



ECCLYASTES

Solomon's Great Experiment

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25 Lantana Lane, Maxwell, Texas 78656

Email: biblestudy@wvbs.org Phone: (512) 398-5211

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INSTRUCTOR BIOGRAPHY

Instructor: Trent Kennedy

Biography:

Trent Kennedy is a 2007 graduate of the Southwest School of Bible Studies (SWSBS). After graduating from SWSBS, Trent began working with the University church of Christ in San Marcos, TX as the campus minister and director of the McCarty Student Center. From 2007-2019 brother Kennedy focused his work reaching out to Texas State University students through personal studies, evangelism training, counseling, and teaching Bible classes.

Trent has led 12 week-long evangelistic campaigns on the island of Jamaica and done foreign mission work in Cambodia, Mexico, and Paraguay. In the summer of 2015, the Kennedy family lived and worked in Asuncion, Paraguay, where Trent served as visiting faculty for the Academia Bíblica Asunción. Trent and Lisa also worked with the Avenida Sacramento congregation in Paraguay conducting personal studies, teaching English using the Bible, and teaching various classes.

Trent is married to the former Lisa Veazey, and they have four children: Ella, Troy, Luke, and Annie. He holds a master's degree in public administration from Texas State and a bachelor's degree from Angelo State University with a double major in Communications and Psychology.

In August of 2019 the Kennedy family moved to Singapore to work in a full-time capacity as Instructor and Dean of Academics for Four Seas College. Their fundraising is overseen in the U.S. by the Roanoke, TX church of Christ. More information about their family's transition to living and working in Asia can be found at www.SingaporeSix.com.

In 2022 Trent became an instructor at the Southwest School of Bible Studies. He began his role as the school's director in 2023.

THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES INTRODUCTION

Thank you for choosing to study the book of Ecclesiastes with us. It is our firm belief that everyone can benefit from a thorough study of each book of the Bible. Because every word of every book is given by God (2 Timothy 3:16), it is important to study each verse of the Bible with great care. That is our desire in the course. We firmly believe that the Bible was inspired by God for man. Man can profit from the study of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:17). It is in the Scripture that we understand who God is, God's will for man, how to live godly lives, and more (2 Peter 1:3; Romans 15:4; Ephesians 3:3-5).

This is how we plan to approach the book of Ecclesiastes: it is the inspired word of God written and preserved for us today; it is a book that is profitable to study, and it is a book that will teach us things about God and about our lives on this earth. As with any book of Scripture, the principles of Ecclesiastes cannot be left on the page nor can those principles be only kept in our heads and readily dismissed when the assignments are complete. The principles of Scripture must be upheld, practiced, and taught.

It is expected that every student will put into practice Ecclesiastes 9:10a, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might." We expect you to work hard in completing this course. Once again, we are encouraged by your desire to study and want to commend your choice as we begin.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Name of the book

The title of the book in the Hebrew Bible is "*Koholeth*" or "*Qoholeth*." This is the term used in Ecclesiastes 1:1, 2, and 12 (see also 7:27; 12:8, 9, 10) and translated in English as "preacher" or "teacher" in most versions.

The word *Koholeth* describes one who calls an assembly together. Usually, this assembly would be for the purpose of teaching. Thus, we can see that the book of Ecclesiastes is a book of teaching where we might envision "the Preacher" or "the Teacher" calling together a class of students to impart to them instruction. In the book of Ecclesiastes, we find these words of instruction written down and preserved for our learning today (cf. Romans 15:4).

When the Hebrew Bible was translated into the Greek language before the birth of Christ, the Greek title of the book, *Ekklesiastes*, was the translation of the word *Koholeth*. As you can tell from the word, this is where we get the English title "Ecclesiastes."

{Important Point: The title “Ecclesiastes” comes from the Greek title for the book.}

What is the significance of this term? You are probably familiar from your studies of the New Testament that the Greek word translated “church” is the word *ekklesia*. You should be able to see the similarities in these two words. The Greek word *ekklesia* describes a group of people who are “called out.” This “called out” group could usually be found in an assembly together. If you wanted to describe “an assembly” in Greek, you could use the word *ekklesia*.

This title, then, reflects the original language as one who calls an assembly together for the purpose of instruction. While some of that may be lost in the English title “Ecclesiastes,” we should see that the book has something of great value for the church, the group that has been called out by God through the gospel (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:14), today.

Some have suggested that, with the assembly called together for instruction, the “teacher” or “preacher” begins to set forth his great lessons. Thus, we can look at the book of Ecclesiastes like a sermon or Bible class. This great book will deal not just with instruction in general, but it will deal specifically with things of a spiritual nature. Studying the book of Ecclesiastes will help us to better understand:

1. God,
2. Our lives on this earth,
3. Our true purpose here,
4. And how to get to heaven.

B. Author

Not only is *Koholeth* the title of the book (cf. 1:1-2), but it also the title by which the author identifies himself.

{Key Question: Who is *Koholeth* or the author of the book?}

Traditionally, Solomon has been seen as the author of the book of Ecclesiastes, but modern scholarship almost unanimously rejects this idea. The Jewish synagogue and other Jewish writings traditionally attributed the book to Solomon even though his name never appears in the book. In fact, Jewish tradition held that Solomon wrote the Song of Solomon in his youth, Proverbs in the maturity of middle-age, and Ecclesiastes near the end of his reign and of his life.

Many people believe and teach that the book of Ecclesiastes was written well after Solomon died (maybe around 200 BC). The problem is that the book does not name or even suggest another author because the author believe himself to be Solomon. In place of Solomon, some other authors have been suggested, but the scholars do not agree here. Instead, they see this book as some type of work which an unnamed author might have written and attributed to Solomon.

This is a conclusion that we must reject. Either Solomon wrote the book, or he did not. Let us consider what the book says:

1. The Preacher was “the son of David” and “king” (1:1). While many from the house of David could have identified in this way, the natural way of reading this passage would be to identify the author as Solomon.
2. The Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem (1:12). This suggests a time of the United Kingdom (“Israel”) where the throne was in Jerusalem. Only two monarchs reigned over the United Kingdom (all of Israel) from Jerusalem: David and Solomon (cf. 1 Kings 11:41-42).
3. The author had “gained more wisdom than all who were before me in Jerusalem” (1:17). This describes Solomon very well (cf. 1 Kings 3:12; 4:30; 10:23).
4. The author had many great building projects (2:4). This would also describe Solomon as we read about him in the Bible (cf. 1 Kings 7:1-12; Song of Solomon 8:10-11).
5. The author had great wealth and riches (2:7-10). This would have been an accurate description of Solomon (cf. 1 Kings 4:21-23).
6. The author traces the theme of wisdom throughout the book. The word wisdom in some form appears more than 50 times in the text. This corresponds to the wisdom of Solomon (cf. 1 Kings 4:30) and the speaking or writing that we know Solomon did (cf. 1 Kings 4:32; Proverbs 1:1). Ecclesiastes testifies that its author was such a man of wisdom and proverbs 12:9-10).
7. The Preacher was an assembly-caller. So was Solomon (cf. 1 Kings 8:22; 2 Chronicles 1:3).

One of the common arguments made by those who oppose Solomon's authorship of the book is his great downfall described in 1 Kings 11. Since the book of Ecclesiastes is written from the perspective of a man with a lot of experience, this book would have had to have been written later in his life. Yet, the book of history, 1 Kings, describes Solomon's departure from God. There, nothing is said of Solomon's repentance. However, the absence of evidence (notably that 1 Kings does not describe the repentance of Solomon) is not evidence in favor of another author.

{Important Rebuttal: Solomon's departure from the Lord helps us to understand his mindset as he describes the vanity of all things without God.}

Solomon, himself, had sought to find life's purpose in the things this world had to offer. Yet, even when he was distant from God, he could not find meaning in life apart from God. While 1 Kings does not detail Solomon's repentance, the tenor of Ecclesiastes is consistent with someone who spent time away from the favor of the Lord.

As we have seen above, the author of the book of Ecclesiastes believed himself to be Solomon. The book holds a high level of clarity and morality that does not suggest the author was lying.

{Important Question: How then is it possible for Solomon to have written the book after his departure from God described in 1 Kings 11?}

I would offer this suggestion: the book of Ecclesiastes describes a man who drifted far away from God (consistent with the life of Solomon in 1 Kings), yet ultimately found the purpose or meaning of life in God. While 1 Kings does not describe Solomon's repentance, it also does not say that he did not repent.

{Key Point: The book of Ecclesiastes stands as a testament of the repentance that Solomon made before he died.}

Solomon would have called together the assembly, presided over the assembly as the teacher, and laid out his life before the Israelites in order that they did not make the same mistakes he did. Remember, Jewish tradition held that Solomon wrote the Song of Solomon in his youth, Proverbs in the maturity of middle-age, and Ecclesiastes near the end of his reign and of his life. This makes a lot of sense and fits with what we know about the historical Solomon and what we read in each book.

Since we take Solomon as the author and observe that the book reflects on a life long-lived, we place the writing of Ecclesiastes near the death of

Solomon. In doing so, we will date the book to the 10th Century (900s) B.C.

{Date of Writing: Late in Solomon's life during the 900s B.C.}

One of the usual arguments against Solomon's authorship is the style of Hebrew in the book of Ecclesiastes. Some scholars insist that it must have been written much later. However, on this point many disagree. This evidence is inconclusive because modern day scholars are seeking to re-order a dead language. In doing so, many assumptions are required. One thing that those skeptical of Solomon's authorship often neglect in the consideration of the original language is the uniqueness of the book of Ecclesiastes which we will discuss later. One author put it this way, "The language of this book is dictated not as much by its genre as by its age." It is truly a unique book without other Hebrew parallels in the 10th Century before Jesus.

{Important Rebuttal: The language of Ecclesiastes is unique because the book itself is unique.}

The text of Ecclesiastes that we have today is very reliable. The Masoretic text which are copies of copies of copies with centuries of tradition are without question. Further, the discovery of fragments of Ecclesiastes found at Qumran among the Dead Sea Scrolls match with the Masoretic text. Early Christian manuscript in Greek and Latin along with the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures during the intertestamental period) also confirm that the transmission the text has been above reproach. While we believe and affirm these things, even skeptics of this book and the Bible in general must agree with these conclusions.

{Important Note: The text of Ecclesiastes is witnessed in the Masoretic text, the Greek translations, the Latin translations, and the copies of manuscripts among the Dead Sea Scrolls.}

C. Audience and place

The audience of Ecclesiastes is primarily those who are young enough to consider the wise words of Solomon and dedicate their youth to serving God (cf. Ecclesiastes 11:9; 12:1). However, any generation, any age, any person can learn from the wisdom and conclusions of Solomon found in this book. The book is part of the Old Testament Scriptures and is for our learning today (cf. Romans 15:4).

Within the Old Testament, Ecclesiastes is a part of the Wisdom Literature which includes Job, Psalms, Proverbs, and the Song of Solomon as it is

divided out in our English Bibles. However, Psalms and the Song of Solomon are books that contain poetry. Thus, we can group Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes together as the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament. (Note that some of the Psalms carry themes and style of Wisdom Literature: Psalm 1, 14, 53, 119, 101, and 133 among others.)

This book is read by the Jews at the Feast of the Tabernacles. This feast occurs in late September or early October. This book of instruction is given to help us learn how to live wise, God-serving lives on this earth. Therefore, it has many valuable insights today.

D. The uniqueness of Ecclesiastes

1. A unique perspective: personal

The perspective of Ecclesiastes is very personal. It is written from a first-hand account of what has happened in Solomon's life. A first-hand account is when you tell the story from your perspective. In this very personal book, the author admits that at one time he "hated life" (2:17). He praises the dead for being dead (4:2). He hates the work which his hand has done (2:18). Yet, the same author exhorts his audience to work hard at whatever their hands find to do (9:10); he offers wisdom to the young to not forsake their life (12:1); and he wants others to find lasting happiness (11:9-10). All these things and more show the unique perspective from which this book was written. Over the course of life, Solomon had become discouraged and disheartened by life. He hated life. He feared death. He had an emptiness inside of him. Yet, the book shows how he found purpose in life.

2. Unique pursuit: meaning of life

The book of Ecclesiastes is concerned with a great question: what is the meaning or purpose of life? This is quite different from other books in our Old or New Testaments. Central to understanding the book is understanding that Solomon was searching after or pursuing something when he said that he had "set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven" (1:13). In order to satisfy this pursuit and understand the meaning of life, Solomon sets about conducting a great experiment. Some have even called the book of Ecclesiastes "Solomon's Great Experiment."

An experiment is usually defined as a scientific procedure, usually in a lab, to test a hypothesis, to determine a fact, or to explore variables. A variable is when something changes that causes

something else to change. When a scientist begins this process, he or she will often have a “hypothesis” of how they think things will work out. In order to test this “hypothesis,” they go through the process of experimentation. After testing over and over again, something can become scientific “law.”

However, this is a more formal definition of an experiment. I want you to think about your hand phone or cell phone. If you plugged your phone into the wall but it did not charge, you would know that something was wrong. However, you would not know if it was your phone, your charger, or the outlet that you plug your charger into. You have three variables. You could test these in some very common ways. If there is another outlet, you might take your charger to that outlet. If your phone charges, you may say that the outlet was the problem. However, if the phone still does not charge, then you might borrow a charger from a friend or family member. If that charger works, then you would conclude that you had faulty charger. However, if the phone still did not charge, you might conclude that your hand phone is the problem. You just conducted an “experiment” where you tried out different things to try to answer the question, “why does my phone not work?”

{Key Point: One way to look at Ecclesiastes is as “Solomon’s Great Experiment.”}

This is what we mean when we say Solomon’s Great Experiment. Solomon’s problem is an inner emptiness, a meaningless existence, a life without purpose. In order to fill this missing piece, to solve this problem, Solomon sought worldly solutions like wisdom, wine, wealth, works, and women. However, he still found vanity, or he still found life to lack meaning. Throughout the book, Solomon continues to come back to a growing idea, one that had no doubt harbored in his mind as a young man who was faithful to the Lord: God. In those moments of clarity, Solomon sees purpose in life because of God or in relationship to God. I believe we can see this conclusion moving from unfaithful to more faithful as the book progresses from chapter 1 to chapter 11. It is in chapter 12 that we find the ultimate conclusion to the book.

3. Unique pattern: a different outline from other books

The book of Ecclesiastes has a very simple but unfamiliar structure.

- a. It begins with a brief introduction that gives insight into the author’s thoughts (1:1-1:11).

- b. Then, it transitions into a monologue - where a single person is speaking - about the meaning of life (1:12-12:8). This is primarily autobiographical information where the author gives his first-hand account.
- c. Finally, the book closes with a conclusion that wraps up the book (12:9-14).

The structure has some similarities to Job and perhaps the Song of Solomon but stands quite different from most of the 66 books of Scripture.

What distinguishes this book even more is that the thesis of the book is not found in the first chapter or in the middle of the book, but it is found in the last two verses of the entire book. The thesis is the main point or main idea of a book or paper or sermon. While we should read and study every book of the Bible from the first verse to the last, this truth is more clearly seen in Ecclesiastes than in any other book. In fact, to understand the book, we must interpret everything in the book with the lamp of Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 shining on it.

Notice that Ecclesiastes 1 sets for a working thesis (or main idea) that everything is vanity. The book starts with this idea: "all is vanity" (1:2). The life that is observed (1:3ff) is one which can be seen as hopeless or pointless. Thus, it is vanity. However, by the conclusion of the book we should add these words: "without God." Everything is vanity or worthless or pointless *without God*.

{Reminder: The thesis is the main point or main idea of a book or paper or sermon.}

It is in these final words that Solomon positions the destination that he wishes his audience to arrive at: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil." When it comes to key verses in the book, no verses are more important than these. Other key verses to consider by way of Introduction:

- a. 1:13-14 Set the tone for the beginning of the book
- b. 2:11 Sets forth an opening conclusion
- c. 3:19 Teaches that all people will die (unless Christ comes before their death)

- d. 5:8-9 Teaches that greed is wrong, but work is good
- e. 7:29 Teaches that humans are created in innocence but seek sin of their own accord or choosing
- f. 8:12 Teaches to trust in God no matter what happens
- g. 11:9 Teaches about the reality of a final judgment
- h. 12:1 Calls on young people to make the most of their youth by being godly
- i. 12:13-14 Concludes the book, the great experiment, with the grand conclusion about man's purpose or "man's all" on the earth: fear God and keep his commandments because He will judge all

4. Unique place: Wisdom Literature but not Proverbs

While the book of Ecclesiastes fits among the Wisdom Literature, it is unlike both Proverbs and Job.

Similarities to the book of Proverbs:

- a. Same Author: Solomon
- b. Similar Focus: Emphasis on wisdom, knowledge, and the proper conduct in this life
- c. However, it is not a book of proverbs.

Ecclesiastes also shows similarities to the book of Job:

- a. Both books have a central human character.
- b. Both start with a prologue.
- c. Both spend the major part of the book with the central character in the midst of struggle and coming to terms with great questions about life, death, and God.
- d. Both end with an epilogue.
- e. However, it does not share the characteristics of Job, as it neither starts nor ends with narrative sections,

nor does it feature great speeches or friends of the main individual, and it does not display the voice of God dramatically from heaven.

So, while it is similar to these books in some regards, Ecclesiastes is quite different from them and the rest of the books of Scripture. It is this difference in literature and purpose or pursuit that calls for language unlike Solomon's other writings, unlike the other writings of the Old Testament. It is this great difference that has led some scholars to argue that it was written much later, but that simply is not the case.

{Reminder: The language of Ecclesiastes is unique because the book itself is unique.}

5. Unique phrases: vanity of vanity, under the sun

Finally, Ecclesiastes is unique because of the key phrases that distinguish it among other books in the Bible. One of the key words is "vanity." The word "vanity" is found 30 times in the NKJV Bible while "vanities" is found 3 times and "vain" is found 2 times. The word vanity means being worthless or futile (pointless, incapable of producing results). The Hebrew word has been defined as "empty" like the substance of a breath (or the wind or air blowing out of a fan). When we examine the Old Testament use of the word translated "vain" or "vanity" in Ecclesiastes we more clearly see the idea of the word:

- a. It is used to describe placing trust in idols (Deuteronomy 32:21; 1 Kings 16:13).
- b. It is used to describe placing trust in foreign alliances (2 Kings 17:15; Isaiah 30:7).
- c. It is used to describe life without hope (Job 7:16).
- d. It is used to describe work without reward (Job 9:29).
- e. It is used to describe comfort that does not truly comfort (Job 21:34). There is no usefulness to it.
- f. It is used to describe beauty that disappears (Proverbs 31:30).

- g. It is used to describe the words of idols (Zechariah 10:2).
- h. It is used to describe the comfort given by idols (Zechariah 10:14).
- i. It is used to describe the substance of a vapor and the time that a vapor takes to disappear (Psalm 39).
- j. And, it is often used to describe the weakness of a human being in comparison to God (Job 35:10; Psalm 78:33; 144:4).

Throughout the book, a series of lessons is given to convince man that striving for:

- a. “Wisdom” (key word used 50 times),
- b. “Knowledge” (key word used 33 times), and
- c. “Wealth through labor” (key idea used 28 times)
- d. Makes one a fool (key idea found 18 times)

...because he is seeking that which is “vanity and striving after wind” (key phrase used 30 times).

While none of these repeated concepts are sinful (wisdom, knowledge, wealth, or work), they are empty or pointless or worthless or vain *without God*.

The term that describes this world without God in the picture is another unique phrase in the book: “under the sun” found 29 times (“under heaven” is used 3 times and many believe it to mean the same thing). Life that is lived “under the sun” is not just lived on this earth, but it is lived on this earth without giving due attention to God. It is living life for the sake of living life.

{Unfortunate truth: Some Bible students have looked at the book of Ecclesiastes and tried to conclude that the world, the material world, is evil or that the book describes that man is born in a sinful state.}

This is simply not the case. In fact, Ecclesiastes 7:29 teaches the exact opposite. The world of Ecclesiastes and the world that we observe are corrupted by sin. The influence of Satan in this world is

clear. However, to suggest that the material world is evil or that man is born in sin is simply not with Scriptural evidence in this book or any other book in our Bibles.

{Important Rebuttal: God made man upright and not sinful (Ecclesiastes 7:29).}

The book of Ecclesiastes has much to say about God. While this point is explained and proclaimed in the grand conclusion (12:13-14), the great teacher is leading us (the audience), his students, to draw that same conclusion ourselves. So, Solomon will place God before us in what some people call the “positive passages” of Ecclesiastes.

The book clearly teaches the sovereignty of God. He is the one that is over all mankind and all creation. It also teaches that wisdom has an ultimate source: God.

The book has much to say about man’s relationship with God. Our relationship with God starts with the “fear of God” which is the beginning of knowledge (cf. Proverbs 1:1).

The book also gives a great contrast between life and death. Death is a reality that every living human being must face. Unless the Lord returns before I die (cf. 2 Peter 3:8-11), I will die...and so will you. When you read Genesis 5 for the first time, it is striking to see these words for the first time “and he died” (Genesis 5:5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20). These are the first recorded deaths in Scripture, yet today we are very familiar with death. Death is the “great equalizer” in that every man (rich or poor) must face it. One commentator has given this observation about the concept of death in Ecclesiastes:

“Life is short and death is sure. The shadow of death falls on everything man does. The worldly person must be haunted by the specter of death, the “fly in the ointment” (10:1) of all that he accomplishes. Man knows he will die, but he does not know when. Death reverses the creative process of Gen 2. The spirit leaves the body to return to the creator while the body returns to the dust from which it came (12:7)” (James Smith, *The Wisdom Literature and Psalms*, page 703.)

On the opposite side of death is life. Life is full of labor (used 20 times) and toil, full of hard work. Yet, life is to be enjoyed with God in view (cf. 11:10-12:1). Life is not meant to be consumed by living. Instead, life is to be consumed by finding our place in the service of God. When we serve God, our lives have true purpose and

meaning. Since we have true purpose and meaning, we can enjoy the things that this life has to offer because those are blessings from God (cf. 2:26, 5:19).

In bringing these introductory ideas together, one could point to the New Testament and find some commentary of thought. Consider James 4:13-14, "Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away." God is in control; He is above the sun. Life is short, and death is certain. These realities help us to live our life on earth to the fullest so that we can enjoy eternal life in Heaven.

E. 22 Vanities in Ecclesiastes

1. All the works of men (1:14)
2. Indulgence in pleasure (2:1)
3. The profit of one's labor (2:11)
4. The quest for wisdom (2:15,17)
5. Earthly accomplishments (2:19-23)
6. Achievement (2:26)
7. An over emphasis on life and living (3:19)
8. Competition (4:4)
9. Hoarding riches (4:7,8)
10. Trying to please everyone (4:16)
11. Words and promises (Especially when they are used foolishly) (5:7)
12. Money (5:10)
13. The irresponsible use of riches (6:2-4)
14. Greed or greedy ambition (6:9)
15. The mastery of language (6:10,11)
16. Evil companionship (7:6)
17. Trying to assign meaning to every detail of life (7:15)
18. An indifference towards evil (8:10)
19. An unjust system of justice (8:14)
20. The desire to relive or retrieve the past (11:8)
21. Looking to the future for happiness or satisfaction (11:10)
22. Death itself (12:1-8)

F. KEY VERSES:

- Ecclesiastes 2:24-25
- Ecclesiastes 3:11
- Ecclesiastes 3:14
- Ecclesiastes 5:2

- Ecclesiastes 8:11
- Ecclesiastes 9:9
- Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

ECCLESIASTES - OUTLINE

- I. Introduction (1:1-1:11)
- II. Body of the Book (1:12-12:8)
- III. Conclusion (12:9-12:14)

ECCLESIASTES - EXPANDED OUTLINE

- I. Introduction of the Book and The Problem of Vanity (1:1-1:11)
- II. An Initial Hypothesis: Beginning of the “Great Experiment” (1:12-2:26)
- III. Refining and Testing the Hypothesis: Conducting the “Great Experiment” (3:1-11:6)
- IV. Forming a Final Hypothesis: Concluding the “Great Experiment” (11:7-12:8)
- V. Concluding the Book and Pronouncing the “Law” of Ecclesiastes (12:9-14)

EXPOSITION

Chapter 1

1:1-3

1 *"The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.*

2 *Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher; "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."*

3 *What profit has a man from all his labor In which he toils under the sun?*

1:1

This verse testifies to the authorship of Solomon. Only three kings were over all of Israel: Saul, David, and Solomon. Only two reigned in Jerusalem: David and Solomon. Only one was the son of David: Solomon. While David's lineage did continue to reign in Jerusalem, they reigned over Judah (or "the house of David"). None of those descendants could be described by the wealth and wisdom of Solomon described in the following verses.

1:2

All is vanity. "Vanity" is a key word in this book. This word means that it is not of redeeming or lasting value (transitory). It is also translated "futile." He will be talking about all those things which are useless, pointless, or without lasting value / meaning. The Hebrew word here is *hebel*. This word includes ideas of (i) brevity and unsubstantiality, emptiness; (ii) unreliability, frailty; (iii) futility; and (iv) deceit. As Bible students, we see that life is brief or short:

"Whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away," James 4:14. This is the case with our existence on earth. It is temporary. However, we also look forward to an existence in eternity with God.

Please note that the word *hebel* in Ecclesiastes is also used in the sense of futility, emptiness, unreliability, and deceit. This is because a life on this earth that does not have an anchor in Heaven (cf. Hebrews 6:19) is futile, empty, unreliable, and deceitful. Imagine a smoke with no fire, clouds with no rain (or even shade), a promise that is not kept. These things are empty, but they are also deceitful. They promise one thing (like smoke "promises" fire), but they do not deliver. That is how Solomon sees all of life from the beginning of the book. Do not forget the thesis (or main point) that he is building to in Ecclesiastes 12:13-14!

The phrase all is vanity could also be translated "the whole" is vanity. This looks at everything.

1:3

Gaining the whole world is of no value (cf. Mk 8:36). The phrase "under the sun" occurs 30 times in the book - see 1:3, 9, 14; 2:11, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22; 3:16; 4:1, 3, 7, 15; 5:13, 18; 6:1, 5, 12; 8:9, 15 (2 times), 17; 9:3, 6, 9 (2 times), 11, 13; 10:5. Where can you go and not be under the sun? Nowhere. Therefore, everything under the sun is vanity. It could read - "There is no

advantage in whatever he does under the sun.” “Under the sun” = everyone in all places throughout all time. There is another consideration to “under the sun” and that is a life that is lived with only this earth or this world or this existence in mind. A life under the sun does not give full attention to God or His plan.

The word “profit” is a commercial term and could be translated as “pay dividends” or “that which is left over” and describes earning of money through labor. Labor and toil are most often physical (as the word is used in Psalm 127:1) but can describe mental labor or work as well (as the word is used in Psalm 25:18). Since all of life in this world is subject to vanity and real meaning can only be found above the sun (that is in God’s person, will, and purpose), then there is no hope of finding lasting satisfaction from the resources of this earth alone. If man tries this, he will be disappointed. Remember that Solomon knows the “end of the matter” (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14) and is writing with that in mind.

1:4-8

4 One generation passes away, and another generation comes; but the earth abides forever.

5 The sun also rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it arose.

6 The wind goes toward the south, and turns around to the north; the wind whirls about continually, and comes again on its circuit.

7 All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full; to the place from which the rivers come, there they return again.

8 All things are full of labor; man cannot express it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.

1:4

...earth... The earth outlives us all. People come and go but the earth remains. There is a false interpretation of this verse by some religious groups today. In Hebrew the word for “forever” is *olam*. It means an “indefinite period of time known only by God.” The easiest place to see this is in Isaiah 32:14-15:

“14 Because the palaces will be forsaken, The bustling city will be deserted. The forts and towers will become lairs forever, A joy of wild donkeys, a pasture of flocks—15 Until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, And the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, And the fruitful field is counted as a forest.”

Here the world *olam* (“forever”) is used in vs. 14 but that time of “forever” would come to an end as described in vs. 15. Thus, we see the world means a long duration that lasts into the future. This is a term even applied to the human life which (on this earth) will not last forever (cf. Nehemiah 2:3). Therefore, it does not mean that the earth will never be destroyed, but that it will remain indefinitely as long as God allows it to remain. For example, this same word is used to describe other “eternal” things.

Note:

- a. Sabbath (Exodus 31:17)
- b. Passover (Exodus 12:14)
- c. Incense (Exodus 30:8)
- d. Burnt offerings (Exodus 29:42)
- e. The Aaronic priesthood (Exodus 40:15)
- f. Peace offerings (Leviticus 3:17)

As we can see, these things all passed away at the cross of Christ (cf. Col 2:14ff; Romans 7:1-7). Therefore, they were not actually “everlasting” as we might understand it, but that they were going to remain as long as God willed it (see 2 Peter 3:9ff). There, Peter clearly demonstrates that this earth will be destroyed. The point Solomon is making is that life goes on from one generation to another and the stability of the earth seems to indicate it will always be this way. He is not trying to make a point on how long the earth will last. To see this exact point, we could look into the lives of our parents, grandparents, great grandparents, and further back. Or we could look to the Scriptures and see the truth of death from one generation to another (like we read in Genesis 5) even as the created world continues to abide even unto this day. It is this thought that may make a small dot of our lives seem insignificant. Yet, God is mindful of man!

1:5

Solomon here refers to three examples to show the abiding or continuing nature of the earth. From these examples, we see that there is nothing really new - all things follow the same basic pattern:

(1) The continual and repetitious cycles of the sun which hurries across the sky only to rise again and repeats the same cycle.

1:6

(2) The example of the wind which continues to blow in its circular path for no apparent reason. The wind here is part of the three-fold example, but the reader will now have the “wind” in the mind. This prepares for Solomon’s use of the term 12 more times (see 1:12 for the next time it is used). Wind, or more specifically, “grasping for the wind” will be used at least 9 times to illustrate the point of vanity.

1:7

(3) The rivers flow to the sea but the sea is not full thus nothing is ever completed. Therefore, they continue to go through the same cycle, but the sea never fills up.

This is a passage of Christian evidence: the ancient man had no idea about evaporation and the cycle of water. Yet in this verse the principle of evaporation is discussed. It was not until the 15th or 16th century that “man” discovered this cycle. Amos also describes this in Amos 5:8. While Solomon did not write this verse simply to be an apologist of God’s creative hand in

nature, the wisdom of God flows through the pages of Scripture to enlighten mankind in every field. Here, the water cycle is just another illustration of the continuation of the earth without change.

1:8

Although the creation is active nothing is ever accomplished. Fulfillment will never come. There is not lasting satisfaction. Man, like the creation, will not find satisfaction. We experience this even today: our eyes are often not satisfied with seeing something just one time. Instead, we continue to look again and again. The same can be said of the things we hear. Think about the songs that some people listen to over and over again. While we enjoy hearing them one time, we also are not satisfied with only one time. The words "all things" could also be translated "all words." Man continues to speak words. The eye and the ear continue to consume until they are unable to do so any longer (cf. Ecclesiastes 12:1ff). Yet in all the consumption through the senses, through all the observation and consideration of the natural world, there is not lasting satisfaction. This great philosophical truth is illustrated in the very senses of our own human body. Solomon observed constant repetition in nature without accomplishment. Here, he turns his pen toward humanity: constant motion - speaking, hearing, seeing - without accomplishment. In other words, in these human endeavors, there is not lasting satisfaction.

1:9-11

9 That which has been is what will be, that which is done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.

10 Is there anything of which it may be said, "See, this is new"? It has already been in ancient times before us.

11 There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of things that are to come by those who will come after.

1:9

The author makes his point here - "There is nothing new under the sun." The cycles will continue to repeat forever. History will continue to repeat itself. No new thoughts. No new anything. Sure, there are new advances in technology and things of this nature but look at the world around us. The earth continues just as God created it. Genesis 8:22: "While the earth remains, Seedtime and harvest, Cold and heat, Winter and summer, And day and night Shall not cease."

Even more, the ideas of man, the philosophies of man, the temptations of man, and the basic character of man is the same. We are still tempted by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life because these things are an abiding part of the world (1 John 2:15-17).

1:10

The author points out that nothing is new. Not even the things we think are new. Again, look at medical and technological advances, and we can see that there are new things...but this is not what Solomon has in mind. Instead, think about the continuation of everything from generation to generation. Man does not evolve in the sense that is used by evolutionary biologists. We are of the same make-up, the same DNA, the same character as Adam. This is also true with the world we observe around us. While we might observe it through the computer or television or some other new invention years from now, the earth will be the same.

This truth can make things seem very pointless. And, to this end we must agree. If you look for purpose in the created world, you will not find it. If you look for purpose inside of yourself or another human, you will not find it. Both the created world and the inner person of man call us to look to God for purpose:

“Because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse” (Romans 1:19-20).

1:11

This verse continues the observations from the preceding two verses, an observation that can lead us to conclude that life has no purpose. Simply put, people forget. The current generation does not remember the lessons of the past. There are no new inventions under the sun; no remembrance of things past. We think we find new things, but they are not really new. The next generation does not remember the last one. Ironically, Israel struggled with this very fact throughout its history. God would repeatedly call on them to “not forget” the lessons of the past (cf. Deuteronomy 9:7).

This concludes the first section of the preacher’s sermon. He has taken the secular viewpoint; that is, the way one would look at things without a belief in God.

1:12-15

12 I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem.

13 And I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven; this burdensome task God has given to the sons of man, by which they may be exercised.

14 I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and indeed, all is vanity and grasping for the wind.

15 What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be numbered.

1:12

Solomon begins his great experiment to find purpose or meaning in life. This is not just a personal experiment from himself, but he seeks the application to others as well. Solomon speaks as part of the greater humanity. Where can one look when they see nothing to live for? In this section of the book, Solomon will walk the audience through his first-hand account of seeking life's purpose. Here, we see many of the mistakes that Solomon made. These are the same mistakes that others have made, are making, and will make so long as this earth stands. It is true that human beings seek to fill the void, the emptiness in our hearts. When we look to the world, we cannot find it.

In verses 12-18, Solomon begins to list the vain things for which men have sought. By eliminating all of these "vanities" he will demonstrate there is nothing on earth that is of any true value. By taking the first person, we can see that Solomon had personal experience with these things. Certainly, a king would have the resources to research all of the things about to be discussed. There is no logical reason to reject Solomon as the author. It seems that one who later speaks of fearing God (12:13) would not be making false claims about who he is and what position he holds. Modern criticism, which rejects Solomon as the author, has not offered sufficient proof to reject this son of David as the author (for more information, see the introduction).

1:13

Solomon "set" (or "applied" ASV 1901) his heart to seek wisdom. The method of research in this great experiment will be that of observation. When school children are taught about science, teacher will explain to them that science, as a field of study, begins and ends with observation. Observation is the process of closely observing or watching. When someone conducts research through observation, they will watch and note what they see or experience. With his observations, we can think of the commentary as Solomon "self-reporting" throughout his experiment. Since he will write from the perspective which he had when his heart was away from God (cf. 1 Kings 11), we will note that some of his observations and feelings are misguided. This is why reading the entire book of Ecclesiastes through the thesis or main verses of Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 is so important to understanding the book. Solomon's "field notes" or observations from the various experiments are reported accurately and perfectly. However, Solomon did not always have the right perspective in his life. Therefore, we have to read the book with this in our minds. This is similar to the way we must study Job because not everything that is said by Job's three friends was true (Job 42:7). However, the words of those speeches were reported with total accuracy by the inspiration of God.

God has not given mankind the task of knowing all things done under heaven. God has given mankind the duty of obeying God (Ecclesiastes 12:13). However, Solomon took this task upon himself. He tries to use his influence to seek wisdom and knowledge. As he conducts his research, he

will list a number of things that are called “vain” in the text (see the introduction for a listing of all the “vain” things). Here are the first seven, running through chapter three:

1. All the works of men (1:14)
2. Indulgence in pleasure (2:1)
3. The profit of one's labor (2:11)
4. The quest for wisdom (2:15,17)
5. Earthly accomplishments (2:19-23)
6. Achievement (2:26)
7. An over emphasis on life and living (3:19)

1:14

When one proceeds to list all that man has accomplished what will be found? Anything of lasting or eternal value? No. It is all vanity (useless, futile, of no redeeming value). Notice the first use of “grasping for the wind,” a key phrase in the book. Can you imagine trying to grab onto the wind? While the wind is useful and can be harnessed for productivity through inventions like windmills, it is impossible to grab the wind. In fact, if you saw someone running around the street trying to “catch the wind,” you would think this person was not in his right mind. Can you imagine going out to get dinner: when your family asks you “what will you bring home for dinner?” and you respond by saying “I will grab some wind for dinner.” Can you imagine the reaction? It would be an evening of hunger because you cannot eat the wind. You cannot read the wind. You cannot hold the wind. If you were to try to do any of these things with the wind, we would think you were not thinking clearly.

This is Solomon's idea: trying to find purpose in life (without God) by examining the created world or the works of men was like trying to “catch the wind.” Not only does the wind pass by briefly, but it also has no substance to it. The wind is simply air, nothing more.

1:15

Some things which are crooked can be made straight like the iron in the fire. However, it is futile to try to make straight that which has forever been crooked. Man, in his great wisdom, might attempt to solve some of life's problems, but he will fail. Certainly, there are things that can be changed. That is not Solomon's point. Instead, we must think about those things which cannot be changed. When something cannot be changed, there is no power of man that can change that thing. Further, mankind cannot count or “number” something that is not there or that is “lacking.” This would be futile or pointless. Commentators suggest a further meaning to this text that those “crooked” things and “lacking” things show twists and gaps in thinking: when man thinks deeper and deeper on this life (without considering God), man is not able to make sense of it all.

While man is able to do great things, this passage clearly shows that man is not omnipotent - that is to say all powerful. Our own observations on life

have probably brought each one of us to the same conclusion. I, a human being, do not have the power to change everything. I, a human being, cannot count something which does not exist.

While Solomon is not specifically talking about this idea, this verse provides an interesting truth. Man has long attempted to make straight what God has declared to be crooked. It is impossible to correct evil by trying to make it acceptable. If it is crooked, it is crooked. It cannot be made legal in God's view.

1:16-18

16 I communed with my heart, saying, "Look, I have attained greatness, and have gained more wisdom than all who were before me in Jerusalem. My heart has understood great wisdom and knowledge."

17 And I set my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is grasping for the wind.

18 For in much wisdom is much grief, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.

1:16

Solomon did not seek the answers from Heaven like he had done during his faithful days (cf. 1 Kings 3:5ff). Instead, he communed (or communicated) with his own heart. Remember that our hearts can be deceitful (cf. Proverbs 28:26; Jeremiah 10:23). When Solomon considered himself, he rightly saw that that he was wise and knowledgeable. This is perfectly consistent with 1 Kings 3-4 and the unmatched wisdom of Solomon. Likely, he had spoken and written many proverbs at this time in his life. Beyond his own wisdom, Solomon had observed wisdom and knowledge. His position has afforded him the opportunity to witness much. Not only had God blessed him with great wisdom, but Solomon had experienced life in ways that made him wise.

1:17

While recognizing wisdom seems to be the most logical thing to search for, he is also trying to be open to the alternatives: madness and folly (see 2:12; 7:25 also). Madness can be thought of as those things which do not come about by reasonable thinking. Thus, "madness" in the Bible is not synonymous with anger but with being crazy or with mental instability. Folly is the product of foolish thought or lifestyle. These two concepts are not exactly the same, but they are often overlapping as described in Ecclesiastes 7:25:

"I applied my heart to know, To search and seek out wisdom and the reason *of things*, To know the wickedness of folly, Even of foolishness *and* madness" (note ASV: "...that foolishness is madness"). In the next section he is going to pursue pleasure because he is trying the variables, the alternatives: madness and folly. But even before he begins on this quest he realizes that both were vanity - grasping for the wind.

1:18

Verse 18 shows Solomon's rationale for pursuing folly and madness. Namely, wisdom brings about pain at times. The world is so full of bad things that "ignorance is bliss." So much misery, so much pain, so much vanity. Plus, knowledge causes change and change is painful. Especially when you learn things that force you to change from what you have become accustomed to or are comfortable with. But it does make you think (Ephesians 5:12; Josh 23:7; Psa 101:4).

The thinking is similar to what we might see today. Solomon knows that wisdom is better than folly. He will see that clearly in the next chapter:

"Then I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness"

Ecclesiastes 2:13. Yet, Solomon does not seem to be satisfied that wisdom is the answer to life's purpose. This is a struggle that he will return to. We would admit that wisdom is a good thing. However, without the proper foundation of wisdom, the fear of the Lord (Proverbs 1:7), wisdom can become worthless. Wisdom does not hold the meaning of life; God does. God is the one from whom all wisdom flows. He is all-knowing and all-wise.

Chapter 2

2:1-3

1 I said in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore, enjoy pleasure"; but surely, this also was vanity.

2 I said of laughter— "Madness!"; and of mirth, "What does it accomplish?"

3 I searched in my heart how to gratify my flesh with wine, while guiding my heart with wisdom, and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives.

2:1

This is the second vain thing - indulgence in pleasure. He is trying to think of what sensual pleasures this life has to offer and is intending to experience them all. He is going to blitz himself with pleasure. He is going to enjoy himself. He seems to know, however, the outcome before he even begins: it will be vanity. In the New Testament, John describes the "lust of the flesh" (1 John 2:15-17). While not all pleasure is lust of the flesh, we will see in the following verses that Solomon has some sinful pleasures in mind as well (vs. 3). The problem with pleasure is that it is always passing. Like this world, pleasure is fleeting. Sinful pleasures are especially fleeting (cf. Hebrews 11:25).

2:2

He begins by considering two of life's hedonistic endeavors: (1) laughter (Hebrew - SEHOQ) which is a superficial gaiety, a type of fun, playing games or partying that neither lasts long nor provides any known benefit. (2) Mirth or pleasure (NASB) (Hebrew - SIMHA) here deals with various activities that

provide simple pleasures (such as in serving others or participating in various festivals). He is most likely not dealing with sensual pleasures here. Of laughter he concludes it is madness. It gets old after a while. It does not satisfy you that much. Pleasure, meanwhile, is seen to accomplish nothing. It does not change or improve anything, and it certainly does not answer any of life's puzzling questions.

As Solomon seeks to answer life's deep questions and satisfy those things missing from his own life, he clearly sees that laughter or silliness does not prove to be of such substance. We have all witnessed this. Laughter is good medicine: "A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones" (Proverbs 7:22). There is a place for laughter. Many non-sinful pleasures bring us happiness and cause us to smile or laugh. However, we know the purpose of life is not found in this. That is what Solomon means in vs. 2.

2:3

Now the preacher is going to deal specifically with some of the activities he has attempted. His first attempt has to do with the partaking of wine. Solomon knew the dangers of alcohol (Proverbs 20:1; 23:27-35). He knew that kings especially should abstain from wine or other beverage alcohol (Proverbs 30:4). Either Solomon chose to take only a little wine against his own counsel (Proverbs 23:31), OR Solomon chose to completely neglect the godly wisdom he had written before.

Some argue that there was not much wine consumed, because you cannot have much if your mind is continuing to guide you wisely. The mind is the first to go when you drink. What Solomon tried did not work though. The mind cannot guide one with wisdom after he has been drinking. Further, when a man or woman chooses to drink alcohol to solve their problems or help them find solutions, they will always be worse off afterwards (cf. Proverbs 23:35; 31:5-6). This wisdom of God's word is that those who are serious about spiritual things should remain sober and abstain from alcoholic beverages. Why did Solomon try wine then? We must remember that his heart was away from God for a time. Solomon rejected his own godly wisdom. Even at this time in his life, he could clearly see that wine was not the answer. In fact, the main point in vs. 3 is clear: Solomon is looking at all these things to see what is worthwhile for men to do. Even with his first-hand experience, He cannot recommend these things.

2:4-8

4 I made my works great, I built myself houses, and planted myself vineyards.

5 I made myself gardens and orchards, and I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them.

6 I made myself water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove.

7 I acquired male and female servants, and had servants born in my house. Yes, I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me.

8 I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and of

the provinces. I acquired male and female singers, the delights of the sons of men, and musical instruments of all kinds.

He is going to enumerate the works he enlarged. Here are listed nine categories of works he did, or things he built or obtained for himself. This could roughly correspond to the discussion in 1 John 2:15-17 “pride of life.”

2:4

Here we see Solomon had houses and vineyards. First Kings 7 describes Solomon’s majestic palace. As you read that chapter you will notice that he also built a house for his wife, Pharaoh’s daughter (1 Kings 7:8). These houses were just the beginning of Solomon’s works which progressed throughout his life. His vineyards are described in Song of Solomon (8:10-11). Vineyards are a certain type of garden where grapes are grown. These were common in Israel.

2:5

Solomon also put his effort and might into works like making gardens and orchards. Whereas a garden is used from growing many types of plants, often flowers or food, orchards are cultivated trees that produce fruit. It is no doubt that the vineyards, gardens, orchards, and other trees (vs. 6) were both beautiful and bountiful - that is they produced a great amount of food. These would have testified of Solomon’s wisdom and ability. However, Solomon also sought in these works a greater purpose which he ultimately would not find. The word “orchard” or “park” (ASV 1901) is the Hebrew word *pardēsîm* which you can see is tied to the English word “paradise.”

2:6

Solomon made collection pools or irrigation pools to water his trees. These pools would have been useful and would have shown Solomon’s ability as a great engineering mind. These pools would have provided the necessary water for his agricultural endeavors.

In vs. 4-6 the original language uses many plural forms of the words which points to the magnificence of the works done. The use of “I” and “myself” throughout this text shows that these works were not done for the public good, they were not philanthropic works. Instead, Solomon had selfish reasons for doing these things. They were done by him for him.

2:7-8

Solomon’s wealth and works were so great that he needed to have servants, both male and female. He also was able to have servants born in his house. In Solomon’s mind this may have connected him with the greatness of Abraham (cf. Genesis 14:14). Remember that Solomon had “many concubines.” First Kings 11:3 tells us that Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines. The concubine was a mistress or a lover. Notice that he is looking

all over the spectrum of possibilities to discover the truly worthwhile things of life.

His possessions were legendary (cf. 1 Kings 4:23). Solomon's riches were greater than any before him in Jerusalem. While this may not mean much since only David had reigned as king in Jerusalem before Solomon, remember that the city of Jerusalem was ancient and existed before David conquered it from the Jebusites (cf. 2 Samuel 5:6-9). Many believe that Abraham sojourned in this area in Genesis 22. Abraham was very rich. Others believe that Melchizedek (Genesis 14) was king here because the Bible describes him as King of Salem (Genesis 14:18). While both of these men might have been in Solomon's mind along with his father David, there were also pagan kings that had occupied the city of Jerusalem. Solomon exceeded them all.

Solomon's riches and greatness extend to wealth and agriculture and people. I have often described the experiment of Solomon in this way: he tried wine and women and wealth and wisdom and works, but he found them all to be the wind!

Think about the application to our society. We accumulate "things," but money cannot buy happiness. Society continues to have this as its goal though. TV fosters it. The rich always have the good life and the poor are always struggling. So, Solomon immerses himself in every pleasure imaginable. He had 1,000 women to satisfy his every sensual desire. First Kings 11:3 shows his wives caused him to fall away from God!

2:9

9 So I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also, my wisdom remained with me.

2:9

He was wise enough to see the futility in all these activities and possessions. By claiming that wisdom "remained with me" or "stood by me" (NASB) it indicates that he maintained at least some objectivity in all these pursuits. Over and over again as Solomon sought out purpose he was guided by a greater wisdom. Later in chapter 2 we will see how this influences his thinking. However, we will not see the fullness of this until the great conclusion in chapter 12. As a wise man, a great teacher, and an inspired author, it should not surprise us that Solomon will begin to help the audience see the final conclusion in stages as he builds the book of Ecclesiastes to its intended end.

2:10-11

10 Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart rejoiced in all my labor; and this was my reward from all my labor.

11 Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labor in which I had toiled; and indeed, all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun.

2:10

Here we see that Solomon also sought out the “lust of the eyes” (1 John 2:15-17). There was no restraint. Many believe that a life without restraint would be bliss, but Solomon knows and relays that such a life is not blissful.

The phrase “all my labor” is a curious thing. With all the vain things which he is going to talk about, there is going to be only one thing that is of some value. That is...labor. The work was the only lasting pleasure he had experienced. The mental exercise, the trying to understand, and the physical exercise was a reward. However, once the work was done, there was no longer satisfaction.

In discovering some satisfaction in the work, itself, Solomon reveals an important truth: man should find reward in the things he does. In many countries, the word “work” has become a curse. There is no lower word, nothing more despised, nothing more vulgar than work. It is not insane for one to like his job. As a matter of fact, one should learn to find satisfaction in any job. It is not the job as much as it is the attitude about the job. You can be happy being a ditch digger or lawyer or janitor or security guard or doctor or politician or gardener or taxi driver or teacher. It is not the job as much as it is the attitude about the job. Work is important in the Scriptures:

Ephesians 4:28 “Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.”

2 Thessalonians 3:10 “For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.”

Note these other passages in Ecclesiastes about work:

2:24 - Man should enjoy good in his labor as a blessing from God.

3:13 - Man should enjoy himself in all his labor as a gift from God.

3:22 - Nothing is better than man should be happy in his activities.

5:12 - The sleep of a hardworking man is sweet.

5:18 - Man should enjoy himself in all his labor as a blessing of life.

9:9 - The toil in which you have labored (with your wife) is a joyful blessing.

2:11

The third vain thing is the profit of one’s labor. When Solomon had a moment to reflect over all that he had done, he had to be honest. It is truly worthless. Note how this verse brings together many of the key ideas in Ecclesiastes: labor, vanity, striving after wind, profit, under the sun (this would also include knowledge, foolishness, and wisdom). So, in one statement Solomon discredits the value of all the aforementioned activities. As great as Solomon’s works were, they still did not provide the meaning of life. There was no lasting substance there. Labor is good. It is a gift from God. It is a gift to your family. It is a demonstration of the blessing of health and vitality and life itself. It is a great service to your fellow man. BUT labor, toil, work...these do not provide the deep answers to life’s great questions. The ultimate objects of

his search like value or profit and purpose or meaning, were lacking in the all the good of labor.

2:12-14

12 Then I turned myself to consider wisdom and madness and folly; for what can the man do who succeeds the king? — Only what he has already done.

13 Then I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness.

14 The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. Yet I myself perceived that the same event happens to them all.

2:12

Here, Solomon repeats the idea of Ecclesiastes 1:17. He thinks about this experiment from a different angle, looks at the problem from a new direction: what can the man do who succeeds (comes after) the king? This repeats the idea of chapter 1 that there is no real meaning in life or no real purpose. If there is nothing new under the sun, then the successor cannot do anything differently. This idea bridges the hopelessness or pointlessness of chapter 1 with the challenge of death that Solomon will give much attention to later in the book.

There are three areas to which he has devoted his attention: wisdom, madness, and folly. His research has yielded some valuable information. But what about the next king? How will he handle the same perplexing questions? Will he learn anything from what he has discovered?

This is something that we must all struggle with as we think about the next generation that follows us. While we must do a good job of teaching the next generation (2 Timothy 2:2), it does not guarantee faithfulness. However, if the next generation forgets God, that guarantees unfaithfulness (cf. Judges 2:6-10). Ultimately, the actions of the next generation fall on the next generation. We can teach and train - we must teach and train, but that does not guarantee anything (cf. Ezekiel 18:18-20).

2:13

The question posed in verse 12 receives a twofold response. First, Solomon concludes that wisdom is of value, but it is not the solution to all. Second, he concedes that wisdom is that which is like a lamp to a man's path. Wisdom will be discussed further in the comments on verse 26 of this chapter.

The comparison of this verse shows the distance between wisdom and folly. Here, folly and madness can be combined as both opposed to wisdom. Wisdom is as far from folly as light is from darkness. Just as darkness is the absence of light, foolishness is the absence of wisdom.

2:14

The wise man has eyes and he uses them. He realizes that he needs to be walking soberly. He needs to notice what goes on in life. The fool walks in darkness. He is in a fog. The fool could be distanced or he could be led astray or he could be self-absorbed, but he will always be unable to see with the

same clarity as the wise man. The New Testament author James poses a question and gives an answer that could help us understand the difference in the ability of the wise man to see clearly while the fool walks in a fog:

James 3:13-17

“13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. 15 This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. 16 For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. 17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.”

The Bible uses the illustration of vision or clarity of sight for wisdom in other passages as well (cf. Proverbs 22:3; 27:12). This is akin to the man or woman who needs eyeglasses to see clearly in the distance. Without those aids, they cannot see. Another way of thinking about the difference is that of driving during the daytime with a clear windshield as opposed to driving during the night with fog, no lights on the automobile, and a dirty windshield. This is the difference between the “eyes” of the fool and that of the wise. While this passage uses vision, we must understand that it is the lifestyle of the individual that is reflected in their vision.

So, Solomon praises the wise above the fool because wisdom exceeds folly. Both will die though. Wisdom will not stop death, and all people will have the same fate. Therefore, wisdom is not the solution to the problems of life. It cannot be the point of life. It is good (like labor), but wisdom alone is not the answer for an unsatisfied life.

This is our first reference to the fool. Solomon will say more about the fool in the book of Ecclesiastes. In chapter 10 we will rehearse and highlight these references. In Ecclesiastes, like the Proverbs, the fool is one who lacks understanding because he cannot be taught. Therefore, the fool engages in foolish talk, worthless pursuits, and drunkenness. He also has the tendency to do evil as we see in passages like Proverbs 10:23 and 18:2.

2:15-16

15 So I said in my heart, “As it happens to the fool, it also happens to me, and why was I then more wise?” Then I said in my heart, “This also is vanity.”

16 For there is no more remembrance of the wise than of the fool forever, since all that now is will be forgotten in the days to come. And how does a wise man die? As the fool!

2:15

This is the fourth vain thing: the quest for wisdom (see vs. 17 also). You work so hard for it, but then you die. The fool can spend his whole life stupid and will die as well. There is no advantage to wisdom. Well, there is not lasting or everlasting advantage to wisdom when it is only used under the sun.

2:16

On the phrase “no more remembrance” note that the wise will not even really leave a legacy as we saw in 1:16. Every single action, every single day of our life will not be remembered. While that is okay, it can cause a person who is short-sighted to worry.

Solomon, during his life and before writing the great conclusion to the book of Ecclesiastes, struggled with the reality of death. He paints death as the great equalizer and the great enemy. When we view this mindset in view of the New Testament, we must praise God that Jesus has overcome death in his resurrection (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:54-57).

2:17

17 Therefore I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was distressing to me, for all is vanity and grasping for the wind.

2:17

This verse is a summary of all that has been said. Everything is futility and the only actual benefit was doing the work. While Solomon knows wisdom is good and toil is good, there is no lasting satisfaction. The conclusion at this stage of his life is that life is something to be hated. Death brings an end to wisdom, and it makes life itself vain. Life is about the acquiring of wisdom and then you die. All of those years you could have used the wisdom were spent attaining it. “Too soon we get old; and too late we get smart!”

This struggle with hating life will be expressed again in the following verse and later in the book (cf. 4:2). However, ultimately, Solomon will understand the purpose or true meaning of life (12:13). It is important for us to understand the mind of the author at this point in his life. He hated life. That is what the Bible says. That is a reality that many in our world face. They, like Solomon, do not see the purpose of life, and they fail to find purpose in the pursuits of their peers. This is a problem. The book of Ecclesiastes will show us the solution as we continue reading and studying.

Up until now there has been something missing. God has been missing. Solomon has said nothing about Him. He will not introduce God into this discussion until verse 24. Here he says he hates life, but he will say three other things about it later:

1. Life is good (3:12; 5:20),
2. Life is given by God (5:18) and
3. Life is full of pleasures from God (9:9).

Having God in mind is what changes his view. Solomon will slowly move from a place of hating life and labor (2:17-18) and praising the dead (4:2) to expressing the blessings of life with God in the picture. When life is only lived “under the sun,” it cannot be enjoyed to its fullest. When life is only lived “under the sun,” people do not have the answers to life’s greatest problems or greatest questions. But, when consideration is given beyond the sun, to the

one who created all things “under the sun” and even the sun itself, life can be enjoyed fully.

2:18-19

18 Then I hated all my labor in which I had toiled under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who will come after me.

19 And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will rule over all my labor in which I toiled and in which I have shown myself wise under the sun. This also is vanity.

2:18

Here, Solomon expresses one of the reasons he hates life. Namely, he will die (as all people), AND his life, work, wisdom, and even wealth will not be viewed in the same way as the one who comes after him. Notice the phrase “leave it to the man who will come after me.” He does not want to leave it to someone else. Who knows what they will do with it? This is a troubling thought because God is still not in the picture; God is not in Solomon’s thinking.

If you are reading from the NASB you will notice the word “fruit” which means enjoying life and the things produced in life (cf. 9:9). Now he says he hates life and its fruit. Later he will say he enjoys life. The fruit is the main consideration. If it is left behind, what is the point of accumulating it in the first place? People worry about the money they leave to children. They feel it will be wasted. Their children may be “money happy.” They will not appreciate it. Even though this would be out of the hands of Solomon one he died, it troubled him.

2:19

Is the one who is going to receive inheritance going to be a complete fool? This is what he is worried about. Solomon would not be able to stop it once he was dead. None of us could have. And, just as he feared, Rehoboam was a fool and destroyed the kingdom which David and Solomon had worked so hard to build and maintain. It even took Solomon’s son fewer than 12 months to do it (1 Kings 11:41-12:24)! This is just one Biblical illustration of how men and women must do their personal best and strive to please God because we cannot promise or guarantee the actions of others. This reality troubled Solomon and troubles many today. There is a balance of working with people, raising children, making disciples, and such - but worrying about every action after we are gone is not healthy. What Solomon was worried about was even worse though because his worry was selfish. Solomon worried about how his own legacy would be carried after death. A life focused on this earth will be sorely troubled by these trifle matters.

2:20-23

20 Therefore I turned my heart and despaired of all the labor in which I had toiled under the sun.

21 For there is a man whose labor is with wisdom, knowledge, and skill; yet he must leave his heritage to a man who has not labored for it. This also is vanity and a great evil.

22 For what has man for all his labor, and for the striving of his heart with which he has toiled under the sun?

23 For all his days are sorrowful, and his work burdensome; even in the night his heart takes no rest. This also is vanity.

2:20

He despairs of the fruit of his labor because that fruit might be left to a fool. This is connected with hating his labor and fruit. The antithesis to this is 1 Corinthians 15:58. Our toil is not in vain here when it is focused in the proper direction. We know that our labors are storing up treasure in heaven (cf. Mt 6:19f) when we work for the food that abides to eternal life (John 6:29).

2:21

This is the fifth vain thing: the focus on earthly accomplishments. It is an injustice to leave it to an ingrate. It is better to leave nothing, but sometimes this is the reality of life. There is a good lesson in this for the Christian: do not plan to leave your estates to people who are foolish and who will spend it on their pleasures.

2:22

This question serves to summarize much of what Solomon has been considering. "Striving" here is the exertion and effort in order to acquire wisdom. The summary is that all labor and working for wisdom is vain.

2:23

The above is true because there is never any real satisfaction to laboring and striving. One never gets any lasting benefit but, instead, gets pain, grief and sleepless nights. He goes through mental and physical anguish. He cannot even rest because of his worries. His head hits the pillow, and his mind works through all of the problems.

The phrase "all of his days" is used often in the book: 2:3; 2:23; 5:17-18; 6:3,12; 8:15; 9:9; 11:9; 12:1. It is obviously used many times in Ecclesiastes. He is emphasizing all of one's life, from beginning to end. One's entire life is vain. This is the perspective that Solomon is working through. This is the answer to the experiment. Does wisdom, madness, folly, or labor satisfy that which is missing in life? No. Solomon, guided by wisdom, sees that both labor and wisdom have value and virtue, but neither wisdom nor labor is the key to life.

2:24-26

24 Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God.

25 For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I?

26 For God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in His sight; but to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and collecting, that he may give to him who is good before God. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.

2:24

This is a turning point. Solomon is now going to show how things can have ultimate value with God. He has been building to a climax. He is like a preacher intentionally leading his audience to adopt faulty conclusions, then suddenly turning on them, showing that these conclusions are true only when one views life apart from God! One's entire viewpoint changes with God. Everything he mentions is true without God, but with God it changes.

There are three reasons to support the view that this is a major turning point:

1. God is mentioned only once up to this point (and there only to blame Him for man's troubles!). From this point on, however, God is brought into the discussion.
2. He had a somewhat negative view of wisdom and its worth (1:16ff). From this point on wisdom is very important. We will discuss this point in verse 26 in more detail and
3. His view of the various aspects of life, history and creation have been very pessimistic. He saw nothing good in anything. Now he sees value to life (see notes on vs. 25).

Notice the phrase "eat and drink." This is equated with prosperity and enjoyment of life and the things God has provided. They are worthwhile with God. All you have and all you have done has meaning with God's hand. There is purpose and enjoyment. Before this Solomon has taken the pessimistic viewpoint that makes one throw up their hands in despair. Some of that despair will continue as Solomon surveys life under the sun.

Is there anything worthwhile? Solomon has concluded that the answer is no. That is, when considered apart from God. This technique is quite effective. He is going to show that there are some things that are good. For example, from this point on he is going to encourage his readers to consider things from the perspective that they have come from the hand of God. That is, one considers life with God in it.

It seems that Solomon will regularly remember God in the book of Ecclesiastes. Since this book is somewhat autobiographical - written by Solomon about the things he observed and experienced - we should see that Solomon kept considering the truth of the existence of God. Even when things looked bad or bleak or backwards, Solomon could inch closer and closer to returning to God.

2:25

Consider the important phrase "without Him." There is no true value to anything man does if he does it without considering God's will. When the hand of God is brought in, everything changes. The end of chapter 2 is Solomon's

first step in that direction. It is a big step that counters his previous way of thinking. He will continue to make steps in the book of Ecclesiastes as he brings God “back into the picture” throughout the book. Here, Solomon relays how, while he was separated from God and searching for truth, he concluded that man’s true purpose and life’s true meaning could only be found in God.

THE VANITY OF LIFE WITHOUT GOD

Without God everything is vain, but with God’s hand in our lives we have the following things:

1. Wisdom is good (2:26),
2. Life has enjoyment (2:25),
3. Life has beauty (3:11),
4. Life has gifts (3:13),
5. Life has stability (3:14),
6. Life has purpose (3:18) and
7. Life has joy despite hardship (3:22).

“WITHOUT GOD.” Because of God, the perspective changes. We ought to acknowledge the Lord in all our ways and He will make our paths straight. God must be the focus. “Without God life is reduced to paychecks, weekends, and cheap thrills” (Avon Malone). Life with God becomes fun and fulfilling. He is not talking about worldliness and materialism, but a proper view of material things as blessings from God.

2:26

This verse expresses the gifts or blessings of God. “He has given wisdom” demonstrates that the first gift mentioned by Solomon is wisdom. Seeing the importance of wisdom in Solomon’s life and the focus of wisdom in Solomon’s writing, this should come as no surprise. Before, Solomon said that wisdom was useless, but now, he has changed direction after putting God in the picture, God in his mind, God in the book. He now lists the benefits of wisdom. The benefits of wisdom will be further discussed throughout the book.

ATTRIBUTES OF WISDOM IN ECCLESIASTES

In view of Ecclesiastes 2:24 and the realization that God has His hand in man’s labor, notice the following things Solomon mentions about wisdom:

1. It gives success in labor (prosperity) (2:21),
2. It preserves life (7:12),
3. It protects (7:12),
4. It helps in judgments (7:23),
5. It gives strength (7:19; 9:16),
6. It gives joy (8:1; contrast 1:18),
7. It helps others (9:15) and
8. It gives success (10:10).

Among the other gifts from God are knowledge and joy. “Knowledge” here is “experience.” Joy is the heart-felt peace and security that belongs to those in

God (cf. Phil 4:4). Joy is more than happiness and should be linked more closely with the Biblical concept of being content.

There is another consideration in vs. 26, and that is the one who transgresses the law of God. The sinner, however, is the one whose focus is on himself. The sinner has no value to his life, except that God uses him to do good things for His people. Outside of this one positive thing, what the sinner does is vanity. The one positive point in this verse is that, ultimately, God is going to bless His people (for further study, consider Proverbs 13:32; 28:8; 2 Corinthians 6:10). It is in the consideration of the sinner that the sixth vanity is found: achievement. Achievement cannot be the sole pursuit of life if one is to find true meaning and purpose.

Chapter 3

3:1

1 To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven:

3:1

Life in all its seasons cannot be avoided. There is a season for everything. Solomon had observed life. In this chapter he will not comment on the good or bad of the thing observed, he simply notes that it happens. The Hebrew word for "time" here is the most generic word that you can use for time. "Purpose" could be translated "matter" - "something that is in the mind." There is a time to every matter under the sun. Not something God necessarily ordained. These are not a matter of good and bad, they are just facts that cannot be avoided.

There is an appointed time and purpose for the events of life. The point that he is making is that we not throw up our hands in despair and give up. This is the view of some. But rather it is to view life optimistically since God is in control. God is the one who is supreme. All of these verbs are going to be used for the purpose of showing that the many pursuits of man, whether they are creative or destructive, whether they are good or evil, are still not done by someone who is self-sufficient.

Man is within the control of God. One suggested application of this study is that man ought to do is ask: "according to God's will, is this the time to do this?" However, if there is no revealed answer from God, we must use the wisdom that God has given us to do our best to observe, discern, and obey. Since no human can control these things, at least not completely, we must live our lives yielding to Almighty God.

The following verses are characterized by a perfect symmetry throughout. The poetry of these verses is evident even in our English translations. The focus is on the word "time" showing that many things will happen in life where we have little or no control. This is not something that should cause us despair. Like Solomon, we can observe them and see that things have inherent beauty and purpose within them (cf. vs. 11). The conclusion could be a faulty one: this list is a demonstration of life's vanity (cf. vs. 9). That is how many worldly people would see this cycle. God keeps things going (cf. vs. 15)

Notice Genesis 8:22.

“22 “While the earth remains,
Seedtime and harvest,
Cold and heat,
Winter and summer,
And day and night
Shall not cease.””

Acts 17:24-28

“24 God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. 25 Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. 26 And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, 27 so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; 28 for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His offspring.’”

The following list is descriptive and not necessarily prescriptive. It is the observation of things not the commandment of things. However, many useful and practical principles can still be considered as these topics are taught throughout the Bible.

3:2-8

2 A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck what is planted;

3 A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;

4 A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

5 A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

6 A time to gain, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away;

7 A time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

8 A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.

3:2-3

There is a time to be born and a time to die. This has to do with the beginning and end. Everyone and everything, has a beginning and end. There is not a set time, but we must remember that what is done in between is what counts. Our time is the LORD’s time. Death is a theme that will be considered and reconsidered within Ecclesiastes, and it is often accompanied by birth.

Every farmer understands the principles of sowing and reaping. Every herdsman or rancher knows that there is time to kill the fatted calf and a time to heal the sick one. There is a time of creating and destruction. A good time to plant many crops is in the spring. A good time to kill (an animal) is when you

are hungry. As we live our own lives, we observed these things just as Solomon did thousands of years ago.

Sometimes, building is needed. Other times, destruction is needed. Think about a house. When a house is not built, the land must be cleared, the foundation set, and the house built. However, if a house is crumbling and the wood has rotted, then we must look to “tear down.” Notice that some things are not worth repairing. It is better to tear it down and build from scratch.

There is a spiritual application for us today. There are many churches that claim the name of Christ. However, God only built one church (Matthew 16:18). Christ only died for one church and purchased one church with His blood (Acts 20:28). There is only one body or church (Ephesians 4:4). Hebrews 3:4 shows that every house is built by someone. Since the church is the house of God (1 Timothy 3:15), it only makes sense that any other church is built by someone other than God. God only built His one church. So, what should we do with spiritual houses that are built on the wrong foundation? They need to be torn down and built again. If I have been taught wrong my whole life, then I do not need to repair that teaching, I must **replace** that teaching with truth. Do not build houses out of rotten wood and do not build spiritual houses out of rotten teaching.

3:4

This verse deals with the various emotions that are experienced by all humans. These are part of life. There is a time to weep. Christians have an obligation to weep with those who weep, that is an appointed time to weep (Romans 12:15). As part of Christianity this is what we must do. You do not make light of the situation at a funeral. There is a time for the right thing. When it comes to weeping or mourning or being sad, these things will come as part of life. It is inescapable. This is not the time to “dance.” When something bad has happened to someone else do not laugh in front of them. A time to mourn is not when you are around happy people. We mostly understand these principles. Not only do we see them in the Scriptures, but we have also probably observed them like Solomon.

3:5

There is a time to “cast stones.” Some see this as a physical or literal act. Other see this as a representation of something else. For example, the idea of the existence of enmity or strife between individuals is seen here by many scholars. Regardless, this line has puzzled scholars. There are two main interpretations:

1. Throwing stones would refer to the literal, actual throwing of stones. A farmer who attempted to clear all rocks off his land so he could plant might throw stones. Or that same farmer might eventually realize that there are far too many rocks to clear off and he therefore “throws” the stones he has already collected back into the field. The time to gather would be when a sufficient number of rocks can be cleared in order to use the land (for building or planting). If you could, imagine a field that

you were given or able to purchase a new piece of land. You have a great desire to plant a garden or sow a certain crop. Before you do this, you must gather the stones out of the field, a time to cast stones. However, when it came time to build a house, those very stones that were cast out would now be very useful for building your house.

2. Others see this as a non-literal action such as severing a relationship with someone, which is demonstrated by a symbolic act of casting rocks. In a military sense this would be done in order to destroy another's property or field. Gathering stones would refer to work being done to prepare the way for a military conqueror (cf. Isa. 62:10).

Notice that there is a time to "embrace" or hug. There is a proper place to express affection and certain places that one needs to shun giving affection. For example, young people need to learn that the worship period is not the proper place to display affection. The physical love between husband and wife is not for the public eye. This is true. However, consider the deeper meaning that sometimes we must embrace certain people in fellowship and other times (like times of sin), we must refrain from embracing. The same is true of raising children: most of the time embracing them is good. However, if the need is corrective discipline, they may need me to deal with them more sternly. Wisdom helps us know when to embrace and when to refrain.

3:6

This verse has to do with man's possessions. The word "gain" is translated "search" in other English versions. The idea could be searching for lost animals. Remember when Saul was searching for the donkeys. He found a time when to forget them. Too much searching may not be worth it (1 Samuel 9:5). This is also true of "gain" in regard to business practices. There are many businesses who have grown at just the right time. McDonalds comes to mind. However, there are other companies that have sought to "gain," but they were not ready.

In thinking about possessions, there is a time to keep and a time to throw away. Wisdom can guide us here. It may be easier to see this proper time when we consider the possessions of others. Children of God evaluate their possessions to see if they possess something that ought to be kept, or perhaps something needs to be discarded (i.e. idols, or anything that would distract one from spiritual thoughts and practices). There are times when keeping or throwing away is a matter of wisdom, a matter of opinion. However, there are other times that throwing away may be necessary:

"17 This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.
18 And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds.
19 Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver. 20 So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed," Acts 17:17-20.

3:7-8

These verses probably deal with human relations more than just garments. Some scholars see in this tearing apart and sewing together as the period of beginning to mourn and ceasing the period of mourning and mending the clothes of mourning. Others consider this to refer to relationships, where there is a time when a relationship needs to be severed (tearing apart) and other times when a relationship is worth mending (sewing together). Certainly, we are to try to be at peace with all men (cf. Romans 12:18), but there are times when we must not yoke ourselves with unbelievers (cf. 2 Cor 6:14). This is true and Biblical.

There are times when it is necessary to speak and times when it would be best not to say even a word. Most of us know this because we have observed a time when someone broke the silence and should have held their tongue. This is a big problem. Man has always had a problem with the tongue (cf. Jas 3:1ff) and has difficulty knowing when to speak and when to listen (cf. Jas 1:19; Hab 2:20; Romans 12:15; Amos 5:13). Wisdom should dictate this as well. From observation we learn when we should speak and when we should not speak. From the Scriptures we learn more precisely when to speak.

This famous section closes with the opposites of love and hate, war and peace. This covers the whole spectrum of tearing down and building up. When is the time to hate? Certainly, the Bible teaches that we are to hate evil (Romans 12:9; Psa 97:10; Amos 5:15; cf. Prov 8:13), divorce (Mal 2:16) and a host of things related to the world (cf. 1 Jn 2:15-17). Equally, there are times to strive for peace and other times to go to war. This was true of the Israelites as God commanded them to go to war. Today, no nation, no king, no man has a direct revelation from God concerning war and peace. It is often a matter of judgment for kings (cf. Luke 14:31-32). Sometimes war with all its horrors may be necessary. A government may elect to “bear the sword” and create war. However, we all prefer peace when possible. This is true of relationships between nations, institutions, and individuals.

3:9-11

9 What profit has the worker from that in which he labors?

10 I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied.

11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.

3:9

When the cycles of life repeat, what can man do? Since God determines the ultimate destiny (from vss. 1-8), what personal benefit is there for the worker who toils? The answer to this question is given in the following verses. Ultimately, the wise man uses the plan of God to his advantage. He accepts what God has decreed and set in motion and fits his life to be in harmony with that plan. He is not stubborn or rebellious in trying to do things at the improper

time. There is an application in the immediate context such as one who plants out of season. And there are many spiritual applications that we might consider today as people try to make their own way to God instead of following the righteous plan of God.

“10 Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. 2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge,” Romans 10:1-2.

3:10-11

God has made everything beautiful in its time and its place. So, while man may question whether it is time to do this or that (vss.1-8), there is a beauty seen when one does things God’s way. This can even be applied to the material beauty. The sun has its appointed time to rise and set (cf. 1:5), but the godly man appreciates the beauty of those continual events.

God has put eternity in man’s heart. Man, longs for something that is eternal. Almost any ancient culture has been found to bury objects that would be beneficial in the afterlife. They are buried with food, tools, boats, chariots and, if wealthy, slaves. This longing for something lasting is present with all men, even atheists. This idea needs to be connected with verse 14. What God builds lasts forever. What man builds will be temporary. Therefore, which is wiser - to seek for the works of man or of God? (cf. Matthew 15:13; 1 Peter 1:23-25).

“18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,” Romans 1:18-20.

Consider the phrase “is manifest in them” in light of Ecclesiastes 3:11. Romans 1:19 shows that there something INSIDE OF MAN as evidence of God’s existence. In Acts 17 the one true and living God who made every nation is discussed in the context that they might “feel after Him, and find Him,” (Acts 17:26-27) In Ecclesiastes 3, eternity is in man’s heart. Has God put something in man’s heart that is greater than man? Is there within mankind a need to satisfy the knowledge of something greater than himself? The Bible’s answer seems to be yes. This is borne out in man’s innate desire over history to worship something.

Notice the word “that” in vs. 11. Did God put eternity in man’s heart to frustrate man? Of course not. Is it true that God has set this in man’s heart so that way no one can find out the will of God from beginning to end? This cannot be true, perhaps Solomon does not understand the full nature of God or He has not reached that understanding yet. His thinking may be not quite right. He is working towards a full understanding of God’s plan. Surely God wants man to know His will (cf. 2 Peter 1:3).

There is another truth here as well: man, in this life will not completely understand God's plan. He will never fully understand the mysteries of God. So, while Solomon was able to research all that was "under the sun" (1:13), there were still other things that were beyond his capability to research. We should not gain from this passage that knowing God or His will is beyond human reach. God's wisdom is far beyond me!

"33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!

34 "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?" 35 "Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?" 36 For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen," Romans 11:33-36.

But God's word is clear that I might understand it.

"3 how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, 4 by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), 5 which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets," Ephesians 3:3-5.

Consider this verse:

Deuteronomy 29:29 "The secret things belong to the Lord our God." This shows us that somethings of God are not given to us. However, consider the rest of the verse! "...but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law." Both God and His will for us are knowable (cf. Colossians 1:9-10).

3:12-15

12 I know that nothing is better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives, 13 and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it is the gift of God.

14 I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it. God does it, that men should fear before Him.

15 That which is has already been, and what is to be has already been; And God requires an account of what is past.

3:12

Even as Solomon struggled through the meaning and purpose of life, there were still some things he could know. This is the first of the two times Solomon says "I know" (cf. vs. 14). Both are related. In this first occurrence, Solomon has learned that the good things in this life are from God Himself. They are His gifts (cf. Jas 1:17). God changes our perspective on everything. The best we can do in this life is to be happy and to do good (cf. Gal 6:10; Ephesians 2:10). The first thing he claimed to know was that there was nothing better than pleasure. This can only be true when commitment is given to God. Even then, eating and drinking, enjoying life, is not the highest pursuit. It is not

the greatest thing. This will be refined as the teacher continues his sermon and brings his audience to see that the highest purpose in life is living for God.

3:13

There is a marked change where Solomon is giving greater and greater consideration to God. Notice how much he brings God in. Eating and drinking are the tokens of the good life. He understands that these things are the gift of God. When we look at good homes we can see the good because they are a gift of God. The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Even Job realized that it was the Lord who was to be thanked (cf. 1 Timothy 4:3).

3:14

In this second occurrence of “I know” Solomon will demonstrate that the good life mentioned in verses 12 and 13 are secured by God Himself. In relating this point, he lists four things about God and what He does:

1. It is permanent - remains forever (1 Peter 1:25). God is not capable of failure. Nothing God does is incomplete.
2. It is productive - how can you add to something perfect? God’s way is the most effective way.
3. It is perfect - there is nothing to take away from it. It is perfect in both the sense of without flaw and the sense of complete. This is why it is so foolish for men to add to or take away from God’s Word. It is truly perfect in every respect (cf. Rev 22:18f; Gal 1:8-9; 2 Peter 1:3; Jude 3).
4. It is purposeful - it is to cause men to fear Him. Anybody who is remotely thoughtful can see the power of God in the creation. Then, when man considers the magnitude of the creation, he sees himself in a lowly, powerless position. Fear is best understood as being in awe before Him. We shake before Him, realizing how much more powerful He is.

Hebrews 10:31; 12:29:

“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

“For our God is a consuming fire.”

God wants us to fear Him in this respect. Fearing God also appears in these verses - 5:7; 7:18; 8:12-13; 12:13. “Fear God” is the conclusion of the entire experiment, of the entire book. This phrase will be considered in more detail later.

3:15

Notice the contrast with 1:8-11. With man alone, all is hopeless. With God there is security and hope. He is talking about the cycles (cf. vs 2-8). God is keeping the cycles going. This is a watchful concern. For the Christian it represents security and hope. It will rain again because it is a part of God’s cycle. With God there is certainty. For people of faith, this does not cause us to conclude that life is without purpose. Instead, we see that God gives purpose.

While Solomon at this point in the book might not be “there,” he is coming to that conclusion based on the observations and considerations of his “great experiment.” When he finally can state that “all have been heard,” then we, as his audience, can draw the same grand conclusions (Ecclesiastes 12:13). Until we reach that climax in the book, we see how the Teacher or Preacher is leading the way to that ultimate conclusion.

3:16-17

16 Moreover I saw under the sun: In the place of judgment, Wickedness was there; And in the place of righteousness, Iniquity was there.

17 I said in my heart, “God shall judge the righteous and the wicked, For there is a time there for every purpose and for every work.”

3:16

This begins the first of two things Solomon says “I saw” or “I have seen” (cf. vs. 22). In all of his research, what has he discovered? He is now going to tell his readers.

When we see the phrase “under the sun,” we know that everything does not have its perfect order when man is involved, but it will be right when God is involved. There are some places “under the sun” where we expect some consistency, some discernment, some fairness. Unfortunately, that is not always the case. Judges can be partial, courts can be paid for, and leaders can be poisoned by various ideas in this world. A place of righteousness can be wicked (i.e., the temple or “churches” today). Man has the ability to make just about anything good an instrument for wickedness. This is one reason we must “prove all things” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). In this world, we will find inconsistency and inequities because humans are involved.

3:17

This verse begins the first of two things that Solomon has said to himself. The first observation that he makes concerns the judgment court. There will be a time when the wicked will pay. In the Parable of the Tares (Matthew 13:30), this is demonstrated. There will be a separation at the end. God sees the difference between the righteous and the wicked even now (cf. Psalm 1:1-3). When Solomon says in his heart that there will be accountability (cf. 3:15), this is not the same as Solomon communing within his heart (chapter 1:16). This is a conclusion based in looking at the sovereignty of God above the selfishness of Solomon.

3:18-21

18 I said in my heart, “Concerning the condition of the sons of men, God tests them, that they may see that they themselves are like animals.”

19 For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over animals, for all is vanity.

20 All go to one place: all are from the dust, and all return to dust. 21 Who knows the spirit of the sons of men, which goes upward, and the spirit of the animal, which goes down to the earth?

3:18

The second observation Solomon makes concerns the character of those who operate without any fear of God. By themselves they are merely beasts (cf. 2 Peter 2:12). The false teachers are like animals. Sinners are like the beasts. OR Solomon may here be describing the very nature of man. If this is the case, Solomon is not quite correct. Man, and beast are not the same even when man acts like a beast. God sees a difference between humans and animals (cf. Genesis 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 15:39). It is very clear that Solomon understands this difference when we read chapter 11-12 (cf. vs. 21). Sometimes our lives can feel like they are of equal value to animals. Many people in the world today teach this error. Young people have begun to believe that the animal and the man are of equal value. This is a dangerous way to think. This kind of mindset can cause us to devalue human life and lead to a corruption of morals. We must always remember that God made man a little lower than the angels (Psalm 8:5), not a little higher than the monkeys.

This discussion of man and beasts will be used to introduce the thoughts of vs. 19-20.

3:19-20

This is our seventh vain thing: an overemphasis on life and living. With God life is valuable. Without Him it is a pitiful waste. Life is life only with God (cf. Jn 10:10). Also, Solomon is letting man see that there is, on the surface only, a similarity between men and beasts: they both live and die; they both came from the dust and will return to the dust. This thought is one that will trouble Solomon and cause him to further question the purpose of human existence. Death can cause us to think that life is vanity. The reality of death and the equal nature of death that is faced by all living things can cause confusion or anxiety.

3:21

The word “breath” is the Hebrew word RUAH which is equivalent to the Greek word PNEUMA. It can be translated as “wind” or “spirit.” This verse is correctly posed as a question. Solomon does not know where the spirit of the living creatures will go. Of course, God knows. But does man really know? However, we must see that the question is asked in a leading fashion because while Solomon may not have been ready to commit to the answer at one point in his life, he absolutely is when he wrote Ecclesiastes.

Even as Solomon’s observations brought him to the troubling conclusion that all living creatures must face death, he sees and knows that there is a difference between mankind and animal kind. He may not have known everything about life after death, but he could see a difference between

humans and animals. This is easily observable to anyone who thinks critically about the world around us.

So where does this question lead us? The life of man ascends upward. The spirit of the beast, its life within it does not go upward to face God in judgment. It is in this verse Solomon sees the difference between the spirit of man and the spirit of the beast. The thought is similar to Psalm 49 in which man and beast are alike in death (vss. 1-12), but very different in what happens after the grave (vss. 13-20). In Ecclesiastes 12:7 Solomon gives the definitive answer to the question on the destiny of the human spirit: it goes back to God who gave it.

3:22

22 So I perceived that nothing is better than that a man should rejoice in his own works, for that is his heritage. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?

3:22

In verse 16 we saw “I saw” or “I have seen.” Verses 17-18 - “I said, I said,” There are two uses of “I said” in between and now another “I perceived” or “I have seen” in vs. 22 which goes with verse 16. His comments are based upon what he has seen and observed.

He concludes that man should be happy in his activities. Man should enjoy his life with God. There is more to life than pleasure, so his thinking will be further refined as the book goes on. But, we see the great difference that God makes in his life. Later, in 12:7, we will see what is going to occur after is that the spirit will return to God who gave it. As for our eternal existence, 1 John 3:2 shows that we will be like Christ is now. Meanwhile, while man lives on in the flesh, it is the intention of God that he should be happy! This is good. This is consistent with the will of God. To say there is “nothing better” will be honed later as Solomon does more than just bring God into the picture. Later, Solomon will clearly demonstrate that God is the whole picture.

Chapter 4

Some commentators have noted that beginning with chapter four, it is difficult to trace any basic argument. They believe that Solomon develops his thoughts in a form similar to that of the Proverbs. However, there are some points demonstrating there is organization and purpose:

1. There is repeated emphasis on wisdom, especially the benefits of wisdom.
2. There is a reference to wealth in each section, especially the impotence of riches.
3. The bleak presuppositions of the first two chapters are dealt with, but now with a more godly viewpoint.
4. Life is often observed as unfair.

5. God stands higher than the purposes of man throughout these chapters.

At its heart, chapter 4 holds four Key Contrasts:

1. The oppressed vs. the oppressors
2. The hard-working fool vs. the content and quiet man
3. The friendly vs. the friendless
4. The poor and wise youth vs. the old and foolish king

And one Central Idea: There is vanity in every aspect of the world. Vanity and selfishness permeate every social class, age, etc.

4:1-3

1 Then I returned and considered all the oppression that is done under the sun: and look! The tears of the oppressed, but they have no comforter—On the side of their oppressors there is power, but they have no comforter.

2 Therefore I praised the dead who were already dead, more than the living who are still alive.

3 Yet, better than both is he who has never existed, who has not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.

4:1

Notice that Solomon “returned and considered.” This phrase shows the continuation of his observation about life, his pursuit of understand the meaning of life, his great experiment.

What did he find? What did he observe? The oppressed are powerless. This thought is especially troubling to Solomon. As he has observed the behavior of mankind, he has witnessed the abuse of power and the misery experienced by the afflicted. The afflicted are without comfort and without comforter. This emphasizes their sense of helplessness. Equally troubling is the fact that cruel men have power (KOA could be translated “strength”) to begin with. This seems unfair. Why does God allow it? Certainly, in the law of Moses God dealt with humane treatment of others:

Exodus 22:21-24: “21 You shall neither mistreat a stranger nor oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. 22 “You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child. 23 If you afflict them in any way, and they cry at all to Me, I will surely hear their cry; 24 and My wrath will become hot, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.”

But Solomon does not see the avenger coming as often as He should (but in actuality, God wants men to strive for equal rights and justice).

When Solomon notes that this is “under the sun,” he is showing that this is done without God’s stamp of approval and the universality of the oppression. It should not surprise us to see this happening today. Like Solomon, we can and should be troubled by it. We should also seek to correct these types of problems through the means necessary to us. However, the gospel is not such

that it is concerned with the social issues of the day more than the spiritual issues which abide eternally.

4:2

The dead are not going to be oppressed, so he praises or congratulates them. This may have been exactly how Solomon felt at the time he recorded this observation. He is taking the position of the godless life. We can see the contrast of 2:26; 3:22 with this verse and know that with God praise is to be found in life. God gives to those who are good in His sight.

4:3

From this perspective, likely a personal perspective held by Solomon at one point, man is “better off” not knowing about all of the evil (oppression) done by men to men. This oppression is under the sun - it is everywhere and it is not condoned by God. Where can man go to escape the inhumanities of man? Nowhere, Solomon says. There have been many philosophers who have taken the viewpoint that one would be better off never being born than to witness this evil (cf. Sophocles, Cicero, and even Buddhism).

Again, one needs to see this verse within the overall context of Ecclesiastes AND with the total plan of God in mind. As with Asaph in Psalm 73 evil men may seem to get their way, but ultimately, they will face God in judgment. So, from the godly perspective, we may witness this oppression and be saddened by it, knowing that in the end justice will be done. “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord (Romans 12:19ff). Yes, this life is often unfair. The final judgment and our eternal existence with God in heaven will not be characterized by such.

4:4-6

4 Again, I saw that for all toil and every skillful work a man is envied by his neighbor. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.

5 The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh.

6 Better a handful with quietness than both hands full, together with toil and grasping for the wind.

4:4

Here is the eighth vain thing: competition. The motivation for “the top” is usually wealth and power. This is vanity. It will not make one happy or fulfilled. These are things that are fleeting; they are passing. In this way, they are like the wind. Why is man ever striving to have more or become greater than his neighbor? Certainly, such striving is vain and worthless (and, ultimately, this will be demonstrated - cf. Mt. 16:26; Lk. 12:15). The following verse shows that this characteristic is not really better than the lazy fool. This attitude was a reality, but it was also a violation of the Old Covenant that Solomon lived under:

Leviticus 19:18: "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord."

Further, the Christian is forbidden from holding this type of attitude toward our neighbors as we read about in the New Law, the New Testament:

Mark 12:33: "And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."

Luke 10:27: "So he answered and said, " 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself.'"

Romans 13:9-10: "For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law."

Galatians 5:14: "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

James 2:8: "If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well."

4:5

The one who works so hard to get "on top" loses out while the fool is so lazy he consumes his own flesh. He escapes the "rat race" but is consumed with laziness.

4:6

Here, the balance between vain work and lazy foolishness is seen. The one hand "full of rest" is the medium or middle ground. This is the balance each should seek in his own life. The phrase "full of rest" means contentment with what one has (cf. 1 Timothy. 6:6). This is opposed to the vain pursuit of competitive success which cannot provide lasting satisfaction. These are hands striving to grasp as much as possible. Unfortunately, those hands will never be at rest because they will never be full. A greedy spirit will never be satisfied (cf. 5:10).

4:7-8

7 Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun:

8 There is one alone, without companion: he has neither son nor brother. Yet there is no end to all his labors, nor is his eye satisfied with riches. But he never asks, "For whom do I toil and deprive myself of good?" This also is vanity and a grave misfortune.

4:7-8

This is the ninth vain thing: hoarding riches. Why is one not satisfied with what I have accumulated? Note the parable of the rich fool in Luke 12.

“16 Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. 17 And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do since I have no room to store my crops?’ 18 So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.” ’ 20 But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’” Luke 12:16–20.

God says to the fool, “Who will own what you have prepared?” It is far better to share what one has with others (cf. Acts 20:35). According to the godly perspective, one works in order to have something to share with others (Ephesians 4:28). We need to understand that there must be a balance. As we have seen and noted often, this book does not condemn enjoying the good material things. It is alright to spend some on yourself and enjoy the blessings life affords. But, there must be moderation; there must be restraint.

It is a sad thing to be alone. Job felt this sadness. To some extent, Jesus felt this sadness while on earth. Many people know this through experience. Solomon will explain this in more detail in the following verses.

4:9-12

9 Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor.

10 For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up.

11 Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; but how can one be warm alone?

12 Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

4:9-12

Companionship will help reduce the difficulties in life. Solomon gives five benefits of companionship:

1. Work is more productive. “They have a good reward.” Studies have demonstrated that two people working alone do not accomplish as much as two people working together. There is someone to help and it will be easier and faster. If someone falls then you have another one to lift him up.
2. There is mutual care. “One will lift up” (vs. 10). Success through a cooperative effort. This exceeds competitive effort which is vanity. These two verses can have a present-day application in team evangelism. When you go off to a work all by yourself it is easy to grow discouraged. If one falls the other will lift them up. There will be someone to lift you out of the pit. But, this passage is going beyond the physical of falling into a pit. In life, and the struggles that are a part of life, we will need someone to help pick us up. The statistics just prove the enormous advantage of team evangelism. One person will do less

than half of what two will do. This is called “synergism.” It is the bringing together of energy. The apostle Paul knew of the advantage of teams.

3. Warmth. “They will keep warm” (vs. 11). This principle applies to marriage, although travelers in Israel’s cold winter nights would sleep close together (cf. Jer 36:22,30). One can draw on another’s energy. Marriage can help someone “weather the storm.” Things are easier because they weather the storms together. It is beautiful how much can be accomplished together.
4. Safety. “Two can withstand him” (vs. 12). A lone traveler can be more easily overcome, but with others around he is less likely to suffer harm. When we are alone, bad things are more likely to happen. Recently this author went to one of the USA’s national parks where there are large bears and other predators. The rule of the park was to never walk alone. I have been in cities where the police encourage the same thing because of criminal activity.
5. Strength. “A threefold cord is not quickly broken” (vs. 12). In this case the strength is like that of the three-ply cord. It is the full measure of strength, very difficult to break. A cord of three parts that has been woven together will not be easily or quickly destroyed. This is the power of good friends and close relationships. Some take this idea further see this talking about you and me and God all walking together in a right relationship. Together we cannot be broken.

In this poetic passage, there are tangible, literal benefits of being in a group and working together. In our interpretation of this passage, we should take vs. 9-12 as teaching a central truth about good, godly companionship: we need to have friends! Two are better than one.

4:13-16

13 Better a poor and wise youth Than an old and foolish king who will be admonished no more.

14 For he comes out of prison to be king, although he was born poor in his kingdom.

15 I saw all the living who walk under the sun; they were with the second youth who stands in his place.

16 There was no end of all the people over whom he was made king; yet those who come afterward will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and grasping for the wind.

4:13

He is talking about the person who feels self-sufficient. This is the way an old person is described. He may think he is full of wisdom, but it is foolish to think that he does not need someone. Everyone needs companionship. Yet a greater principle is seen here as well. A young boy who will listen to other’s advice is better than an old king who has lost the graceful art of receiving instruction. No one is too old to learn from others! The wise youth is a unique person. One attribute for this person was that he had the wisdom to get help. He needed other people.

4:14

This verse seems to be saying that the poor wise youth or young man of verse 13 could have even out of prison and rose to the position of king, even though he was born poor in the old foolish king's kingdom. This illustrates how far one can go when he is willing to receive instruction. Some have said "it is not where you come from but where you are going." The principle here is that we can overcome our past when we live wisely. The Bible carries many examples like a lowly carpenter from Nazareth and a penitent murderer from Tarsus.

4:15

This second youth or young man is probably the young man who became king. The emphasis is on the young lad. The "him" he replaces is the old foolish king. Therefore, the people rally behind the young boy who has now become king. Although this verse is difficult, this seems to be the best interpretation. Maybe Solomon had seen this happen in his lifetime or heard this story from the annals of history in his dealings with kings and queens. Maybe Solomon was simply able to use this as a type of parable to present the truth that wisdom can take us further than heredity. Either way, the point is clear. Solomon uses vs. 12-15 to introduce another vanity.

4:16

Eventually the people will also grow tired of the boy who became king. Even though he was wise and probably continued in this wisdom, the young man could not please everyone all the time. Someone has said you can please some of the people all of the time and all of the people some of the time, BUT you cannot please all of the people all of the time. This is the tenth vain thing: trying to please everyone.

Chapter 5

5:1-3

1 Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil.

2 Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; therefore, let your words be few.

3 For a dream comes through much activity, and a fool's voice is known by his many words.

5:1

When you come before God you become quick to hear and slow to speak (Jas 1:19; Hab 2:20). You are coming to listen (i.e. learn) and to not speak (i.e. teach). "Walk prudently" or "Guard your feet" would indicate the type of forethought and preparation one has made before they attempt to enter into the presence of God to worship. This would have been true with the temple

that Solomon built. There were steps that took the worshipper from the ground to the ascent of the temple. To come into the presence of God (i.e. in the temple), the worshipper literally had to walk carefully. This is also true of the mindset that one carries into worship (cf. John 4:24).

Note that there are “Psalms of Ascent” in our Bibles. These are Psalms 122, 124, 127 (which is a psalm of Solomon), 131, and 133. It is believed that worshippers recited or sang these psalms as they “went up” to Jerusalem or even as they ascended the steps of the temple in Jerusalem. We may not know exactly how those old psalms were used in worship, but the evidence clearly shows that the Israelites were to take the worship of God, in His presence, very seriously.

The same should be said of Christians today. We should worship God with a clean or pure heart (1 Timothy 2:8). We should worship God with proper understanding of the things we are saying, praying, and singing (1 Corinthians 14:14-15). Our minds and hearts should always be engaged when we enter into a time of worship to God.

It was possible for them to offer the “sacrifice of fools.” This would have been improper worship. The babbling of your mouth is the offering of vain worship. The fool does not even know this is evil (cf. Mt 15:8f; Jn 4:24). It is still possible to worship God in vain. An easy application of this principle to us today is to look at our worship (what we do as a church family or body) and see if that worship is in line with the New Testament Scriptures. Then, as we gather together every Sunday (cf. Acts 20:7), we should give our own lives careful examination.

5:2

Remember your position. Do not do a great deal of talking. Do not use meaningless repetition (cf. Matthew 6:7). This is not something God desires because he wants our full knowledge and understanding in worship. God knows what you are thinking anyway. Be on guard against hasty or impulsive requests of God or even vows to God. He wants us to give serious thought to what we are going to say and how we are going to say it. God is great (in heaven) and we are finite and weak (on the earth). There is another immediate application for preachers and teachers. We must give careful thought to what we will say from week to week. Even those who lead in other ways in the worship assembly (like men who lead prayer - 1 Timothy 2:8) should always carefully consider their words.

5:3

The phrase “through much activity” or “through much effort” could be descriptive of a person who wants a message from God and is going to great lengths to receive one. The effort is like what one goes through when he has a restless dream. The purpose of sleep (rest) is lost because of the effort expended in the dream. Another understanding is that a fool’s words are kind of like having a dream. In a dream, things move from one thing to another without clarity, without meaning. People are mixed up, situations are unreal,

and the dream itself is confusing. The point is clear: the fool demonstrates wasted effort and lack focus with his many words.

5:4-7

4 When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; for He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed—

5 Better not to vow than to vow and not pay.

6 Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin, nor say before the messenger of God that it was an error. Why should God be angry at your excuse and destroy the work of your hands?

7 For in the multitude of dreams and many words there is also vanity. But fear God.

5:4

A vow is simply a promise. Vows were not commanded by the law of Moses, but they were voluntary. The vow desired in vs. 5 is that of promising to give money to God through the temple service or temple treasure. There was always a danger in the vow turning into a bribe. The mind of the worshipper could be “paying God” for blessing. This was not the intention of the voluntary vows of the law of Moses.

Then again, there was always the danger in one making a rash vow which later he is unable to pay. This is what we see in vs. 5. Again, God wants the worshiper to give serious consideration to his words.

5:5

One might think that God is pleased that one would make a vow, even if he will not be able to pay it. This is woefully incorrect! In fact, that would be form of a lie! God wants His worshipers to make promises they have every intention of keeping. Then, God wants those who worship Him to do what they have committed themselves to doing. Christians with the best of intentions should “exercise the doing thereof” and keep those promises that they have made.

5:6

It is not just an unfortunate mistake or an insignificant matter when one makes false vows. It is sin. God would rather one suffer and keep his vow than to change his vow (cf. Psa 15:4). The “messenger” is likely talking about the priest. Do not tell the priest that vow. In Malachi 2:7 we see that the priest is a messenger of God.

Notice God’s reaction to sin is that of perfect, righteous anger. God will make you pay for promises you do not keep. He may not bring punishment immediately (cf. 8:11), but will certainly do it ultimately (cf. 12:14). This passage ought to be yet one more reminder of the seriousness of worship. Paul was determined to worship correctly and that involved the use of his “mind” (1 Cor 14:15).

5:7

Dreams are just dreams and nothing more. And the multiplication of dreams serves no useful purpose. So also, are endless words (vows, promises) to God. The worshiper who offers vain words is in danger of incurring the anger of God. This verse then gives us the eleventh vain thing: words and promises (especially when they are used foolishly).

In order to understand the mindset of the original audience, it is good to look at vows in the Old Testament. Leviticus 27 provides a lengthy discussion on vows. By using this section, and others, we find that vows take the following forms:

1. Ask for blessing with promise of return (Num 21:2),
2. A promise made out of gratitude or thankfulness (Jonah 2:9); sometimes this vow is made in response to specific blessings,
3. A dedication of a child to be a Nazirite (1 Sam 1:11),
4. A promise of allegiance or commitment (Gen 28:20-22) and
5. A free-will offering based on a past vow (Lev 22:18).

In this section of chapter 5, Solomon has given great attention to the things of worship. He has given an admonition regarding reverence (vs. 1), an admonition regarding prayer (vs. 2-3), and an admonition regarding vows (vs. 4-7). The purpose of life is not simply religious activity. These are weighty matters which must be taken seriously. We can learn much from passages like this because we can believe that simply being in the worship assembly or at the church building sanctifies us. That is not the case. God has never wanted religious formalism from His followers. God wants faithful disciples who are obedient to His will. In the following verse, Solomon will step outside of the place of worship to continue his observations.

5:8-9

8 If you see the oppression of the poor, and the violent perversion of justice and righteousness in a province, do not marvel at the matter; for high official watches over high official, and higher officials are over them.

9 Moreover the profit of the land is for all; even the king is served from the field.

5:8

Beginning with this verse, and running through 6:12, Solomon is going to consider various aspects of poverty and wealth. We will see that in the remainder of chapter 5 Solomon gives his attention to those things which money cannot buy. There is deceitfulness in riches because the power of money is only temporary, it can only solve some problems for so long, and it cannot solve all problems. This is why money is vain. Notice that the seven things that money cannot buy:

1. Lasting power (vs. 8-9)
2. Perpetual satisfaction (vs. 10-11)
3. Lasting peace (vs. 12)
4. True joy (vs. 13-14)

5. Real hope (vs. 15-16)
6. True companionship (vs. 17; cf. 6:1-2)
7. Eternal life (vs. 18-20)

In the word “oppression,” we see the denial of justice. There is someone always more powerful than the one doing the oppressing. But those in high positions often watch out for each other and protect each other. It was so common in antiquity that the Teacher told his audience not to “marvel” or be amazed or surprised by this type of behavior. Much could be said about governments in our own day as well.

Therefore, when something evil is done, do not be shocked that those in higher positions do not do anything about it. It is common for governments, even today, to be corrupt and the officials to protect each other. Ultimately though those in authority are going to have to answer to God.

5:9

This verse has provided much difficulty for translators and commentators. The thought seems to be that in spite of government corruption, a king who still sees that the land is productive will ultimately provide some blessings (i.e. food) for those under his authority. There is a simple truth here that everyone serves the king in a kingdom. The land which is worked by the lowly farmer supplies food for all, even the table of the king. There is a dependency and relationship. If the field does not produce, those officials all the way up to the king cannot make the field produce. Money does not have the power over the field. The only one with power over the field is the sovereign God who gives rain on the just and the unjust.

5:10-12

10 He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity.

11 When goods increase, they increase who eat them; so what profit have the owners except to see them with their eyes?

12 The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eats little or much; but the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep.

5:10-12

Here is the twelfth vain thing: money. Solomon is going to explain why money or wealth is vain.

Money cannot satisfy (vs. 10). It is a well-established fact that the wealthy soon realize happiness and contentment are not found in wealth. This illustrates the great problem with greed: by definition greed is never satisfied because it wants more and more.

Money attracts a crowd of dependents (vs. 11). When they know you have it, they want it. This is what happens to the lottery winners or those who inherit large estates. They eventually have to disconnect their phones and remove

themselves from public access. Solomon observes that those “relatives” gather around like vultures who will eventually drain him of all his wealth.

Money disturbs one’s peace and ability to sleep (vs. 12). He is talking about insomnia. The laborer sleeps soundly after a day of work. His body is tired and ready for rest. The rich man is not tired. He has folded his hands and been idle all day long. His body has not moved enough while his mind has not shut off.

Money creates worry (vs. 12). Both riches and poverty can be cause for worry (cf. Proverbs 30:8-9). When someone is rich, they have more cares. They may have gold or businesses or houses or livestock or whatever. Each of these brings a cause for worry. Anxiety or worry can trouble your health and destroy your ability to sleep peacefully.

5:13-17

13 There is a severe evil which I have seen under the sun: riches kept for their owner to his hurt.

14 But those riches perish through misfortune; when he begets a son, there is nothing in his hand.

15 As he came from his mother’s womb, naked shall he return, to go as he came; and he shall take nothing from his labor which he may carry away in his hand.

16 And this also is a severe evil—Just exactly as he came, so shall he go. And what profit has he who has labored for the wind?

17 All his days he also eats in darkness, and he has much sorrow and sickness and anger.

5:13-15

The discussion about the vanity of money continues.

Money can easily be misused (vs. 13). What Solomon has in mind is not discussed. Was it moral decay? Physical suffering (like sleepless nights - 5:12)? Regardless, the result of his wealth was not good. It is significant to note that Solomon does not mention the way the wealth was obtained. Was it in a sinful, or just, way? Actually, it does not matter. His point is that when it is hoarded or guarded it will not bring a good result (cf. rich fool - Lk 12:13-21).

Money can easily be lost (vs. 14). Here the man of wealth, through some bad investment (NASV) which could be literally translated as “evil task,” loses all that he had accumulated. The wealth perished very quickly. Perhaps this loss could be attributed to foolish gambling, a misguided venture or in an unforeseen reversal of circumstances (perhaps beyond his control). Regardless, it was quickly lost. And what increases the tragedy is that the once wealthy man now has a son whom he needs to care for, but he no longer has the resources to support this newborn son.

It cannot be taken beyond the grave (vs. 15). Compare 1 Timothy 6:7 as a parallel: “For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.” Have you ever seen pictures or videos about the Egyptian kings who build great storehouses for both their dead body and their great riches? Hundreds of years later, as their bodies lay decaying, their gold and silver and

pearls are still there - unless they have been taken by grave robbers. Even though they had amassed great wealth, they could not take it with them. They tried. They failed. The same is true for prince and pauper, for king and subject, for the rich and the poor, for the wise and fool. You can work, work, work but you will not be able to take it with you. But heavenly things (treasures) you can take (Mt 6:19-20).

5:16

What a man has in his hands signifies what capital he brought with him. Nothing. What he takes with him will correspond exactly to what he brought with him. The accumulation was futile. You cannot own the wind, so why work (toil) for it? Rich men and women will always die poor, that is without any worldly possessions because you cannot take those things with you (cf. Job 1:21).

5:17

Money loss brings great suffering (vs. 17). This man would have been better off always being poor. But since he had a taste of wealth, and then lost it, he now has to endure a number of things. It seems he endures these things alone and hopeless. Solomon observes that he eats in (i.e. lives one's life in):

1. "Darkness" or misery. Perhaps this refers to the fact that he is so poor he cannot even afford candles, but most likely is talking about the gloom he feels for having lost all that money.
2. "Sorrow" or cares and frustrations, probably found in thoughts like "if I had only not invested in that," or "if only I had done this or that..."
3. "Sickness" or physical strain. There have been many who have committed suicide after losing all of their wealth. Gambling often takes all of one's wealth and that one then takes his own life. There is great mental anguish which produces physical anguish when great sums of money are lost.
4. "Anger" or wrath. Perhaps this reflects the total disgust with himself and what he has done or anger towards those who might have been involved in his loss. It might also include frustrations he feels now, since recent efforts to regain the wealth have failed (i.e. throughout his life - see 1 Timothy 6:8-10).

5:18-20

18 Here is what I have seen: it is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage.

19 As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor—this is the gift of God.

20 For he will not dwell unduly on the days of his life, because God keeps him busy with the joy of his heart.

5:18

Money has value in this life and only in this life (vs. 18). Money is just a tool for trade. It is neither good nor bad. Money has no intrinsic quality that makes it good or evil. It is part of this world that is passing away. It is not eternal. It cannot buy things eternal. That is okay.

With this sad story about riches, Solomon shares what he had found out about wealth:

1. Learn to enjoy what you have and what you do. It would be better to never be rich than to expose yourself to the dangers of verses 10-17. Solomon makes three observations about enjoying what one has:
 - a. It is good, meaning that it is a worthwhile endeavor and produces good for self and others, and, most importantly, for God;
 - b. It is fitting (literally - "beautiful"), meaning that it is the most satisfactory way for one to live his life. True peace and beauty will be seen in the contented life;
 - c. It is God's reward, meaning that what one has is a blessing from God, therefore he ought to be content and appreciate those things (because he does not live long enough).
 - d.

It is important to remember that the wise man says one ought to find enjoyment in all one's labor - not in slothfulness or laziness. We are to work. It is God's plan (cf. Genesis 2:15; 3:17-19; 1 Thessalonians 4:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:10).

5:19

2. If one does have wealth, he must maintain a proper perspective on what to do with that wealth and where that wealth came from (cf. Deuteronomy 8:18). Wealth without God brings nothing but misery. Wealth with God can empower one to get the most out of life. Since "God has given riches and wealth," we can know that money is not evil. However, if we sin with money or become "lovers of money," then we have done that which is sinful (cf. 1 Timothy 6:10).

5:20

3. With God there is happiness. One does not need to complain about the years of hard work. He is just thankful to God that he has a job and is able to physically do the work. Thus, he has gladness of heart. Whatever situation he is in he can find peace. Money passes with this world so a wise man or woman will set their sights on things which matter more (cf. Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

Chapter 6

6:1-2

1 There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men:

2 A man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor, so that he lacks nothing for himself of all he desires; yet God does not give him power to eat of it, but a foreigner consumes it. This is vanity, and it is an evil affliction.

6:1-2

Having discussed the proper and improper ways to view and use wealth in the preceding verses, Solomon now gives more attention to the improper view. This balances out the end of chapter 5 and extends the discussion which began in 5:8. This view, Solomon notes, is both evil and prevalent among men during his time. As we read these verses, we might note that these views still exist in our world today. In this we see that there is nothing new under the sun regarding the attitudes of mankind.

Here, God has given wealth, but unlike the previous man this person does not enjoy the wealth and neither do his sons. The idea here is that this individual does not seem to recognize that it is God who gave him the wealth, even though he is pampering himself with whatever his soul desires. There is no thought to thanking God or considering His will concerning the use of that wealth. As a result, God removes the blessing of the wealth and gives it to a foreigner (thereby removing what satisfaction that would come by his giving it to his sons). The man knows the struggle of getting wealth, but he never enjoyed that wealth as God intended.

Solomon concludes that this is vanity and an “evil affliction.” Herein we see the thirteenth vain thing: the irresponsible use of riches. The man above has wealth, but he fails to properly use it. While this could be seen as a continuation of the vanity of money, we will consider it a linked but separate concept. This is explained more in the next two verses.

6:3-6

3 If a man begets a hundred children and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many, but his soul is not satisfied with goodness, or indeed he has no burial, I say that a stillborn child is better than he—

4 for it comes in vanity and departs in darkness, and its name is covered with darkness. 5 Though it has not seen the sun or known anything, this has more rest than that man, 6 even if he lives a thousand years twice—but has not seen goodness. Do not all go to one place?

6:3

In further discussing the vanity of using money foolishly, Solomon offers another example of one who fails to recognize blessings from God. Here he discusses a man who fathers “100 children.” This terminology is done for the sake of emphasis (as with vs. 6). This man has a large family which is a blessing from God (cf. Psalm 127:4). He lives long life, another blessing from God (cf. Exodus 20:12; Job 42:17 where he was “full of days”). Yet, this man is dissatisfied. He dies but no one mourns. He is despised and does not even have a proper burial. There are many cultures that this would strike to the heart of, but the Jewish culture would have seen this as a horrible curse, a

troubled end to a dissatisfied life. The ancestors who had lived before, the “fathers” were held in high regard, and people made sure to care for the burial of their predecessors (cf. Genesis 50:25; Exodus 13:19; Joshua 24:32; 2 Samuel 21:12). So this rich man’s miserable life was followed by a miserable, unimaginable death.

Solomon is now going to make an analogy between the dissatisfied man who died in unimaginable misery and the miscarried child. The miscarried child who did not live to see even one day “under the sun” would have been a time of great sadness as well. This passage and other similar passages in Scripture do not downplay the sorrow and sadness of miscarriage; they simply deal with a very real issue. In this context and from this perspective, the miscarried child has the following advantages:

6:4

1. He/she comes in futility - probably meaning that he/she comes into a vain, purposeless world.
2. He/she goes into obscurity – he/she never develops a reputation that future generations ridicule and mock. He/she never makes the foolish mistakes of the man who is always dissatisfied and therefore loses his fortune.

6:5

3. He/she never sees the sun - that is, he/she has never had any of the experiences of those who have lived to see the light of day.
4. He/she never knows anything - the stillborn child does not have to remember the bad experiences.

Thus, the application to the unfulfilled man is clear: God has given much to him but he never appreciates it. Therefore, he is worse off than the child who never has the experiences of life.

6:6

He has the same amount of joy as a stillborn child...none. They both end up in the same place, the grave (*Sheol* - the realm of the dead - this is equivalent to the Greek *Hades*). So what use is the long life if it is filled with dissatisfaction and misery? Certainly, Solomon is emphasizing the foolishness of a life lived without God and the worthlessness of that life.

6:7-9

7 All the labor of man is for his mouth, and yet the soul is not satisfied.

8 For what more has the wise man than the fool? What does the poor man have, who knows how to walk before the living?

9 Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.

6:7

You work to survive and not for pleasure. You work to put food in your mouth, yet the soul is not satisfied. Man does not live on bread alone, but on the word of God (Luke 4:4). Food alone will not fulfill man's deepest needs.

"Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, 2 as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby," 1 Peter 2:1-2.

God's Word is meant to nourish our souls.

6:8

Verse 8 presents a difficult question from the perspective of Solomon regarding the advantages of the wise man over the foolish man. The answer here is none. Without God there is no advantage to the wise man. This is the moral dilemma of atheism. Any life without God has great trouble distinguishing wise from foolish, good from bad, and such like.

"The living" here are those who have the best in life. If the poor man knows how to walk before the living (knows how to please them) it will not help him. If he spends all of his time doing this then life is gone before he knows it and he has nothing. He will not ultimately benefit from trying to please men. He will benefit from trying to please God. We can see why Solomon sees vanity in life because much of this is unfair when we do not view this life from an eternal, beyond the sun, perspective.

6:9

The eyes see things you can have. The soul desires things that it cannot have. There may be plenty to see but an inward longing and covetous attitude will take away from the beauty of what you do have; from what the eye sees. Our soul can lust over the beautiful women with the perfect bodies, but the eyes see the wife at home. If this is the case, then our greed (for a different mate) might lead to adultery. This is what we should be satisfied with. The "grass is greener on the other side of the fence" philosophy is not good. The grass or garden at home will be greener when we water and fertilize and nurture it. We need to stop and smell the roses and be content with what we have. Someone has said, "There is no place better than where you are going or where you have been." Christians need to learn this attitude of contentment. (cf. Phil 4:10-12).

It is in these verses that we find the fourteenth vanity: greed or greedy ambition. Greed is never satisfied with what it has. This lack of satisfaction is vanity. Thinking back to the wife we have at home. Maybe I married a young woman whose youth I saw as beauty. Maybe, as she (and I!) ages, she is not as "beautiful" in my eyes because she is no longer young. Now, when I see a younger woman I find her more attractive. Think about this though: that younger woman will age as well! Greed is never satisfied, and this way of thinking is vanity. It is striving after the wind. Instead of searching for youth, I should recognize, respect, and love my wife as Christ loved the church (cf. Ephesians 5:23-33).

6:10-12

10 Whatever one is, he has been named already, for it is known that he is man; and he cannot contend with Him who is mightier than he.

11 Since there are many things that increase vanity, how is man the better?

12 For who knows what is good for man in life, all the days of his vain life which he passes like a shadow? Who can tell a man what will happen after him under the sun?

6:10

Notice that the editors chose to capitalize “Him” because they believe this to be a reference to God. This is almost certainly correct. You cannot dispute with God. Man has to learn to accept some things. Man is human. God is divine. This is clearly seen in God’s omniscience and sovereignty.

6:11

This is the fifteenth vain thing: the mastery of language. Words of man cannot change the reality we faced. If I call a sheep a lion, it does not make this thing so. There are some things that just are. Smooth words cannot change the sun’s rising, can they? Your fluency and delivery may be perfect on why it should not rise, but it will. The one thing words might do, however, is increase the futility of life for mankind. Perhaps, this is clearest when we think about the words that a man or woman speaks versus what God says. It is no wonder that man “cannot contend with Him”!

6:12

What is really valuable in this day of life? A person has been given just a little bit of time, and he will get the most out of it. This is the attitude that we need to have.

The phrase “like a shadow” means that which has no substance or value. He is on the stage of life with his one act play. He has a few years. How is he going to use them? To the profit? To the squander? The Bible clearly teaches the brevity of life:

“Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. He comes forth like a flower and fades away; he flees like a shadow and does not continue,” Job 14:1-2.

“Whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away,” James 4:14.

“Lord, make me to know my end, and what is the measure of my days, that I may know how frail I am,” Psalm 39:4.

“For we are aliens and pilgrims before You, as were all our fathers; our days on earth are as a shadow, and without hope,” 1 Chronicles 29:15.

No man has enough wisdom to explain what is worth living for and what will come after death. No man has this wisdom inside him. Do not let the TV commercials or any man tell us what the good life is. Man does not know. The door of riches and man's wisdom have been slammed shut. None of these doors will give the answer. But he must turn to the door of faith. Let God teach man the true value of living. It is the attitude of Jeremiah that we must also have in this endeavor:

"O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps" Jeremiah 10:23.

This is the teaching of wisdom:

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the Lord and depart from evil," Proverbs 3:5-7.

Sometimes we sing a hymn that asks the question "to whom shall I go but to the Lord." This was the bold attitude of Peter in John 6:68-69:

"But Simon Peter answered Him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also, we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'"

This attitude will pave the way for the continuation of the experiment. As Solomon continues to observe life, he has included the plan, purpose, and Person of God more and more. We are being led by the Teacher to a place of understanding: only God can show us the true meaning of life

Chapter 7

7:1

1 A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of one's birth;

7:1-8:1

This section includes proverbs which deal with suffering and sin. There is clear teaching on things of value like reputation, lamentation, admonition, patience, wisdom, and self-control. The first lines state an obvious truth, and the second truth ought to be equally obvious. This is how the section unfolds to allow the audience to see those things which have more and lasting value or worth.

7:1

We study this passage with reference to Proverbs 22:1, "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, Loving favor rather than silver and gold."

Some worry more about how they smell than what their reputation is. They look good and smell good but are absolute failures. A woman who spends more time working on her outward appearance with make-up and clothing and

jewelry than her inner character is not a worthy woman. Likewise, a man can have a fresh haircut, strong muscles, and many accessories, but if he does not consider his character, who he really is, none of that matters. You cannot fool people for very long when you have a foul character. And you cannot fool God for even a second!

The phrase “the day of one’s death” may be odd to us. However, the conclusion should be obvious, but also should the first statement be just as obvious. A life well-lived is a great life (cf. Revelation 14:13). Potential is a great thing, but actually living a great, godly life is even better than the potential that one might have. To the Christian there are two positive things about death:

1. It is the end of all troubles and
2. You are going to be with God.

So, this is decisively “better”! Notice all the times the word “better” occurs - eight times through verse 10. This is a key word in this section. This is the language of advantage, the language of value or worth. God’s way is always the better way.

The following set of verses will continue the discussion of “better” things where we will discover that for the faithful death is better, but so is life! Life is better because the faithful, the wise consider and understand the somber moments of life.

7:2-4

2 Better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for that is the end of all men; and the living will take it to heart.

3 Sorrow is better than laughter, for by a sad countenance the heart is made better.

4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

7:2

The “house of mourning” is a place of sadness. When we think of the word mourn, the feeling that should come to mind is associated with great loss - usually loss of life. This is the house where a dear loved one has passed from life to death, the spirit and the body have been separated. When you go to a house of mourning you appreciate the value of life. You are with people who have a value and respect for life. Sadness can help you experience happiness and build character. Funerals can change your perspective on a lot of things. If you go to the funeral of a friend who just lost a parent, you are likely to appreciate your parents more. The same thing is true when a neighbor loses a young child. You appreciate your children and their energy much more.

On the other hand, there are those that never take life seriously, even in the gravest moments of life. The house of feasting has a “live and let die” attitude. While enjoying life is good, there are times to look around and consider the end that is coming to all men: death.

This gives us a better perspective and appreciate for life. Some things do not seem enjoyable at the moment but the wise can lay it to heart. "The living" are the ones who go the house of mourning and think about life. They are really thankful to be alive. This does not mean they are going around every day just hoping someone will die. They do not dwell on death, but they do consider and even meditate on death's reality.

Consider this an opportunity. When a person loses a loved one, it is the best time to reach him with the gospel. He has a respect for both life and death. He just saw it hit close to home. He has to be in the right frame of mind. This is a time when the parable of the sower might give us some insight regarding good and honest soil. The soil has to be right. Death encourages one to think about the afterlife. Christians want to talk to others who are serious about their eternal destiny.

7:3

When a person has looked death in the face he appreciates life more and is happier about it. When you walk away from a funeral you are glad to be alive. It is better than laughter because sorrow brings the soberness of a true sense of what is important. We tend to let little things destroy the true happiness of living. Sorrow makes happiness more enjoyable. There is an application to parenting for us today. If you shield children from every sadness, defeat, and hurt, they will never appreciate things that are opposite like happiness, victory, and healing. Not everything in life is laughter. That is okay; that is life. Perspective is a good thing.

7:4

The wise allow death to provoke thought and meditation. You walk by the casket, you see the body and know it will be you someday. You visit the wake or the memorial service and the picture of the deceased is there. You wonder if the individual made it to heaven or not, but the fool just wants to go party. He does not want to even think about it. "That's too heavy for me, man; let's go party!" The fool's mind is in the house of pleasure. The heart here is that of the mind which can and often does bring about emotions. The wise will give their attention to the current situation; their mind will provoke their emotions. They will continue to think about and sympathize with those who are in times of great sorrow. We should serve these people, evangelize these people, and pray for these people (cf. Romans 12:15).

7:5-7

*5 It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than for a man to hear the song of fools.
6 For like the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool. This also is vanity.
7 Surely oppression destroys a wise man's reason, and a bribe debases the heart.*

7:5

If you were asked what you would rather listen to a song or a rebuke, what might you say? The easy answer might be a song, but Solomon is considering the weightier matters of life and death. Songs are good. They have a place. But, not all of life is meant to be a song.

Here we see the carelessness of people of songs. Songs are associated with happiness and festivities. One should not be hearing happy songs when it is time to be thinking soberly. Music may sound pretty but you would be better off listening to the wise. We have the tendency to avoid people who would confront us (wise man), and we associate with non-confrontive people who sing songs of no value (fools). We seek the path of least resistance, just like water. If you have associated with a wise man he will tell you what you need to do to improve your life and get your priorities right. He will rebuke you because he is interested in your becoming better. Even if something is unpleasant to hear, when we need to hear it, we need to hear it. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend..." Proverbs 27:6 because our friends, our true friends have our best interests in mind.

7:6

The song and laughter of the fool is like thorns crackling in a fire under a pot. When a recently cut thorn-bush is cast into the fire, the thorns retain the water from the plant. They make all kinds of noise in the fire, but the fire does not burn hotter and the thorns burn off. The hardwoods burn for longer. The thorns are loud and passing. This is the fool.

This too is futility. It is a pun in Hebrew as the word SIRIM means "crackling of thorns." He is saying that the fool's laughter is like a sudden flame. It crops up very fast with lots of noise and flash but is soon gone. The laughter of the fool vanishes quickly. This is our sixteenth vain thing: evil companionship. It is vain to associate with those who do not think soberly about life. "Do not be deceived: 'Evil company corrupts good habits,'" 1 Corinthians 15:33.

7:7

Verse 7 could be thought about as a continuation of the vanity of evil companionship. Those who give bribes and those who oppress are evil companions. Oppression is the putting down of a certain person or class of people. A bribe is taking money to influence your judgment or the outcome. The wise does not want to associate with those who are fools, nor those who oppress, nor those who give or receive bribes.

Wise people get upset when they see someone taking advantage of someone else. They do because it undermines society, that which keeps society strong. We need to be trusting in each other instead of being suspicious. Wise people are interested in a better society.

A bribe shows that there is something wrong deep down inside. There is corruption. Both giving and taking bribes is wrong, and the wise will refrain from this behavior and from these people. Thus, both oppression and bribery

bring about certain responses of destroying reason and debasing the heart. There is symmetry or parallelism here in destroy reason and debase the heart as both of these are associated with the mind.

7:8-10

8 The end of a thing is better than its beginning; the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.

9 Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, for anger rests in the bosom of fools.

10 Do not say, "Why were the former days better than these?" For you do not inquire wisely concerning this.

7:8

The end is better than the beginning of a great relationship or a life well-lived or anything else. It is good to get things settled. The anxiety is gone, and you can quit worrying about it. While both the beginning and the end have a "time" (cf. Ecclesiastes 3:2), the end is "better." This verse speaks to potential. There is a famous American football coach who once said something along the lines of "potential means you have not done it yet." This very true in sports as the end of good season is better than the prospect of a good season. This is true with a hunt as the end of the hunt with food in hand is better than the prospect or potential of a good hunt. The reality of a good marriage is better than a potentially good marriage. The list could go on and on.

Here, patience and pride are contrasted. Patience enables a person to grow. Pride causes people to think they do not need to grow. Growth as a person enables you to deal better with other people. We need to learn to be patient with other people. Pride is a sin; patience is a virtue. Pride looks to self. Patience bears with others. The Lord hates pride (Proverbs 8:13). On the other hand, patience is a characteristic of God (Romans 15:5), it is befitting a man of God (2 Timothy 3:10), it is necessary to remain faithful (Hebrews 10:36), and it is a Christian virtue worth pursuing (2 Peter 1:6).

7:9

There are some people who are very hasty and become angry quickly. Anger lodges deeply (rests or resides) within the fool. A fool cannot handle certain situations and leans on anger. This person is unable to control himself.

Do we quickly get angry? Certainly, this is not a characteristic of God's children. A Christian realizes that anger is not an acceptable attribute. Solomon also observes that if one's temper is not dealt with and controlled, then ultimately it will make a permanent home or residence in the personality (bosom) of the fool.

7:10

Since the end of the thing is better than the beginning and since the wise person leans on patience over pride or anger, the wise person will always look to the opportunities of life in order that he might finish the task at hand. This indicates the attitude of perseverance. There is a foolish attitude that says the

days in which we live are inferior to the days which have passed. This is called “the ‘good old days’ philosophy.” Do not yearn for days long past. It is good to evaluate the times past, but to live in the past is foolish. People are constantly thinking about what used to be, but not what can be. They throw their hands up in disgust and give up on society. This is not a wise attitude, and it is not the attitude of God’s children.

“This is the day the Lord has made; We will rejoice and be glad in it,”
Psalm 118:24.

7:11-12

11 Wisdom is good with an inheritance, and profitable to those who see the sun.

12 For wisdom is a defense as money is a defense, but the excellence of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to those who have it.

7:11

When one receives an inheritance from a wealthy relative it is a good thing if it is associated with wisdom. In many ways, Solomon could speak firsthand about this as he inherited the kingdom from David and sought out even more wisdom from God to rule that kingdom. Wisdom plus inheritance equals something good. Inheritance minus wisdom equals something bad. As demonstrated in 5:10-17, many things can go wrong when one has wealth. Thus, it is imperative that great caution is exercised. Things must always be approached with a godly perspective, considering God’s will in the use of those monies. We must be good stewards.

Those who “see the sun” are those who are alive and not dead. You can only receive an inheritance or gain wisdom if you are alive. Why do these have a great opportunity? They are alive, they have received an inheritance, and they have the wisdom to know how to use that inheritance. This is very profitable.

7:12

Remember that wisdom is a key word in Ecclesiastes. Notice how many times it occurs just in chapter seven: verses 4, 5, 7, 10, 11, 12, 16, 19, 23, 25. That is thirteen times in chapter 7! This verse could literally be translated “For in the shade (or shadow) of wisdom, in the shade (or shadow) of money.” Shade here is a form or symbol of protection as we see in our English versions with the word “defense.”

Money and wisdom are compared in this verse. Wisdom gives protection. Money can build a fortress around someone, but wisdom keeps you safe even if there is no fortress. There is an advantage in knowing and thinking things out for the best. In verse 11, Solomon put an inheritance (money) and wisdom together. In verse 12, Solomon shows that wisdom has advantages over money: “the excellence of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to those who have it.”

7:13

13 Consider the work of God; for who can make straight what He has made crooked?

7:13

God has set the standards, and man cannot altar the basic structure of God's will. When God bends something, it is bent and man cannot unbend it (cf. Isaiah 5:20). This is a different perspective than Solomon had in 1:15, "What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be numbered." Now, God is brought clearly into the picture. If man bends something, then it is quite possible that man can unbend that thing. However, if God does something, man cannot overcome the power of God.

This is very true with God's Word. It is the final and objective truth (cf. John 17:17). One of the applications is this: God has said that homosexuality is wrong and no matter how much man tries to justify it and make it acceptable (i.e. bends and twists it), it will always be wrong. Man will try to twist God's word (2 Peter 3:16), but it will result in their destruction.

7:14

14 In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: surely God has appointed the one as well as the other, so that man can find out nothing that will come after him.

7:14

"God has appointed" both days of prosperity or increase AND days of adversity or difficulty. However, God did not do this in order that man cannot find out there is nothing after him. The end of verse 14 likely shows that Solomon is still struggling through the meaning of life. In all of this struggle, Solomon is looking to the right source, God. As long as he is guided by wisdom and leans on God's Word, Solomon will come to the correct conclusion (12:13).

Some very important points:

1. Happiness and adversity have their purposes. When one has prosperity, the tendency is to be happy. When one has adversity, he thinks more soberly (cf. Jas 1:2ff). Both of these are good things. If we will carefully consider life and observe in a similar fashion to Solomon, we can find wisdom.
2. The constant fluctuation between good days and bad days keeps us dependent on God and not on our own guess work. God has the key to everything. Having an attitude like Paul had in Philippians 4:10-13 is the right attitude. He was content no matter what. Paul adapted through Him who enabled him to do all things.

7:15-18

15 I have seen everything in my days of vanity: there is a just man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs life in his wickedness.

*16 Do not be overly righteous, nor be overly wise: why should you destroy yourself?
17 Do not be overly wicked, nor be foolish: why should you die before your time?
18 It is good that you grasp this, and also not remove your hand from the other; for he who fears God will escape them all.*

7:15

There is no explanation given here for this truth. This is life. It is just the way it is, so be prepared for it. This is like Naboth in 1 Kings 21:13. He died in his righteousness. Also look at Jezebel in 1 Kings 18-21. In those chapters she certainly prospered in her wickedness. The Scriptures show that even the righteous question these things (cf. Habakkuk 2 and Psalm 73). Thus, man needs to learn to accept this. Meanwhile he ought to remember that in the end, ultimately, God will deal out justice (cf. Psalm 73:17; Habakkuk 3:16-19). Life is not fair, but God is fair. Consider one question and two statements made by heroes of the Old Testament:

1. Abraham asked, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do, right?" in Genesis 18:25.
2. Moses observed, "He is the Rock, His work is perfect; For all His ways are justice" in Deuteronomy 32:4.
3. David praised God saying, "The Lord is righteous in all His ways, Gracious in all His works" in Psalm 145:17.

7:16-17

These two verses center on four commands: do not be _____. This is Solomon's admonition concerning four moral dangers:

First, "do not be over righteous." There is a righteousness that does not depend fully on God. This is the idea of "self-righteousness." Even a righteousness that is recognized by other men but is not recognized by God could be under consideration here. This is not the true righteousness found by obeying the will of God (cf. Psalm 119:172). Do not act more righteous than you are, more righteous than God's word commands. Do not act "holier-than-thou." In verse 20 he will say that there is no righteous man (cf. Romans 3:9-10). It puts a tremendous strain on one who demands more of himself than he could ever become. Do not be unrealistic. Do not measure yourself by any standard other than the word of God. This was part of great depth of hypocrisy that the Pharisees lived out in the first century. Righteousness is seen in doing what is right (cf. 1 John 3:7) according to God's perfect standard (Psalm 119:172). Therefore, overly righteous is to go beyond God's righteousness. This is very dangerous:

Romans 10:1-4: "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."

Second, Solomon warns do not be overly wise. This again is talking about thinking more highly of yourself than you ought to think. The RSV agrees with the NKJV here and is correct in its translation “Do not make yourself overwise.” This has a way of destroying you. Once again, wisdom comes from God, and the pursuit of wisdom is good. However, overly wise goes beyond the wisdom of God. This could be through philosophy or traditions or imagination or secular academics or anything else.

Third, Solomon warns against being excessively wicked. This does not prove that wickedness in moderation is acceptable. When God condemns something in excess, he does not condone it in excess.

When James writes, “Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls,” James 1:21; he is not suggesting that we keep our cup full (but not overflowing) of wickedness! We all fall short, but we must check that sin and not take it lightly. God wants us to correct course in our live not be overtaken by sin. We must do all that we can to conquer it. What happens to a person who sins and does not take it seriously? He will do it again and will grow worse and worse. This is the fool. He dies before his time (cf. Psalm 55:23). His conscience can become seared as with a hot iron (1 Timothy 4:2).

Fourth, Solomon warns against being a fool. The fool in Ecclesiastes (see 2:16), as in Proverbs, is one who is characterized by stupidity and overconfidence. He embodies the antithesis or opposite of wisdom. He is easily led and shows no common sense (Proverbs 13:16; 17:24; 26:7-11; 28:26; 29:20).

7:18

God’s word tells us how to correct those problems that we have; the Scriptures guide us to correction the errors which they highlight. They instruct us in righteousness. Here, Solomon is referring to the four dangers mentioned above concerning righteousness and wisdom. There must be a balance. It is God who provides the balance. How does a person obtain balance? The answer is by fearing God. This is the key.

This is a good time to “zoom out” from where Solomon started (1:2) and where he is headed (12:13) in this great book. Over the course of this book, over the course of Solomon’s life, he recognizes the necessity of the fear of God. Like any good speaker or author (especially an inspired author), Solomon is leading his audience to his grand conclusion: “fear God and keep his commandments.” Along the way, we will notice that Solomon has “sown” this idea into the book:

Previously:

1. 3:14 “I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it. God does it, that men should fear before Him.”
2. 5:7 “For in the multitude of dreams and many words there is also vanity. But fear God.”

And, this prepares us for what is coming:

3. 8:12-13 "Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and his days are prolonged, yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him. But it will not be well with the wicked; nor will he prolong his days, which are as a shadow, because he does not fear before God."
4. 12:13 "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all."

7:19-22

19 Wisdom strengthens the wise more than ten rulers of the city.

20 For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin.

21 Also do not take to heart everything people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you.

22 For many times, also, your own heart has known that even you have cursed others.

7:19

Look back at verse 18 and see "For he who fears God will escape them all." Now, combine that fear of God with verse 19. Wisdom and the fear of God are better than the collective wisdom of experienced wisdom. Ten is the perfect number of men. Even if you have a perfect number of wise men, they are not as good as the one man with God. This is seen over and over again in the lives of Joseph and Daniel among other of God's servants. Notice that "fear" of God and "wisdom" are connected in the book of Proverbs:

Proverbs 1:7, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction."

See also: Proverbs 1:29; 2:5; 9:10; 15:33; 19:23.

7:20

This passage is directly referenced in Romans 3:23 in the discussion of humanity's need for Jesus because man could not solve his sin problem. People sin (1 John 3:4). Have you ever heard of the phrase in a prayer, "Forgive us of our sins of omission and commission"? Omission is the sin of not doing something good. Commission is the sin of doing what you were not supposed to do. Sins of commission, some have said, are when you sin with your eyes open. You committed what God said not to commit. The point that Solomon is making is still the same: one must seek for a proper balance in his life. Here, the balance is an understanding of man's inability to live perfectly. This also leads the audience to see the need to rely fully on God.

7:21-22

These verses read like proverbial statements. As such, they help the reader in accomplishing the given assignments of the context, and they are easily applicable to various parts of life.

You can visualize the scenario: a teacher is giving instruction on a given subject. The lessons she gives require the attention of the students. When one does not listen, she admonishes. When one does not apply himself, she corrects. She is “tough but fair.” What might the students say about her after class? Someone might call attention to her physical features or characterize her as mean or something similar. What if the teacher heard those students? She could become very angry and discouraged. She could take out that anger on the students and punish them. However, she could also just take note that maybe the students have struggled in class today, but they will be better tomorrow. For Solomon’s sons, this could be true of their servants. For a business owner, this could be true of employees. For parents, this could be true for children. For any of us, it could be true for any friend, peer, neighbor, or family member, so it would do us well to take Solomon’s words to heart.

It seems is a part of human nature to say things one really does not mean, like saying something hateful when one is not a hateful person. Do not take everything seriously. We know from our own experience that we have done the same thing with foolish words. This does not omit the sin of the tongue, but we need to have Christ’s attitude and be willing to forgive men when they speak evil, while at the same time guarding carefully our own words (cf. Matthew 12:33-37; James 3:19).

We are allowed to overlook the folly or rashness of others. “...love covers all sins,” (Proverbs 10:12). “He who covers a transgression seeks love...” (Proverbs 17:9). Love does not keep record of wrongs but thinks the best of others (1 Corinthians 13:5-7). We do not have to take every word against us seriously NOR do we have to be offended at everything. Children are unable to consider the context of words. Children are the ones who take offense at everything. Let us not be like children! In fact, we should “put away childish things” like Paul did (1 Corinthians 13:11).

We do not have to listen to what others say about us! Generally, the words of people that we do not respect affect us more than the words of people we love and cherish. One insult from someone at work that I do not respect can hurt more than one hundred compliments from my most cherished friends. We should not do this to ourselves. Among all people, those in authority, leaders, must be very careful about this. We should not be petty. We can put ourselves in the shoes of others and extend grace to them. This is the perspective of the wise. The wise have that different outlook and framework. This applies in the church, in school, in work, and in life. When I do premarital counseling, I like to bring up this concept for husbands and wives: do not take offense at everything!

7:23-25

23 All this I have proved by wisdom. I said, “I will be wise”; but it was far from me.

24 As for that which is far off and exceedingly deep, who can find it out?

25 I applied my heart to know, to search and seek out wisdom and the reason of things, to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness.

7:23

Solomon pursued wisdom and found it to exceed folly. He used wisdom as a tool to examine the world and various philosophies and found it useful. Wisdom, though, was not the missing piece of Solomon's life. It was not and is not the meaning of life. It is a worthy pursuit and useful tool! Here, Solomon sees that with wisdom comes the recognition of what you do not know. With the expanse of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding in the world, even the wisest of men could say, "Wisdom is far from me." This does not mean that God placed wisdom where man could not find it. Instead, Solomon understands that with wisdom comes the understanding that he did not know everything. Thus, wisdom must be pursued further. Even then, wisdom cannot truly solve the problems of life nor can wisdom alone answer the truly important questions of life.

7:24

Grammatically, a negative answer is expected by the question posed. No one can grasp God's plan or purpose. This is why the statement in verse 23 is true. God has all wisdom and man does not. Man, even in great pursuit of wisdom cannot have "it all." Further, without the revelation of God, wisdom under the sun would always come short. It would always be imperfect. What man can learn of lasting significance comes from God. Beyond His word are many mysteries man cannot understand. "The secret things belong unto Jehovah our God; but the things that are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law," (Deuteronomy 29:29). This passage clearly shows that we **need** God to have wisdom of what he has revealed, **and** we do **not** know all there is. What a humbling passage! Man must, therefore, trust the purposes and plans of God.

7:25

Solomon had done a lot of research in this grand experiment. He did much work and wanted to know about all the evil of doing foolish things. He searched to find what is vain, foolish and mad (i.e. without logic or sober thought). This passage shows that Solomon had a desire to understand the world and what he was missing. Wisdom had been a useful tool in his life and would be used as a tool by his audience to come to his same conclusion. Wisdom can help see what is reasonable or logical. This is a good thing. While wisdom is not the end all or be all, it is very good and very useful!

Unfortunately, Solomon had delved into the experiential knowledge of folly and its wickedness. He had embraced madness (that which is without reason) in his pursuit of pleasure, in his erection of idols, in his apostate marriages, and in his life. However, experience is not the only way to learn these valuable lessons. It is much less painful to learn from the experience of others! I see the danger of drug use without taking drugs and ruining my body because I learn from the experience of others. Ecclesiastes serves as instruction and as a clear warning **not** to follow the path that Solomon did for so much of his life.

7:26-29

26 And I find more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are fetters. He who pleases God shall escape from her, but the sinner shall be trapped by her.

27 "Here is what I have found," says the Preacher, "Adding one thing to the other to find out the reason,

28 Which my soul still seeks but I cannot find: one man among a thousand I have found, but a woman among all these I have not found.

29 Truly, this only I have found: That God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes."

7:26

What woman is not named? Perhaps because any woman that is like this is a danger to man (cf. Proverbs 5:15-23). A woman who has a heart (intention) to dominate and uses her available resources (hands) to accomplish her will, is to be completely avoided (cf. Proverbs 23:26-28). The only one, however, who can notice the snares and traps is one who is pleasing to God. If we are trying to be pleasing to God we will escape, but the fool will be captured by her. Do you remember the historical account of Joseph when he lived and worked in Potiphar's house in Egypt? Joseph serves as an example of living this type of wisdom (cf. Genesis 39).

But, Solomon had lived this very tale. Who would know better this truth than Solomon? First Kings 11 tells his wives turned his heart away from God. If he had been pleasing to God that would have never happened. If he had avoided these snares and pits, he could have given much more of his life in faithful service to God. There is a very real application to the kind of women we pursue (or for the ladies, the kind of men they pursue). We need to look for the right type of person. The Bible gives great guidance in Proverbs 31:10-31 about a virtuous woman. On the other side, the judge Samson found himself in the snares of Delilah after he failed to heed his parents' wise counsel about that woman (Judges 14-15).

Notice in this verse the contrast: on one hand there is "he who pleases God," but on the other hand there is "the sinner." The sinner, that is one who lives in sin and does not repent, cannot be pleasing to God. The one who pleases God, that is the one who does his will and follows his commands, will not continue in a life of sin. Consider what the New Testament teaches:

"Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him. Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous" 1 John 3:6-7.
One who wants to please God will not continue to do what is wrong.

7:27

Notice the emphasis on the words "find" or "found." Note that some translations will use "discovers" (vss. 24, 25, 26). Thorough investigation will yield discoveries or findings. This is the language of Solomon's great

experiment. Solomon admits that some truths have been found, but these findings have brought about further questions which have yet to be answered.

In the phrase “Adding one thing to the other to find out the reason,” the word “adding” has been added by our translators to help with the understand of the verse. We see this in most every English translation. How did Solomon go about his experiment? He observed one thing and thought about that one thing (or many things) in relation to the other things he had observed. This is how he came about his conclusions.

7:28

The word “find” or “found” carries the idea of discovery. He is talking about wisdom. From Solomon’s experience, it is rare in men, but even more rare in women (as might be argued from 2 Timothy 3:6). But men, do not boast here as we are only 1/1000 better. Solomon had found only a few wise men and no wise women. This does not say there are not wise women, but Solomon had not found one. This may have to do with the women that he associated with in his time as king. Or, this may be a reflection that Solomon sought wisdom from his male associates and not from his female companions. This verse is not the great criticism of women that some have made it out to be. Certainly, the point is that in either sex wisdom is rare.

7:29

“Man” here is a description of mankind and not speaking only of the males. Here he lays the blame for wickedness squarely on the shoulder of mankind. It is man who seeks what is evil. Man’s practice of evil is evidence that he has a lack of wisdom. And for this lack of wisdom he has no one to blame but himself. God puts man on the path of righteousness and man takes himself off. This puts both men and women in the category of those who fall short of God’s glory (cf. Romans 3:23).

God made man upright but they have sought out many schemes. God was not the cause of delusion, pain or mystery. God was the constant amidst confusion (Ez. 18:20, 28:15). Man chose sin of their own free will (1 John 3:4). Man is the one who separates himself from God not the other way around. As we examine this verse carefully, we notice another profound truth: mankind, human beings, are born innocent. God is the One who forms the spirit of man (Zechariah 12:1) and makes man in the womb (Psalm 139:13-14). God does not create wickedness or evil. I did not inherit the sins of my father(s) nor will my sons inherit my sins (Ezekiel 18:4-24). This is why Jesus could say that the citizens of the kingdom of Heaven had to become like little children (Matthew 18:3).

Many people who call themselves Christians have a belief of “original sin” or “inherited depravity.” This is the idea that children are conceived and born full of sin. This passage is a direct and full contraction of such a doctrine. If you or your church believe and teach original sin, study these scriptures and repent. See the world as God does not through the doctrines of demons or traditions of men.

As we close out study of Ecclesiastes 7, we note that the material covered for the last chapter and a half has ranged from the value of life without family and death, to the nature of death and necessity of a good name, to the proper understanding of wisdom and inheritance, even to human relationships. As Solomon has engaged himself in this great experiment, he is able to draw some conclusions. While these conclusions will be completed with the final chapter, they are important. Death is a reality (7:1, 17, 26). Men are accountable at death. God is above all. The fear of God is necessary (7:18). Mankind suffers from a sin problem which only adds to the frustration of this life (7:20). Man was not created a sinner (7:29). Ultimately, God is the one who can provide deliverance to those who please him (7:26).

Chapter 8

8:1

1 Who is like a wise man? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? A man's wisdom makes his face shine, and the sternness of his face is changed.

8:1

Many commentators want to put this verse with the last section as a conclusion to the miscellaneous proverbial thoughts of the last chapter. Since both chapter 7 and chapter 8 (as well as other places in the book) deal with wisdom, this verse could go with what comes before or what comes after. This is a good time to remind our Bible students that the Scriptures were inspired, but men gave them chapters and verses as ways of helping us read, know, and understand the Bible. It is always good to read across the chapter break to continue the flow of thought from the original author who was inspired by God.

Wisdom shows itself in kind and gentle expressions. There is a peace from just knowing and a kindness reflected. The wise man does not demonstrate a haughty or puffed-up attitude. In fact, it would be safe to say that the Bible teaches that we can see the wisdom in others. It will become evident in their lives. This verse then has a direct connection with James 3:17-18: "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

Consider how wisdom appears in peace and gentleness and a willingness to yield to others. Wisdom changes our words, our lives, our families, our businesses, our schools, our communities, and our nations. Wisdom even changes our faces. It is then the wise man (or woman) who is easier to approach and seek counsel (cf. Proverbs 20:5). We should all seek to have wisdom in our hearts that can be heard in our speech and seen in our faces.

If Ecclesiastes 8:1 goes with chapter 7, then wisdom is good for understanding the brevity or shortness of life, giving strength to the wise, and helping to navigate difficulties like those of a woman who would trap and

destroy. However, if Ecclesiastes 8:1 goes with the rest of this chapter, then wisdom is clearly seen in understanding and obeying laws.

In the following verses we will see that God is above the king or ruling powers (8:2, 17). We will also see that the kings or ruling powers have words of authority (8:3). Those ruling powers, like our governments today, have the authority over our lives in many ways (8:5-9). They even have the power to punish those who do evil (8:11). When those who rule fail us in some way, we can be content in the knowledge that God is still ultimately in control (8:12-14). For a greater discussion on the role of governments under the authority of God, please read Romans 13:1-7.

8:2-4

2 I say, "Keep the king's commandment for the sake of your oath to God.

3 Do not be hasty to go from his presence. Do not take your stand for an evil thing, for he does whatever pleases him."

4 Where the word of a king is, there is power; and who may say to him, "What are you doing?"

8:2

Every relationship and interaction we have on earth is affected by our relationship with God. We are better husbands, wives, friends, and citizens. This is our life with God. We made a promise, and God has witnessed that oath (that we will obey the king - cf. 2 Chronicles 36:13; Ezekiel 17:13), and He expects us to keep His commands. Civil governments are worthy of our obedience.

Romans 13:1-5 in the American Standard Version of 1901 says, "Let every soul be in subjection to the higher powers: for there is no power but of God; and the powers that be are ordained of God. 2Therefore he that resisteth the power, withstandeth the ordinance of God: and they that withstand shall receive to themselves judgment. 3For rulers are not a terror to the good work, but to the evil. And wouldest thou have no fear of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise from the same: 4for he is a minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is a minister of God, an avenger for wrath to him that doeth evil. 5 Wherefore ye must needs be in subjection, not only because of the wrath, but also for conscience' sake."

It is possible that man's laws will contradict God's laws. The solution is simple: we must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). However, if the ruling powers (like a king or governor or prime minister) have commands that do not interfere with God's commands, then we need to know the laws and obey the laws of the land in which we live. We do this in part to be good and godly citizens who have an impact on the world around us.

1 Peter 2:9-17 "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once

were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation. Therefore, submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

Many of us live in countries which afford us greater rights than at other times in history, but we should not use such liberty for occasions of stumbling. We should not exercise our freedom to disobey the laws that have been put in place to keep order and promote community. Christians should be the best citizens in any country that does not have laws which contradict God's law.

8:3

Wisdom should be used in the presence of the king. Generally, people understand this. He holds great power and influence and it is good to have both the decorum and some reservation to fit the occasion:

“When you sit down to eat with a ruler, consider carefully what is before you; and put a knife to your throat if you are a man given to appetite. Do not desire his delicacies, for they are deceptive food.” Proverbs 23:1-3

This passage goes a little further because it connects to breaking the oath of vs. 2. This is talking about disloyalty. In some sense, this is an act of rebellion. One is in a hurry to go and do evil, thereby breaking his oath with the king and sinning against God. This is wrong on multiple accounts. One should not disobey civil government. One should not rebel. One should not break an oath! Instead, our “yes” should really mean “yes” (James 5:12). The king will make the evildoer pay as we saw in Romans 13. Beyond that, God will hold the one who does evil accountable for his actions.

Human wisdom tells me that if I follow the laws, I am less likely to get in trouble with the authorities. This is common sense and good citizenship. The Bible takes my understanding on this matter further by helping me see the power of the king and the One who gives power to the king.

Proverbs 24:21-22: “My son, fear the Lord and the king; do not associate with those given to change; for their calamity will rise suddenly, and who knows the ruin those two can bring?”

8:4

If the king issues a command his subject will not be able to question him. He has the authority. There is a biblical example in 1 Samuel 8:10-18 where

the Bible notes that the king of Israel had supreme power in the nation. We might live in different types of governments where the people can contribute to the laws, where we can question the king through freedom of speech. Those freedoms should not be abused. Critique and criticism today must be weighed very carefully because government officials are worthy of respect as we saw in 1 Peter 2.

Today, laws can be amended or changed, updated, or even stricken off the books. That is okay. But, where there is a law we should follow it to the best of our ability. There is uncertainty in life. However, wisdom, in this context, obeys the king and enjoys the blessings of obedience.

This section shows that order and obedience is a good thing. Christians should work to promote such things. It begins with a good example in our lives. This thought continues in vs. 5-8.

8:5-8

5 He who keeps his command will experience nothing harmful; and a wise man's heart discerns both time and judgment,

6 Because for every matter there is a time and judgment, though the misery of man increases greatly.

7 For he does not know what will happen; so, who can tell him when it will occur?

8 No one has power over the spirit to retain the spirit, and no one has power in the day of death. There is no release from that war, and wickedness will not deliver those who are given to it.

8:5

When you are subject to the law of the land, you are wise if you do three things:

1. Know the law
2. Know the consequences for disobeying the law
3. Obey the law

As a general rule, keeping the civil law keeps one out of trouble because the king will not punish those who obey the laws. This is the norm of good governance. While there are exceptions, they are exceptions and not the rule. Wisdom is directly tied to following the law of the land. This is consistent in the writings of Solomon:

Proverbs 14:35: "The king's favor is toward a wise servant, but his wrath is against him who causes shame."

Proverbs 16:14: "As messengers of death is the king's wrath, but a wise man will appease it. In the light of the king's face is life, and his favor is like a cloud of the latter rain."

8:6

Usually there is a balance even on this earth. Rulers who treat people well, make more successful rulers. They just do better. They are more popular. They are respected and loved.

What should the subjects of the king do? Keep on obeying his law for it will all work out in time. A lot of people justify disobedience with their dislike for the ruler. This is not acceptable in God's eyes. We should instead pray for them (1 Timothy 2:1-2) and obey them (Romans 13:1-7).

The NASB 95 translates this verse, "...there is a proper time and procedure..." This should bring to mind Queen Esther, the cup bearer Nehemiah, and the wise man Daniel who all later served in the courts of pagan kings. They understood this principle in their respective places.

There is a balance coming in the end. There is no uncertainty about this. God will bring it all into judgment, rulers and subjects (2 Corinthians 5:11; cf. Revelation 20:12). Even if things get bad for some time, those who trust in God will endure.

8:7

We do not know how God might providentially balance things out. Think about Haman (Esther 9) or Jezebel (1Kings 21). We do not know how long God will allow unrighteous or oppressive rulers to stay in power. Our human knowledge is extremely limited. It is even more limited by our emotions as we think the thing that we are currently enduring is the most important thing. We forget that for thousands of years men and women have lived under less-than-favorable rulers.

A big part of man's problem is that he does not know the future. Therefore, he needs to trust. He also cannot ask anyone else who knows. There are no oracles giving the future. No astrologists can know what the next day or week or month will hold. All humans are limited by this lack of knowledge. So, why not just trust in God?

Remember this good saying: "I may not know what the future holds, but I do know who holds the future." And remember, we only know the yesterdays but God knows the tomorrows.

8:8

This verse is another good reminder of two important things in our study. First, it is always good to read from multiple translations. This is even more necessary when we do not read the original language (in this case Hebrew) very well. Second, the word translated "spirit" could also be translated "wind." This is a common word in Ecclesiastes and good for us to remember. Consider the NASB:

"No man has authority to restrain the wind with the wind, or authority over the day of death; and there is no discharge in the time of war, and evil will not deliver those who practice it."

So, our English translations disagree whether the word should be "wind" or "spirit." That is okay because both are accurate translations of the original term.

As Bible students we have to dig a little to see which one of these might be better. While the immediate context does not help too much, consider that if the "spirit" is used, then we can control our spirit within us. This is simply self-

control (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:11; Acts 24:25; Galatians 5:22-23). Maybe this speaks of the difficulty of self-control (cf. James 3:1-2). However, self-control is possible and it is expected. Are there other considerations?

Even a good or accurate translation can be used to promote false doctrine. If we are to take “spirit” in the NKJV as the best translation, then we must realize that it is connected to “death” that follows in the verse. When man dies, his spirit is separated from his body (Ecclesiastes 12:7; James 2:26). Therefore, man cannot control when he dies. We do not have power over death. Sure, we can prolong death with medicine and treatment and such, but we can never stop death from coming.

However, if the word “wind” (NASB 1995) is meant here, then this is likely a much simpler idea. The wind blows (Ecclesiastes 1:6). Each one of us has experienced the wind blowing. No man can contain, retrain, or restrain the wind. Even now, as wind energy becomes more and more prevalent, no man can make the wind blow or cease to blow. Understanding the meaning of life with God is like trying to grab a handful of wind (Ecclesiastes 1:14, 17, and others). The wind cannot provide profit like the fruit trees or grain fields (Ecclesiastes 5:16). Later in our study we will see that the wind is an excuse (Ecclesiastes 11:4). The wind and its intricacies are unknowable (Ecclesiastes 11:5). If this is the case, then Ecclesiastes 8:8 is simply saying that man cannot stop the wind from blowing.

Thus, this verse gives us four limitations to human authority or power:

1. You cannot restrain the wind. We simply do not have the power to change some things in this world, and that is okay.
2. You cannot stop death from happening because you have no authority over the day of death. We are not able to keep from dying. When the body says no more, it is no more. This is reality.
3. There is no discharge in time of war. Military personnel are in for the duration. This is especially true when the nation is engaged in an active conflict. This is not the time to relieve a good soldier of his duties. When it is time to fight every man is needed. Every single one, when the battle has begun, must fight. Imagine asking for leave during the height of a battle. This picture helps to illustrate the truth that some things are out of our control.
4. Evil will not deliver those who practice it. Just as the first three reflect reality, so does this fourth statement. Some think that lies will get them out of trouble, others think that stealing will get them out of poverty. However, this is an illusion. Sin never benefits the sinner!

There is no doubt that Solomon had observed and pondered these truths. The truth of nature is that the wind cannot be stopped. The truth of human nature is that the body will die. The truth of civil nature is that there is no discharge in the time of war. All of these ring true. We can see that these are

true by the observations and reasonings in our own lives. However, number 4 seems to be the pinnacle, the highest, and main point of the four-part statement. Like an escalator going up, the phrase “wickedness will not deliver those who are given to it,” sets at the top of these truths to carry through.

This grand conclusion is Solomon moving further from his emptiness, his starting point of vanity. This includes a spiritual side of things that cannot be ignored. This idea is repeated by Solomon a few verses later in 8:13: “But it will not be well with the wicked; nor will he prolong his days, which are as a shadow, because he does not fear before God.” If we are keeping the starting point of Solomon where he was so hopeless on one side of our mind and the grand conclusion and thesis (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14) on the other side of our mind, then we can see how Solomon, the inspired author, is leading us towards reaching the same conclusion that he did. Even if the wicked prosper and prolong their lives (Ecclesiastes 7:15), there is accountability (cf. 8:10-14).

8:9

9 All this I have seen, and applied my heart to every work that is done under the sun: There is a time in which one man rules over another to his own hurt.

8:9

Solomon again uses words of an experiment: “all this I have seen”; and of reasoning or concluding: “and applied my heart.” The conclusion “under the sun” in this passage brings together the idea of governmental powers that began in verse 2. While the one who rules over another could bring to mind domestic or business relationships, the context points to specifically to civil power. Simply put: men do not know how to exercise authority without the wisdom and guidance of God. They end up hurting themselves (and probably someone else) if they wander through life without the wisdom of God. Now, this principle is also true in the home and in the business world.

As we step back in light of the whole book, consider that ruling might have been seen by Solomon as a principle point of life. Rulers have greater lives or something of that nature. Without ruling over others, maybe there is less meaning to life. However, this is not true. Solomon recognizes the place of civil power and the king-subject relationship, but he notes that rule can be done to one’s own hurt or unhappiness.

8:10-13

10 Then I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of holiness, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done. This also is vanity. 11 Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

12 Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and his days are prolonged, yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him.

13 But it will not be well with the wicked; nor will he prolong his days, which are as a shadow, because he does not fear before God.

8:10

The wicked will die. They cannot escape it. Death is the great equalizer of the good and the wicked. Even the wicked are given the honor of a decent burial (cf. Jeremiah 16:6; Deuteronomy 21:22ff.; Joshua 8:19). There is equality in death. This can be frustrating and point to a lack of fairness in life. Solomon remembers that the wicked committed evil, and no one gave it much thought. No one raised his voice in objection. We might even say that at their funeral they were given praise.

While Solomon knows this is hypocritical, it is something he had observed. It is likely that we have also observed similar things in our places. This too is futility. It is the eighteenth vain thing: man's attitude toward evil or wickedness. People really do not care much about it. What a shame! God's attitude towards wickedness is not apathy.

8:11

The wicked had gone back and forth, in and out of the holy places with no consequences. The law of Moses would not have allowed such. Further, a good society would hold people accountable for their misdeeds. Punishment should fit the crime and fit the "time." That is to say punishment should be carried out in a timely manner. This serves as the best punishment and the best deterrent. When I lived in Singapore, I saw firsthand how the swift and strict enforcement of laws warned others not to commit crime.

Remember this verse. Use it often. This is why people do evil again and again, because there is no immediate punishment. If God had continued to do with man what he did with Nadab and Abihu, the priesthood would have been spotless (Leviticus 10:1-2). Paul notes that men sin because there is no fear of God in their eyes (Romans 3:10-18 cf. 2 Peter 3:3-4,9; Psalms 86:9-15). This also provides a good lesson for today. If any nation (government) would immediately punish wrong doers, we would not have to worry about all the crime.

Another application is for us as parents (cf. Ephesians 6:4). When rules are communicated to children, they must be enforced. Enforcement must be reasonable, timely, and consistent. We would not want to leave our children without discipline or restraint (cf. 1 Samuel 3:13; Hebrews 12:7-11). This will help build strong families just as enforcement of laws will build strong nations.

Notice the phrase "the hearts of the sons of men." The problem always begins there. People do evil because there is something corrupt about their heart.

Jesus said, "But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies," (Matthew 15:18-19). We need to guard our hearts as Proverbs teaches us (Proverbs 3:1, 4:4, 4:12, 4:23). Solomon had allowed corruption into his heart (cf. Ecclesiastes 2:10, 1 Kings 10:4-5).

This text teaches nothing about being born in sin. Instead, men and women choose to follow that path that pleases the flesh (cf. 1 John 2:15-17). Failure to guard or keep the heart will allow corrupting influences to come in. This corruption will lead to sin. This sin will lead to death. However, every choice along the way is mine, is ours, to make (cf. James 1:13-15).

8:12

If sin is not punished immediately, then people will continue in this lifestyle, making those types of choices. But, there will ultimately come a time to answer for this before God. This verse is once again connected to the thesis of the book (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). Here we have the theme of fearing God. It should be viewed in connection with verse 11. When God is in the picture, sin is an empty and stupid lifestyle. The word “well” is a common Hebrew word portraying the idea of day-to-day happiness and tranquility. It is for those who fear God. Everyone knows where your priorities are. Even a child makes himself known by what he does (Proverbs 20:11). People can see it openly. This is true of righteousness and of wickedness. Solomon here demonstrates patience to leave the ultimate destiny up to God, as did Asaph in Psalm 73. Notice the words of that Psalm:

“3 For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. 4 For there are no pangs in their death, but their strength is firm. 5 They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like other men. 6 Therefore pride serves as their necklace.”

The psalmist did not understand the good lives of the wicked. But one time when he was at the temple in Jerusalem the final outcome of the wicked came to his mind.

“17 Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end. 18 Surely You set them in slippery places; you cast them down to destruction. 19 Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors.”

God takes care of the wicked in his time. However, the faithful must put their trust in him. That is how they, how we, can be “well.”

“26 My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever; 27 For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish; You have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry. 28 But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all Your works.”

This would be a great summary of fearing God.

8:13

There is a simple contrast in that the wicked are not “well” in the sense of enjoying peace and tranquility in this life (cf. Philippians 4:6-7). The word “shadow” shows that these do not last long (remember Ecclesiastes 6:12!). It is because they do not fear God. Solomon probably means that man will not prosper beyond the grave because the lives of each and every person is simply a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away (James

4:14). He will then be facing the wrath of God. The wicked cannot “prolong his days” beyond the grave, and God will not reward the wicked with lengthened days. That wicked man will not live eternally in the good. We are lengthening our days for eternity when we are faithful to God. We have properly prepared ourselves for eternity.

The final contrast of this verse is also very simple: the wicked do not fear God. This links us to Ecclesiastes 7:17 and more immediately to 8:12. This keeps the final conclusion of 12:13 in our mind. Remember, like a good author, the inspired Solomon is leading us to reach his conclusion even before he spells it out plainly of us at the end of the book.

8:14-15

14 There is a vanity which occurs on earth, that there are just men to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked; again, there are wicked men to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity.

15 So I commended enjoyment, because a man has nothing better under the sun than to eat, drink, and be merry; for this will remain with him in his labor all the days of his life which God gives him under the sun.

8:14

Life is not fair. This truth will be repeated again over the next few chapters in various contexts. In this context, good government or a good legal system would punish the wicked immediately and deter them and their wickedness. However, often this does not happen. The deeds of the wicked should not be forgotten even in their deaths, but often they are forgotten in their lives. With the rise of 24-hour news, these things pass through our minds so quickly that we simply do not remember. Those who do not fear God are not living “well,” but they are not punished by the power that be. This has been a reality for over 3,000 years.

Instead, the righteous man might unjustly receive the punishment the wicked man deserved. And if that is not bad enough, the wicked man receives the good treatment the righteous should have received. This is our nineteenth vain thing: the system of justice and retribution. While God’s judgment is perfect, man’s is not (cf. Romans 2:2). We could point to many great injustices in our world over the past 100 years. Many of us know of something like this much more recently.

8:15

If you begin to dwell on what might happen to you as a righteous person, then you may become anxious. There is a better way. Fear God. Let that override everything else you do in life.

Then, he repeats the basic premise: life can be enjoyed despite all of the evil if God is a part of that life (cf. Ecclesiastes 2:24; 3:13; 5:18). Here Solomon is saying that we should enjoy life. This should be connected in our minds to being “well” (vs. 12). If you are not enjoying life, then there is a problem. While enjoying life is not the most important thing, God has given us

many blessings which we are allowed to enjoy (cf. James 17). Remember how Solomon “hated life” (Ecclesiastes 2:17)? That is not what God wants from his people. We can find joy even in all of life’s unfairness. BUT, God must be a part of your life. Otherwise, your life will be empty, vain, and void of meaning.

8:16-17

16 When I applied my heart to know wisdom and to see the business that is done on earth, even though one sees no sleep day or night,

17 then I saw all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. For though a man labors to discover it, yet he will not find it; moreover, though a wise man attempts to know it, he will not be able to find it.

8:16

This is the last time we will find the word “applied” in our New King James Versions (cf. 7:25; 8:9 and 1:13, 17 in ASV 1901). The same Hebrew word with the same idea will continue to be used (cf. 9:1 “considered”). Solomon is thinking critically about life.

In his great experiment, Solomon still saw life as a puzzle. As he is putting the pieces together and coming to his final conclusion, he realized that complete wisdom is unattainable. He worked 24 hours a day to find wisdom but failed. It was not and is not attainable. Man, alone cannot find wisdom.

Much can be gained through observation of the natural world and reasoning from this starting point, this wisdom remains focused on this world. True wisdom and knowledge come from God (cf. James 3:17). Solomon probably knows this truth (cf. Proverbs 1:1-7). However, he is coming face-to-face with the reality.

8:17

Man’s existence without God is futile, and it is feeble. The wise man may have made elaborate claims to know, but we need to be content with limited knowledge. We have to accept that we do not have all of the answers.

Therefore, even though wisdom is good, or maybe we should say “great,” it is not the purpose of life. There is a Source of wisdom. It is the pursuit of God that will ultimately bring that purpose. Wisdom is praised, but the One who gave wisdom is to be praised more highly. With this thought in mind, consider Proverbs 8. In this chapter, wisdom is personified, that is to say, given human characteristics. In that text wisdom is set as a high bar, a high standard worthy of our attention. But, notice Proverbs 8:22-23:

“The Lord possessed me at the beginning of His way, Before His works of old. I have been established from everlasting, From the beginning, before there was ever an earth.”

There is indeed One who is greater than wisdom because that One owns wisdom. Some things the wise cannot answer. They do not know the future (vs. 1), but God does. The wise do not always know the time or judgment (vs. 6), but God has an appointed time and judgment set for all. Even the wise and

powerful are limited in that power (vs. 8), but God is omnipotent. The wise do not hold the wicked accountable and are therefore inconsistent (vs. 11-13), but God always does because he is perfectly consistent. I can be “well” and enjoy life because my trust is not in wisdom or this world but in God (vs. 12, 15).

Chapter 9

9:1

1 For I considered all this in my heart, so that I could declare it all: that the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God. People know neither love nor hatred by anything they see before them.

9:1

Solomon begins with the familiar language of consideration and contemplation in his examination or experimentation of life. The purpose of this experiment becomes clearer in this verse. Not only did Solomon want to know about the meaning or purpose of life and bring about fulfillment of the missing piece inside of him, he also wanted to declare his findings. The works of the righteous should be without question, but Solomon questioned how they would be viewed.

Those words could be viewed with “love or hatred.” The treatment of various works by God might be the question of this verse. What God will decide to do to man in this life is unknown. That is how you explain one passage that indicates God will bless (i.e. Matthew 6:22ff; Mk 10:30); and others that indicate that one will not have much in this life (i.e. Lazarus in Luke 16; Romans 8:31-39). Ultimately God is the one who decides the dispersal of His gifts. God may bless some with great wealth and others will be allotted poverty in this life. We just do not know; and since we do not know, we need to trust. We need to be like Job who said, “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21). If this is the case, then the eternal weight of righteous works is not the question here (cf. Matthew 6:19-21).

However, another consideration is that the works of the righteous might be met in this life with “love or hatred.” This would connect with the human emotions and actions that follow as found a few verses later (vs. 6). If this is the case, then we know that God will ultimately bless our righteous works, but those around us may meet those works with praise or persecution. Whatever interpretation is intended, the main idea we should take away is that we must trust God.

9:2-6

2 All things come alike to all: one event happens to the righteous and the wicked; to the good, the clean, and the unclean; to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As is the good, so is the sinner; he who takes an oath as he who fears an oath.

3 This is an evil in all that is done under the sun: that one thing happens to all. Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

4 But for him who is joined to all the living there is hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion.

5 For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten.

6 Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished; nevermore will they have a share in anything done under the sun.

9:2

The first stanza of this verse is explained by the second one. This is a typical couplet where the second reveals more about the first. Let this serve as an important reminder to us as Bible students to be sure to consider couplets together. If we separate a couplet and attempt to draw conclusions based on half the verse (or less), then we are setting ourselves up to mishandle and misapply the word of God.

The truth is this: everyone must face death. All men are going to suffer the same end (cf. Hebrews 9:27-28). In this life, the righteous may suffer and die and the wicked may prosper and die. Either way, all die. Things may not be fair or equal in life, but death is equal. Death is death. As with things in this world, all have to face the realities of the world that we live in. We deal with the consequences of Adam's sin (cf. Genesis 3:16ff). God sends the rain on the just and the unjust. Our bodies require food, water, and covering. And, we all face death.

The righteous are not necessarily favorably delivered by providence or the wicked always dealt punishment in this life and brought to the grave early. Death does not discriminate. When one views death without considering God who sits above the sun, then even life can be seen as vain and hopeless.

It is good to reflect on the categories that Solomon laid out: righteous, good, clean, the one who sacrifices vs. unclean, does not sacrifice, sinner, wicked. One side seeks to please God. The other does not.

9:3

Here, he is talking about death. Death is evil. Death is the enemy of mankind (1 Corinthians 15:26, Revelation 21:4). Death is a power of the devil (Hebrews 2:14; 1 Corinthians 15:51ff). By the way, this is one of the things that makes Jesus' resurrection so powerful!

If you do evil you are not wise because you have not thought things out. You are acting like the foolish man who has not looked at the evidence. How tragic it is when one foolishly ignores God's evidences and then dies in this ignorance (cf. Psalm 14:1). Paul says they are "without excuse" (Romans 1:18-20). Some of the evil in man's heart could be corrected with punishment and warning (cf. 8:11), but man still sins and deals with the problem of sin and death (7:29; Romans 6:23).

9:4

In verse 4 we see that there is still hope while one is alive that he can make something out of his life. From the “under the sun” perspective, this hope is not of salvation but of simply finding some fulfillment in life, finding something good to cling on to. In order to demonstrate this point Solomon offers an illustration. Even though lions were exalted and dogs despised, a live dog is better than a dead lion. Which is more frightening to meet in the forest, a dead lion or living dog? Which is better to have guard your home, a dead lion or a living dog? Which is more dignified, a dead lion or living dog? From this worldly perspective, the living always has the advantage over the dead. Where there is life there is hope. Life and hope can result in betterment.

Digging a little deeper, we know that dying in Christ brings everlasting rest (Revelation 14:13). In order to die in Christ, one must be “in Christ” where all spiritual blessings are found (Ephesians 1:3). To be “in Christ,” one must be baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27). There is only one baptism whereby one can be saved (Ephesians 4:5). This is the burial in water for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; John 3:3-5; Romans 6:3-4). If we have been buried with Christ in baptism, then we have a new perspective on life and death. Someone is ready to be baptized when they recognize the need to be baptized and have a heart of faith that Jesus is Lord. If that person will confess Christ as Lord, he or she can be baptized in water for the forgiveness of sins (cf. Acts 8:35-39).

Even from this renewed perspective, life can be beneficial when it allows time to repent of sins (cf. 2 Peter 3:9) and live for Christ (cf. Philippians 1:21). Death is certainly the enemy which we must overcome, but with Christ we can! With this renewed mindset, death is gain!

9:5

The dead do not know anything that takes place with the living. There are those today who say that if you are evil you will be annihilated. Solomon is certainly not trying to discuss the theological point of what happens after death. He is merely pointing out that the dead do not know what is going on with the living here and now. They are ignorant. For a further discussion on the theological side of awareness after death, see Luke 16:19-31. There, the rich man was aware of the state of his brothers **as he left them** but not necessarily how they were presently. Death separates.

Remember when you read Ecclesiastes and 9:5 in particular that Solomon is taking an “under the sun” approach that allows him to see things from the perspective that does not keep God in mind. If I do not account for God, then this life is all that there is. This is how atheists live today.

When you are dead no one remembers you. Memory fades and is forgotten. When a good friend moves away it is like a death because you do not see each other regularly. It brings a lot of sadness because you have lost him. Psalm 31:12: “I am forgotten as a dead man.” There is a saying, “Out of sight and out of mind” that explains how we forget people.

Here is an example: my father died when I was young. I still have memories of him and think about him regularly. But, I do not think about him as

often as if I saw him every day. I do not remember everything about him or all the things we did. And, I cannot make any more memories with him or about him because he is gone from the land of the living.

The phrase “for the living” refers to the hope that is discussed in verse 4. Being alive gives advantage, and it needs to be taken while they are alive. This hope is not an eternal one but a temporal one, a hope confined to under the sun.

9:6

The ability to live this life on this earth is gone when you die. The opportunity for influencing is gone when one is dead. You may live on through your writing, but even this is not always absolute. Therefore, one has to seize life when he has the chance. Once he dies the opportunity is gone. This is universally true, but there is an even greater emphasis if you think there is no life after death.

The phrase “have a share” is the reward of verse 5. One who is dead will no longer profit from the labor which is done on earth. While having a “portion” or “share” is a good thing (cf. Ecclesiastes 2:10, 3:22), it is not the most important thing because it is gone at death. Certainly, the idea of taking advantage of today is a biblical truth - because there may be no tomorrow (Proverbs 3:27; Isaiah 55:6; 2 Corinthians 6:1-2; Hebrews 3:13; James 4:17).

Since death is coming to all and there is no life on earth (“under the sun”) after death, what should man do? Solomon answers that in the following verses. As we read these verses remember that Solomon is moving us, his audience (he is the great teacher or preacher) towards that final conclusion of 12:13.

9:7-12

7 Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has already accepted your works.

8 Let your garments always be white, and let your head lack no oil.

9 Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity; for that is your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun.

10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.

11 I returned and saw under the sun that— The race is not to the swift, Nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favor to men of skill; but time and chance happen to them all.

12 For man also does not know his time: like fish taken in a cruel net, like birds caught in a snare, so the sons of men are snared in an evil time, when it falls suddenly upon them.

9:7

The believer turns his life over to God and then can have that fulfilled life. This is the person who can enjoy life for what it offers. The believer is not

worried about acceptance. He knows he is accepted by God and can eat with a cheerful heart. Even the knowledge of death does not rob joy from life when we live with God in the picture. What a blessing!

The “go” here is an imperative verb or command. You must enjoy life! God gives man life to enjoy (cf. Jn 10:10; think about Philippians 4:4). Matthew 6:33 - If we are seeking the kingdom of God first, then God will approve of what we make second, third, fourth, and on and on. As we think about the “works” of this verse remember 8:12 that fearing God leads to “well”ness. Now, life under the sun can be enjoyed because of the One who reigns over the sun.

The description of a blessed earthly life is continued in vs. 8-10.

9:8

White garments here are not talking about purity but about clothing. Some have suggested that white clothes would bring great relief because in a hot climate white clothing makes one feel more comfortable. It would be a blessing.

White clothing would be the opposite of mourning and grief. Really, it is the opposite of sorrow that we should see in the picture here. Remember, this is a blessed life which can be enjoyed with God in mind. The idea here is to enjoy life in the comforts which God allows. This does not mean that those comforts should become idols!

9:9

We need to enjoy hard work (cf. Romans 12:11; Colossians 3:23). We also need to enjoy marriage (cf. Proverbs 5:15-23). It is one of the gifts of God that makes one better able to deal with the difficulties of life. “He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the Lord,” Proverbs 18:22. Take the words of Proverbs 5:18 and the call to “rejoice in the wife of your youth” and join that with Ecclesiastes 9:9 and the call to live joyfully with the wife of all your days. Marriage should be fully enjoyed while both young and old. Marriage is a God-designed institution (Genesis 2:24). It is a favorable thing (Proverbs 18:22) that God loves (Malachi 2:13-16). Marriage is to be held in honor by all men because it is honored by God (Hebrews 13:4).

Solomon notes that marriage requires three things. These same ideas are repeated elsewhere in the Bible as God desires healthy marriages.

1. The giving of affection (cf. Titus 2:3).
2. An active search for enjoyment (“enjoy life...”). This requires some seeking. Happiness is something pursued. It will not “just happen” without effort (cf. Proverbs 18:22)
3. A life-long commitment (cf. Romans 7:1-2).

He also notes two other points about marriage in this text:

1. Life is too brief to give up potential happiness. You can potentially enjoy life with a woman, but not if one does not work at the relationship.

2. It is God's gift. The woman has been given to you by God. Consider the Proverbs' discussions on the wife (Proverbs 5:18, 18:22, 19:13-14, and others). There is a logical conclusion: since marriage is God's gift (cf. Genesis 2:20-24), it contains inherent goodness (cf. Jas 1:17).

Marriage is given by God and was meant to be between one man and one woman for one lifetime (cf. Matthew 19:1-9).

9:10

Life that is pursued with God in mind can be enjoyed to the fullest and demands that humans give their full attention and effort to the pursuit of life. As long as something is not sin, we can pursue it with passion.

In verse 7 Solomon talked about contentment. In verse 8 about comfort and in verse 9 about companionship. All of that leads to verse 10. Contentment, comfort and joy, and companionship in the form a devoted spouse provides the perfect environment for giving maximum effort to life. If we have these then we can give a 100% effort to whatever our hand finds to do. We also have control over all of these things. If we do not have these three things then we are not able to "do it with all your might." Sheol is not a place of opportunity because Sheol is the grave, the place of death. The pursuits of life are finished at death. Whether hobby or career, life can and should be lived with passion. In the full application of this verse, we must stress that God's things come first.

Let us make sure we have full understanding: if God is to be pleased with us, we will please him (cf. Ecclesiastes 7:26). When this becomes our priority, life becomes fuller. Without God, the pleasures of life provide emptiness. With God, they bring fulfillment in life. Pursue your passions but only after you have your priorities perfect. God must be first.

9:11

Like death (vs. 2), chance also comes to every human. Life is not fair. We will see this further illustrated in the next chapter when servants ride on horses while princes walk. When we live "under the sun," we should expect some imbalance; we should expect some things which should not happen. We would expect the fastest person to win the race, the strongest man to win the battle, the wisest man to eat well, and the most understanding man to fill his pockets. However, this is not always the case.

Five accomplishments of life, but none of these is a guarantee for success. Nothing is a guarantee in life:

1. The race is not to the swift. Just because you are the fastest does not mean you will win. How many times have Olympic medals gone to the second or third best because the best had a fall, fail, or fault? It has happened many times.

2. The battle is not always to the warriors. The best fighting men may still be the ones who are killed. Goliath, the champion of the Philistines, was a far better soldier than David!
3. Neither is bread to the wise. The wise still may not have any food on the table. Wisdom does not guarantee a full stomach.
4. The wealth to the discerning. Just because a person is perceptive and makes discerning judgments is not a guarantee that he will be rich. Sometimes wealth goes to the greedy, the opportunistic, and the lucky.
5. Nor favor to men of ability. Those with the greatest ability may not be shown favor (by kings, bosses, etc.). Think about job interviews. I have heard of stories that the top application was selected and no other application was looked at - simply because it happened to be on the top of the pile!

Ecclesiastes 9:11 clearly teaches that chance is a part of life. Some see their future in the stars, but the horoscope is a lie. Some rely on the universe to reveal something to them, but the universe cannot. Some look to destiny to avoid making decisions, but the Bible does not teach that man is destined in the way the world so often uses the term. Neither God nor the ambiguous “universe” have predestined the everyday actions of my life or your life. In the Bible we see this in 1 Samuel 6:9 where the Philistines wanted to know if their calamity was a direct action of God or just a coincidence. In that case, it was God, but at a different time, it might have been time and chance. In the New Testament, Paul wonders if providence or coincidence brought Onesimus from Philemon’s house to his prison cell (Philemon 15). These are two things that can upset any human plans: time and chance.

9:12

Just as we read in 8:1 and 8:7, men do not know everything. In that way, we can be like animals. We can face evil or trouble without a notice. This could be the consequences of our choices, the consequences of another’s choices, or simple time and chance.

The seasons of life have three qualities:

1. Unpredictable - man does not know his time
2. Inescapable - like a fish in a net or a bird in a snare
3. Abrupt - it just happens, falling suddenly.

****You can recall all of the times we have seen this idea of “time” in Ecclesiastes. This idea was prevalent in chapters 3:1-11, 17; 8:5-9.****

9:13-16

*13 This wisdom I have also seen under the sun, and it seemed great to me:
14 There was a little city with few men in it; and a great king came against it, besieged it, and built great snares around it.*

15 Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that same poor man.

16 Then I said: "Wisdom is better than strength. Nevertheless, the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard."

9:13

Solomon's experiment and observation of life in pursuit of its purpose continues. We learn by observation. This is how we should learn. The preachers and teachers who have the best illustrations are the ones who glean them from what is seen, not from "illustration" books. Those often share someone else's experience and not something you know or have seen. We should be able to see something and understand its learning potential. People of all walks of life have wisdom when they are observant, they think about the world around them. Think about Jesus simple, clear, profound illustrations that took examples from everyday life and showed powerful eternal truths. He is the master teacher. Solomon was a wise teacher. If you and I want to be good teachers, we will use this power as well.

9:14

Solomon here presents an illustration of a city with two negatives: (1) It is small and (2) it has a few men to protect it. This would be easy to imagine. In ancient times, these types of cities existed. The original audience could have probably called a specific example to their minds. Even today, we can probably imagine something similar. Next, this poor city is facing what logic would say is an unbeatable foe. The enemy of this pitiful city is illustrated with two positives: (1) it was a great king who apparently had a (2) fairly large-sized army. In the symmetry of the verse, the point of the illustration is clear: the city was hopeless. Their fate was sealed.

9:15

Note that the NKJV, ASV, and NASB translates this verse in such a way as to indicate that the poor wise man did in fact deliver the city by his wisdom. An example of this is in 2 Samuel 20:22. Joab was attacking a city and a wise woman wondered why. All that Joab wanted was one man, not the wealth of the city. The fight was for nothing. This is something that could be imagined as well. While improbable, it was certainly possible. This would show the power of wisdom.

However, the footnote of the NASB suggests that the proper translation may be "might have delivered." If this is the correct translation and meaning, then the man had the potential of delivering the city, but no one thought he knew anything. So, no one asked him of his wise counsel. Think about that! Someone had the power to bring hope to the hopeless but because of the circumstance (small, poor city) and the character (poor man), no one listened to him.

Many people equate poverty with ignorance. Poverty has nothing to do with ignorance. This type of thinking is arrogance. As for the man, whether he

actually delivered the city or simply had the power to do so, no one knew his name. Life is not fair. Maybe on this occasion, the battle would not have been to the strong OR not have been at all. If so, then surely that man should have been marked and remembered. But, life is not fair.

9:16

Reading that this man's wise words "are not heard" shows that the alternative translation (it "might have delivered") could be correct. The leaders of the city did not take advantage of the wise man. How sad this would have been!

Think of the applications. People today, then, ought to learn that wisdom can be found in all types of people in all walks of life. One would be foolish to assume that a poor man is without wisdom. Wisdom can be found in nature (like ants - Proverbs 6:6ff). Wisdom can even be seen in young children. A wise man will take wise counsel no matter the source.

"Wisdom is better than strength" is a point illustrate with the common English proverb: "work smarter not harder." In this case though, the city could not work "hard enough" but could have (or was!) been delivered by wisdom. You might mark two passages in your notes:

Ecclesiastes 7:19: "Wisdom strengthens the wise more than ten rulers of the city."

Ecclesiastes 10:10: "If the ax is dull, and one does not sharpen the edge, then he must use more strength; but wisdom brings success."

9:17-18

17 Words of the wise, spoken quietly, should be heard rather than the shout of a ruler of fools.

18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war; but one sinner destroys much good."

9:17

The thought from vs. 15-16 is continued. No one heeded or no one remembered the wise man. Either way, this should not have been done. Even if his words were quiet, they were wise. Even if the rulers of that small, poor city were loud (like a roaring lion or raging bear), they were foolish. Wisdom then is not dictated by volume. A good ruler would have known this truth (cf. Proverbs 25:15).

When a person replies in a quiet and calm way it indicates wisdom. The ruler who wants to be heard shouts. This is wrong. Quietness implies confidence and assurance and is more likely to be heard than the loudmouth chattering of a ruler among fools (cf. Proverbs 15:1-2).

9:18

If this goes back to vs. 15-16 then we can see the rest of the story unfold: the loud fools who ruled the city brought about its destruction by trying to match the stronger army with weapons of war and they failed. They should have heeded quiet wisdom from an unexpected source.

Oh, that wisdom would have prevailed!

“Like a roaring lion and a charging bear Is a wicked ruler over poor people. A ruler who lacks understanding is a great oppressor, but he who hates covetousness will prolong his days.” Proverbs 28:15-16

Ecclesiastes 9:17-18 can stand on their own proverbially or connect directly to the preceding verses. The teaching remains the same. Wisdom is powerful but often not powerful enough to counteract the influence of a sinner. Satan will use the sinful lives and practices of people in order to enhance his work and bring about destruction. Whereas wisdom can neutralize the powerful weapons of war, one sinner can undo whatever good might be accomplished. Wisdom saves but foolishness destroys.

The phrase “words of the wise” will connect directly to 10:12 where wisdom and folly are contrasted in a different context. This topic is dealt with in greater detail and depth in Proverbs. In the context of chapter 9, notice that time and chance can ruin the best laid plans (vs. 11) and that one sinner can snatch defeat from the jaws of victory (vs. 18). The idiom “to snatch...from the jaws of...” indicates a sure thing that has become unsure - that has been completely reversed. When we put these two ideas together, we see that life is fragile and complex. This truth will be traced out further in chapter 10.

When faced with providence or coincidence, opportunities or obstacles, we should have the faith of Joseph, of Ruth, of Esther that we will remain faithful to God trusting in his sovereignty over this world.

Chapter 10

10:1-4

1 Dead flies putrefy the perfumer's ointment, And cause it to give off a foul odor; So does a little folly to one respected for wisdom and honor.

2 A wise man's heart is at his right hand, but a fool's heart at his left.

3 Even when a fool walks along the way, he lacks wisdom, and he shows everyone that he is a fool.

4 If the spirit of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your post; for conciliation pacifies great offenses.

10:1

Just like one sinner can ruin a city (9:18), the idea here is that one mistake causes wisdom to disappear, causes perfume to stink. The “perfumer” is one who mixes together spices or ointments. With the idea of spices, comes the ruin of a great compound of precious spices, that which smells delicious and gives vibrant flavor to food. However, with ointments, comes the ruin of perfume, that which is meant to make the person smell good. The meaning is clear: a little folly can devalue much wisdom and honor. Just as one sin can destroy a lifetime of good. People often remember the foolish mistakes people have made rather than remember the many good (and wise) things that have been done. In this life we can suffer from those foolish choices that we make, but we can also suffer from the foolishness of others. This serves as a

personal warning to be wise and to be on the lookout for foolishness to avoid. "He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will be destroyed," Proverbs 13:20.

10:2

In verse 2, wisdom and folly are once again directly linked to the heart. Historically and symbolically, the right hand is a place of power and honor (cf. Exodus 15:6; 1 Kings 2:19; Psalm 16:8; Isaiah 48:13; Matthew 22:44; Romans 8:34; Revelation 5:7; and others). For most people, the right hand is their strong hand, thus the connection to power and honor. The left hand would then be less honorable. Within some cultures this is more clear and still in use today. The heart of a wise man keeps him on the right path (cf. Proverbs 4:23) while the foolish does the opposite.

The Heart: A Study in Ecclesiastes

Remember that in the Old Testament (and in the New Testament) the "heart" does not refer to the muscle in the chest that pumps blood.

1. Is used to seek and search (1:3; et al)
2. Can commune and speak from (1:16; 2:1)
3. Has knowledge in it (2:3; 9:1)
4. Has eternity set in it (3:11)
5. Yet it is still evil (8:11; 9:3)
6. Can be defective (10:2)
7. With God it can be occupied with joy (5:10)
8. With God it finds happiness in sorrow (7:3)
9. It can be wise (8:5)
10. Can be happy and satisfied (11:9)
11. Can be vexed or full of sadness or trouble (2:20; 11:10).

When the fool's heart directs him toward the left, his heart is the source of his folly. The left would be the place where the folly and dishonor occurs. And, the wise man would follow his heart because it has been guided by the wisdom from God. In the Bible, the heart is not the muscle in the chest, but it is the seat of man's thought, intellect, reasoning, and emotion.

10:3

Verse 3 continues the thought of verse 2 and extends it. A fool's foolishness is evident in his actions just as the wise man's wisdom is evident in his actions. The fool cannot hide himself. His deficiencies are obvious to all. His words and actions betray him. He is so bad that when he walks down the road everyone knows he is a fool. Just watch him and his dress. Speech or some other action will give him away as the fool. Even a child is known by his doings. Time reveals truth, and with time, the fool will demonstrate his folly. Once again, this serves as a warning as we examine ourselves (cf. 2 Corinthians 13:5) and as we examine our companions (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:33).

The Fool

A Study in Ecclesiastes

1. Is morally blind (2:14)
2. Is lazy (4:5)
3. He may rise to high positions (4:13, 10:6)
4. Worships foolishly (5:1)
5. Is talkative but without substance (5:3)
6. Is disapproved of by God (5:4)
7. Loves rowdy songs (7:5)
8. Is noisy and shallow (7:6)
9. Is easily angry (7:9)
10. Is more likely to die early (7:17)
11. Is associated with the wicked (7:17, 8:12)
12. Is unreceptive to advice (9:17)
13. Allows his heart to lead to evil (10:2)
14. Lacks common sense (10:3)
15. Is hypocritical (10:12-14)
16. Cannot perform the simplest of tasks (10:15).

This succinct study of the fool could be supplemented greatly by viewing the Proverbs of Solomon about fools and their folly. Needless to say, the fool, biblically speaking, cannot please God in part because he does not fear God (cf. Ecclesiastes 8:13-14).

10:4

The anger of a king (or anyone for that matter) can be calmed by having a cool attitude. This works with the most powerful people. It is easier to be clam when you are “well” and pleasing to God. Be calm to someone of importance, and it will be to your benefit. When he sees your calm demeanor, he gives you a chance to explain your position. He will assume by your remaining calm you are right (cf. Judges 8:3). By your remaining calm he will assume that your position is well thought out and rational. This seems to be one of the qualities found in Nehemiah and Daniel as they served pagan kings. Remember the proverb, “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, but the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness,” Proverbs 15:1-2.

10:5-7

*5 There is an evil I have seen under the sun, as an error proceeding from the ruler:
6 Folly is set in great dignity, while the rich sit in a lowly place.
7 I have seen servants on horses, while princes walk on the ground like servants.*

10:5

People make mistakes. No one is perfect. Everyone sins and falls short of God’s glory. One of the evils of life is the folly of human judgment. People in

power like rulers or kings or governors can illustrate this truth disproportionately. When they make errors of judgment, more people feel the consequences. This is a reality of life. Life is unfair. Those men should not be ruling. Their rule should be better, but it is not. Sometimes men are poor at character evaluations. As a result, one can appoint a fool to a place of authority and ignore those who should rule. The fact that this error is under the sun demonstrates its universal practice and not necessarily that it is God's plan or purpose for such people to rule. God would have them rule with wisdom.

10:6

Continuing the thought from verse 5, Solomon notes that one possible "error proceeding from the throne" of human rule is the choosing the wrong people for the job at hand. Rulers have the ability to delegate authority and should choose to do so wisely. This is not the case. It may happen that a friend or family member or well-connected person receives the assignment instead. Sometimes men with resources do not have opportunity to use those resources. While this out of the ordinary, it is easy to call such a time to mind or at least to imagine the scenarios where this could happen. Folly should not be set in a dignified place, but sometimes it is. People who have so much to offer like time or treasure or talent are placed in a position that does not allow them to have a great effect on others. Here, the rich are not those who are oppressive, but rather those who could offer more to society around them.

When we begin to apply this beyond civil government, we can see riches as that of more than just material resources. Unfortunately, this is sometimes true of the church. Those who should not be in leadership roles still occupy them. Sometimes our best people are unused. It is good to examine our congregations to make sure we are not guilty of either of these errors.

10:7

Continuing the thought from the previous two verses, notice how this reality plays out in one example: sometimes slaves ride on the horses while princes walk like slaves. This is the illustration of the previous verse. This is not what would naturally or regularly happen, but it did happen. It is once again easy to imagine a scenario in our day and time and place where something like this could play out. Life is not fair.

As we think about today and applications beyond the princes and prime minister, maybe our best people in the local congregation are the ones sitting in the pews and the others who are least talented are the ones doing everything. This is called an evil. In Ecclesiastes 10:7, the princes (i.e. the best of the land) are struggling to survive while the lowest (the slaves) are enjoying the best life has to offer in places of comfort and privilege.

This is yet another illustration that life is not fair. Sometimes the consequences are not a result of the exact action or expectation. The wise man recognizes it but does not embrace it. This is just life. When we have the opportunity to correct these practices, we should. If we are consistent like God,

we will do our best to remedy this in the church, in the community, in the business, and even in the family.

The following verses will show that there are consequences to our actions. Those consequences may not be fair or expected, but they do happen. This is another reason why life under the sun is vain and the One who sits above the sun is sovereign and worthy of our full trust.

10:8-11

8 He who digs a pit will fall into it, and whoever breaks through a wall will be bitten by a serpent.

9 He who quarries stones may be hurt by them, and he who splits wood may be endangered by it.

10 If the ax is dull, and one does not sharpen the edge, then he must use more strength; But wisdom brings success.

11 A serpent may bite when it is not charmed; the babbler is no different.

10:8

“If he had never dug the pit, he would have never fallen into it.” While that is true, Solomon is not teaching that we should never dig pits. Pits are useful in many scenarios. We may need to dig down to build a foundation for a house or storage room or something. Bold endeavors are sometimes disastrous.

Perhaps, the man who dug the pit had malicious intentions. Something similar is seen in Jeremiah 18:18-22. If this is the case, we may think that this man rightfully got what he deserved. But, that does not seem to be the emphasis of this section.

Perhaps he did not plan well for possible trouble or was too over-zealous in the task. When you are taking on a job you need to think out all of the pitfalls that can happen. Haman (Esth 7:9ff) was zealous to build gallows for Mordecai but he, himself, was hanged on it.

Or, perhaps he planned well and was perfectly zealous in the task, but time and chance happened to him. Accidents happen. Mistakes happen. While good forethought can mitigate some of that, life does happen and consequences can come. The wise man recognizes this as well.

10:9

While we may not see the direct usefulness of pit-digging, it is easy to see that quarrying stone is a useful job. Stones need to be dug, cut, formed, and fashioned for walls and homes and towers. This is a physically demanding task, but it is a simple task. Even seemingly simple tasks ought to be approached with caution. One point of application that has been observed is that one needs to be careful no matter how often the task has been done. When we consider the context, it is easy to see that these were unintended consequences of the action. Even the safest job site can have accidents. The wise man will work to mitigate this truth, but he will also accept it.

10:10

The wise man prepares his tools which enables him to be more efficient in his task. There are some very broad and general applications to this passage that can help us today. Do not go to the job without having the tools ready. Take the time. The wise man sharpens his tools and thus is more efficient. This sets a precedence for the future as well.

The reality that a dull axe creates more work illustrates the truth of consequences to our actions. Likewise, the sharp axe also shows the consequences of positive or useful actions. The English proverb should be considered again: work smarter not harder. In reality, wisdom makes life better and, at least in some ways, easier. Folly is the exact opposite. Folly makes life worse and more difficult (cf. Proverbs 13:15). The NKJV concludes with “wisdom brings success.” Notice how the ASV and KJV translate this phrase: “wisdom is profitable to direct.” This truth that is seen in the task of pit digging, stone hewing, and iron work is true in every corner of life.

10:11

Carrying the thought of vs. 7-9, we would not expect the consequence that Solomon describes. We expect the serpent to be charmed by the charmer, but instead it bites.

Maybe he has skill, but he is a little slow in playing the music that will charm the snake. Maybe his slowness nullifies the skill that existed. Then, the truth that laziness will ruin skill can be seen. You may have a skill, but if you procrastinate it will eventually vanish.

Maybe, there was distraction or something else outside the control of the charmer. The Bible’s ambiguity of the exact circumstances allows us to see its general truth **and** to notice the far-reaching applications. The charmer, the stone worker, and the pit digger all received unintended consequences. Life is not fair. Work can be done to avoid some “falling into the pit,” but time and chance still happen to all.

As we step back, we once again remember the final conclusion (Ecclesiastes 12:13) that without God life is meaningless. This is well-illustrated in the truth of unintended consequences. However, God will always judge righteously; He will always do right.

10:12-15

12 The words of a wise man’s mouth are gracious, but the lips of a fool shall swallow him up;

13 The words of his mouth begin with foolishness, and the end of his talk is raving madness.

14 A fool also multiplies words. No man knows what is to be; who can tell him what will be after him?

15 The labor of fools wearies them, for they do not even know how to go to the city!

10:12

The wise man and his words are gracious (cf. Psalm 37:30; Colossians 4:6). They reflect the favor of wisdom. They have a recognizable elegance but not an extravagance. Because of this, they are easier to accept. The words of the wise exhort others.

But the words of the fool destroy him. The fool's lips consume him in four areas:

1. His reputation (Eccl 10:3),
2. His character (Jas 3:6),
3. His impact for good (Ephesians 4:29) and
4. They ultimately consume the man himself (Mt 12:36ff).

The contrast could not be more clear: wise build while fools destroy.

10:13

The Bible asks us to consider the very first words out of someone's mouth. In this case, we can see that a fool who begins to speak reveals his folly from the first breath. Then, we are called to think about the end of the conversation. Here there is more folly. It might be that we would expect the fool to reveal himself in the middle or meat of the conversation instead of in the opening or closing. But, the image is vivid: the fool can reveal his folly in **all his words**.

The fool's talking begins with senseless, illogical talk and ends with madness, wickedness, and irrational action. Since foolishness begins in the heart, the seat of thought and intellect, this reality does not surprise us. Consider the New Testament illustration of this escalation as found in Matthew 5:21-26. The heart problem under consideration in that text is anger. Anger eventually leads to murder. Anger is senseless and illogical, and it ends with wickedness. Yet the fool practices it. It is possible to be angry and sin not, but anger allows the devil to wait at the door.

The tongue is a main topic in all of the Wisdom Books (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and, to a degree, Song of Solomon). Sooner or later one's character will be seen by his words. This is the test of whether one is wise or foolish. This thought continues in the next verse.

10:14

This verse breaks into three parts. First, the fool's words which are too many. Second, the reality that no one knows the future (in the United States we joke about the weather man who predicts the rain or sun). Third, the reality that once something has passed a fool will not listen to the facts.

The fool is arrogant and multiplies his words, but he does not know what is happening now or in the future. No one knows the future. The unfortunate thing about the fool is that he **thinks** he knows the future. So much so in fact, that when reality contradicts his preconceptions, prejudices, or predictions, he will not listen... "who can tell him...?"

10:15

Solomon continues to rail against the fool. He does not have a good work ethic. He does not bring his experience to the table because either he has no experience, or he has rejected the wisdom he could have had. The fool and the lazy man are Biblically linked (Proverbs 12:23-27).

Verse 15 goes a step further about the fool's ignorance and/or laziness, "...does not even know how to go in to a city..." Most consider this extremely simple. You just walk through the gate! We might imagine one who cannot figure out where the city is nor how to enter in, but all he would have to do is look around or ask around.

The section has deepened the discourse on foolishness. Fools make life harder for themselves and for others around them. Even the simplest task the fool cannot handle. The next section highlights the contrasts between the wise and foolish. Certainly, God would have us be numbered among the wise!

10:16-20

16 Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, and your princes feast in the morning!

17 Blessed are you, O land, when your king is the son of nobles, and your princes feast at the proper time— For strength and not for drunkenness!

18 Because of laziness the building decays, and through idleness of hands the house leaks.

19 A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes merry; but money answers everything.

20 Do not curse the king, even in your thought; do not curse the rich, even in your bedroom; for a bird of the air may carry your voice, and a bird in flight may tell the matter.

10:16

"Woe to you" would be the opening of a pronouncement of doom or of mourning like a funeral. The term "child" reflects not age but maturity. With an immature ruler comes folly and madness. Wisdom and good sense when lacking in leadership spells certain doom. Not just for the leader, but for the land, that is those who are under the rule of the leaders.

Here, in folly, the leaders "feast in the morning." The partying ought to be done after the day's work. The time to relax is after the work has been done, not before. The immature and lazy want to eat now and work later.

One of my favorite replies of Scripture echo this sentiment:

"So, the king of Israel answered and said, "Tell him, 'Let not the one who puts on his armor boast like the one who takes it off,'" 1 Kings 20:11. Boasting, like feasting, should be done after the battle, after the work, not before.

10:17

What a contrast good, mature leadership brings! Notice the contrast: "woe" (vs. 16) vs. "blessed" (vs 17). Solomon has emphasized personal enjoyment or a time of feasting before (9:7-10), but it has its place. The leaders should not feast or celebrate prematurely. This would reflect

immaturity. There has to be moderation and self-control. There must be an awareness of the proper time (cf. Ecclesiastes 3).

The immature leader gives his strength to eating and drinking to absurd fullness or overflowing. The mature leaders will feast at the appropriate time and use the energy for their continued work. The contrast of woe vs. blessing is seen as a direct result of the contrast between wise and foolish rulers.

10:18

The fool is still under consideration. It seems that Solomon extends the thought beyond rulers to the foolish (and later to feasting) in general or in a broader sense. The laziness of a fool may not immediately show itself. It is seen in the more subtle, but it will eventually break down. With time you will see that the job is not done or not well done. For example, you may have a fool repair or replace your roof. Upon completion, you may look at a roof and say that is in good repair, but the rain will show whether the work is well-done.

If we follow this example, we might see that the fool will do something even more stupid. He will look at the roof when it rains and say, "I cannot fix it now because it is raining." Then when it is not raining, he will say, "The roof does not need to be fixed!" This is why through idle hands shoddy work is revealed. The house leaks.

This is a reality beyond house repairs. This is true of marriages, raising children, church work, and every aspect of our lives. This is the opposite of the "do it with all of your might" attitude (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

10:19

Commentators differ on the place of vs. 19. If this is to be taken at face value, then Solomon is saying that feasting (when appropriate and with God in mind), should be enjoyed. This thought has been seen before (cf. 9:7ff). This would not be out of context as it would reflect the bliss or blessedness that comes from working and then enjoying the fruit of labors. If this verse is to be taken thusly, notice that money, which has been shown to be temporary (5:10), is now seen as a practical necessity. Money is the means through which affairs are conducted. If taken this way, then money should not be seen as the pursuit of life as this would contradict what Solomon taught in chapter 5 and the Bible teaches throughout (cf. 1 Timothy 6:9-10).

However, others see This verse "the fool's theme song." The fool has three main areas of interest:

1. Food - solely for my personal enjoyment,
2. Wine - so I can get drunk and make my life merry, and
3. Money is the answer to everything. Now, money can be good if it is used wisely. But this philosophy is the shallow reasoning of the fool.

This interpretation could be possible as well as it describes the fool in this context with teachings that are found throughout Scripture.

Remember that our interpretation of this passage and any passage must remain true to the context, it cannot contradict itself, nor can it contradict any

other passage of Scripture. Truth does not contradict. Maybe we could view this passage that troubles commentators through a New Testament truth:

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness! No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon,”
Matthew 6:19-24.

10:20

The final verse of chapter 10 gives practical advice to conclude a section that has dealt with unintended consequences, mitigation of pitfalls, wisdom, folly, riches, and rulers. Do not wish evil on those in power. They have power. The wise or unwise ruler may judge you. You may receive stiff penalties for such words. You should mitigate that negative outcome by not speaking out in this way.

Interestingly, in English we might say, “a little bird told me...” as a way of saying we heard something. These “birds” have a way of carrying information to places that you did not intend for it to go. The wise will not allow any “birds” to hear them because they push even the thought of evil speech about those in power out of their minds. This is practical advice about words. The wise man is cautious about what he says at any time at any place. Even those places we feel are secret or protected, may not be. For the Christian, we know that God sees all and knows all anyway. Because of this, we do not want to speak idle or careless words.

As we open Ecclesiastes chapter 11, there is a significant movement toward the final conclusion (12:13). The first six verses will serve to conclude the section “refining and testing the hypothesis” while the remainder of the chapter through 12:8 will lead directly to the final conclusion.

Chapter 11

11:1-2

1 Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days.

2 Give a serving to seven, and also to eight, for you do not know what evil will be on the earth.

11:1

The proverbial statements of chapter 11 will work to bring the audience to the final conclusion. While vs. 1 can have many applications in investing, commerce, and agriculture, it shows that, in the midst of not knowing the

future, the wise man does not sit idly by and wait for life. If we take this verse in view of the coming conclusion, then it might best be seen as taking decisive yet obedient action. This is certainly an application. Others have seen an application in generosity as the wise will befriend and bless many around them. This is consistent with Scripture as well. Luke 6:38 says, “38 Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.”

The wise know that life is not fair and sometimes there are unintended negative outcomes, but he still acts. This action knows (and ultimately recognizes) that God is sovereign. Generosity will usually be met in kind as will good investments and such. Furthermore, God sees these actions and blesses the wise either here and now and/or eternally (cf. 12:14)

11:2

When vs. 1 is taken alongside vs. 2, then the idea of generosity may be more clearly seen. Still others connect these verses with good business practices. While many commentators see distinct proverbs in these two verses, let me suggest that we allow vs. 2 to shine back and give clarity to vs. 1. If this speaks to good business, then that is advice worth considering. However, to see these verses in light of being generous to others is a contextual interpretation and fits readily with Biblical truth. God’s people should be liberal givers. Notice the similarities between Ecclesiastes 11:1-2 and what Paul told the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 9:6-11:

“But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. As it is written: “He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever.”

Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God.”

It is worthwhile to share. Be generous. Do not hoard, but share with others. If God has richly blessed you, divide your portions with many. It is worth it.

11:3-6

3 If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth; and if a tree falls to the south or the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it shall lie.

4 He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap.

5 As you do not know what is the way of the wind, or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, so you do not know the works of God who makes everything.

6 In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening do not withhold your hand; for you do not know which will prosper, either this or that, or whether both alike will be good.

Interpretations of this section vary widely among Bible students. We will seek to understand these passages in light of their context and the book of Ecclesiastes as a whole.

11:3

Life is going to happen; that is certain. The world “keeps spinning” (cf. Genesis 8:22). There is a reality described here, and the point is that some actions have permanent consequences. No one has control over where the rain is going to fall. If a tree falls, it falls. Where it lies, it lies. Life is going to happen, but life is uncertain. I do not know where the rain will fall, but that does not keep me from sowing or reaping. I do not know where or when a tree may fall, but that does not keep me from going down the road. This principle leads to verse 4.

11:4

Those who try to anticipate everything will wind up doing nothing. The wise know that life is going to happen, and they still live it. Do not procrastinate. Do not make excuses. Do not be lazy. Do not look for “life” to be a reason that you do not live the life that God has blessed you with. We need to do the work and trust God that it will work out. How many times have we said, “I will work on it tomorrow!” We need to take advantage of every opportunity of time.

Consider the farmer, he needs to plant. If he waits for absolute perfect conditions, then he will never plant. Consider the traveler, he needs to go. If he waits for the perfect road without possible hinderance or hazard, he will never go. Be wise, but plant in faith. Be wise, but go in faith. Trust God! Do not look for excuses!

11:5

Just as humanity’s uncertainty and life’s unpredictability have been clearly displayed, so too has God’s sovereignty. Certain aspects of God’s work defy explanation. We simply do not understand everything God does. Humanity studies the wind, yet many things about it remain unknown and beyond our control. Humanity studies the baby in the womb, yet we still do not fully understand it. And we certainly cannot replicate it!

Ecclesiastes has shown us that the life of faith does not get rid of ignorance. It allows us to accept it though and have faith in God. It will work out. Just because we do not know how the bones are formed does not mean that we cannot trust that they will form. From this verse, work backward and

forward: instead of worrying about the rain or the wind or the trees, we plant. "What ifs" can keep us from doing. Uncertainty can keep us from acting. **But** life is uncertain. It is full of "what ifs." It is unfair. But, there is one who sits above the sun who knows it all and calls on mankind to trust him.

As we think about application of this principle, we must be careful. It does not mean that we sin if we try to find some answers or understanding to life, but we also need faith. The fool can plant at the wrong time (ignorance) or not plant (laziness). The wise will seek to find the best time and "just do it" as this is in God's plan for the working of the world. The final result is that we will not know everything. It does not all have to be explained logically. With faith we are able to accept some things.

11:6

Verse 6 brings some of these thoughts together. Since you do not know the course of the future then you should just give your best effort. Do not wait until tomorrow to do what you can do today. Give the best effort now. Do the work without looking for excuses. Know that life is unfair, but it should still be lived and enjoyed.

This concludes Solomon's grand experiment. Like any good scientist or philosopher or observer, he must now draw some conclusions. Through the first six verses of this chapter, uncertainty has ruled. We do not know. Solomon wanted to know, but he did not know. He could not know everything. We cannot know everything. We do not have to know everything. We do need to know everything. That is okay because God is in control. As this comes clearly into the focus of the audience, Solomon transitions to help see the place and purpose of man in God's creation. With this comes some conclusions (cf. 11:9 and 12:1) that his audience, the youth of his day and time, should draw. As these conclusions come more clearly into view, they lead us to the "end of the matter" which Solomon will clearly state.

11:7-8

*7 Truly the light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun;
8 But if a man lives many years and rejoices in them all, yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. All that is coming is vanity.*

11:7

Life under the sun may be vanity (without God), but that does not take away from the splendor that is life...from the splendor that is the sun. God, from creation, identified the light as good (Genesis 1:4). He created the sun to rule the day (Genesis 1:14-18). He is the one who gave the sun its place (Psalm 19:4-6).

Being able to look at the sun is a gift that only the living possesses (cf. Ecclesiastes 7:11). Some have carried out the thought further by noting that light ought to provide a pleasant attitude because it affords one opportunity. Success is often dependent upon being optimistic. This is the "glad to be alive" attitude.

11:8

A popular saying was coined a few years ago: “YOLO.” This saying stood for “you only live once.” There is some truth to that. We only get one life under the sun. It is not meant to torment the sons of men. It is meant to be lived with God in view (cf. 11:9-12:1 which is coming in our context), **and** it is meant to be enjoyed. It is essential that we enjoy life. We are not going to be able to do it in retrospect. When we look back at what we should have done it makes us miserable. This is not dealing with the afterlife! This is speaking of life under the sun; it is earthly life.

See how Solomon has led us to this conclusion that life is to be rejoiced in:

1. Enjoy the good of life (2:24)
2. Rejoice in life (3:12)
3. Rejoice in work (3:22)
4. Rejoice in the rewards of labor (5:19).

While joy and labor and wealth and pleasure are not the meaning of life nor should they be among its greatest pursuits, there is joy to be had when life is lived properly. This is a far distance from “I hated life...” (Ecclesiastes 2:17-18). Now, we are seeing life under the sun more clearly because we are viewing it with God in mind.

11:9-10

9 Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes; but know that for all these God will bring you into judgment.

10 Therefore remove sorrow from your heart, and put away evil from your flesh, for childhood and youth are vanity.

11:9

While life should be enjoyed, this joy can, with the proper perspective and pursuit (12:1, 13) should be enjoyed from youth! This is consistent for Solomon to exhort joy in youth as he did so in marriage as well (Proverbs 5:18). When the heart is set at the right hand, when it is walking in wisdom as guided by God, faithfulness can be achieved and blessing received.

The word “know” (or understand or grasp) is in the imperative. Enjoy life but remember that if you do some evil things, God will make you pay for it. Joy and pleasure are to be controlled in light of God’s judgment. This warning prepares for the recap of the truth of judgment in 12:14. Once this is done and you have put God’s fences around your activities, then go ahead and enjoy them. Never choose a lifestyle that will be a stumbling block to obedience!

11:10

When this is done, sorrow can be replaced with joy. There is no need to live like Solomon did with doubt and sorrow because there is no need to reject God! God does not want people to live in sadness, trouble, or worry. These

things destroy life. It takes the joy out of living. It is anti-Christian (1 Peter 5:7; Philippians 4:4-6; Matthew 6:30ff). The world today is full of these sorrows. Counseling and medicine have a place, but the proper view of and obedience to God is the ultimate cure for every spiritual malady.

If you have an opportunity to get rid of pain, then do it. Suffering in and of itself does not make one more spiritual. It is more difficult to enjoy life when you are in pain. Religious groups that deny medicine or other types of medical treatment need to consider this verse. Solomon would think their philosophy of suffering, when they can go to a doctor, is foolish. Eat right, live right, enjoy some of the benefits of modern medicine and knowledge and technology and eliminate some pain.

Again, the point is that God wants man to enjoy living. He wants man to seize every opportunity to enjoy life, especially since life is so short. But, as we will see in the next verse across the chapter break, life can only be truly and thoroughly enjoyed when God is kept in memory and his will in mind.

Chapter 12

12:1-7

1 Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, "I have no pleasure in them":

2 While the sun and the light, the moon and the stars, are not darkened, and the clouds do not return after the rain;

3 In the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men bow down; when the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look through the windows grow dim;

4 When the doors are shut in the streets, and the sound of grinding is low; when one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of music are brought low.

5 Also they are afraid of height, and of terrors in the way; when the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper is a burden, and desire fails. For man goes to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets.

6 Remember your Creator before the silver cord is loosed, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the well.

7 Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.

12:1

Notice the connection between 11:9-10 and 12:1. Remember that chapters and verses are not inspired. It is good to read across the chapter break. This verse continues talking about enjoying youth. Not a worldly, fleeting, futile joy. No, no. This is a true joy that can be enjoyed here and forever. Remember the Creator. Remember Him before He comes, and judgment comes. Remember Him before the bad days of old age come. We should be thinking about Him **now**. Without God we cannot enjoy life like God intended us to. To bring that reality into full view, Solomon discusses how old age will perpetuate that neglect.

“I have no pleasure in them” is possibly reflective of a life in age lived without God in mind. Or, more likely, it is a simple acknowledgement that old age brings more physical troubles (cf. Corinthians 4:16-18). These days are difficult. In the U.S. you might hear an older person say, “growing old is not for sissies.” This means it is harder than youth. As Solomon will poetically describe in the following verses, this physical body was not created to inhabit an eternal material existence. It was made to decay. Adam and Eve had the tree of life to keep that decay from happening. After sin, they (and we) had no access. Thus, the breaking down of our physical body is a reality.

In this text though, it is more than just a reality. This is meant to be a motivation. If we are correct in our timing of the book, then Solomon is past the splendor of his physical state. He is aging. He is going the way of all the earth. As he discusses these things, we might note that his body would be experiencing them! This is what happens in life. So, unlike Solomon, do not hesitate, do not wait to serve God. Serve him now! And, serve him always!

12:2

This is emphasizing the problems of old age. The spring of life is passing away. The take away principle should be clear: take advantage of the joys of living while you can. Some see here that these all represent the capacity of joy, and they all fade away. But, I believe this misses the more pertinent picture of the detailed description of aging. What happens as we get older? Our eyes begin to fail. Think about how the elderly need more light when they read, and how vision becomes worse and worse. It becomes more difficult to read. There is difficulty seeing at night. While this section could be all representative of fading life, it seems more specific.

12:3

Some have seen the “keepers of the house” could be figurative, but I encourage you to see them as the legs which keep the “house” (i.e. the body) upright. The legs begin to wobble. Standing, sitting, and strolling are all more difficult. The strong are no longer strong, but are bent over. Their posture fails as they begin to hunch in their backs. They are no longer physical specimens of strength they once were.

The grinding stones stand idle because they are no people with power to turn them. Let me suggest that this is a picture of the old man’s teeth which are no longer able to chew his food. At this point in life, he may not even have many teeth left! The “grinders” (i.e. the teeth) are few. Notice how all of these correlate to the body.

Those that “look through windows” (i.e. the eyes) have darkened like vs. 2. The eyesight has dimmed; it has diminished.

12:4

With eyes and teeth considered, Solomon turns to the ears. Hearing is a funny thing as we get older. In some ways, it seems like there are “doors shut” which do not allow us to hear clearly. Instead, there is a muffled or covered

sound. Those grinders, we might imagine modern-day construction noises, are no longer as loud as they once were. Music needs to be “turned up” which is a modern convenience. In Solomon’s day, it was simply “brought low.”

Yet, in the midst of diminished hearing, the most subtle sound, like the song of a bird, interrupts your sleep. For many, age brings difficulty sleeping. Frequent trips to the toilet or thoughts or noises can all distract from this simple task.

12:5

The discussion of old age continues in vs. 5 as he notes that the elderly fear heights which they once did not fear. Climbing on a chair or a ladder or a simple step brings new difficulty. This is the reality of aging.

With shaking knees, dimmed eyes, and muffled ears, the aged have “terrors” (i.e. new fears) as they journey. They are no longer in the strength and vitality of youth.

The “blossoms” of the almond tree have been suggested to be descriptive of the hair on someone’s head as they age. This hair, if there is any left, becomes grey. Moreover, the smallest things, like a grasshopper or small bug, becomes heavy. The smallest of weights has become an unbearable burden. When Solomon mentions that in old age “desire fails,” he could be describing any earthly desire, but there seems to be a direct reference to sexual desire (cf. Proverbs 5:18-19).

In all of this, he is talking about old age. The preacher is really drawing his conclusion. Now is the time to take advantage of life, because the time will come when it will be too late!

Verse 5 concludes with a reminder that man’s “everlasting home” is not on this earth. This will be expanded in the following verses. When man dies, the mourners go to the street. This is the way of mankind. After the aging process comes the dying process. The end is death. This is clear in Scripture: death reigns.

12:6

While the imagery here is debated, the picture that Solomon draws is clear: death is the end of life under the sun. First, we might imagine that Solomon asks us to look in the elegant dining room and see the golden bowl and silver chain. The silver chain and golden bowl, in all their beauty and ornamentation, have snapped and broken into pieces. Possibly, they once seemed unbreakable, but now they are broken. Next, Solomon illustrates the same point by taking his audience to a water source. The pitcher that was taken to the fountain is now shattered. The wheel which would allow the bucket or pitcher to be let down and drawn up from the water well has broken. Whether wheel or pitcher, there is now no water, a symbol of death.

Death is the ultimate outcome of life under the sun (cf. 1 Kings 2:2), but death is not the most important part of this verse. It is a reality, but it is not the focus. Death can be accepted and even, eventually, embraced when someone lives with the knowledge of God. When Solomon by the Holy Spirit wrote

“Remember your Creator” it echoed and end-capped vs. 1, “Remember now your Creator.” Just like “in the days of your youth” (vs 1), the idea of “before” (vs. 6) death or the aging process is certainly clear. The reality of death follows in the next verse.

12:7

Death is the end of the body, but this verse points to an eternal existence! Physical deterioration is returning to dust. Physical bones may be healthy, but they will grow old (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:16 - 5:4). We now have the capacity to turn to God and do what is right. We have our bodies and our minds to search for God in the fullest. We will one day reach the point when we will be dull and old. We may not have the capacity to turn to God then. It is “in the days” of youth and “before” getting old that man has the option to turn to God and do what is right. After death, it is too late.

This passage points to a second reality: man’s spirit will return to God. Ultimately, God is sovereign over man’s eternal soul (Ezekiel 18:4). Do you remember reading, “Who knows the spirit of the sons of men, which goes upward, and the spirit of the animal, which goes down to the earth?” back in Ecclesiastes 3:21? Solomon through observation and wisdom (and a reliance on revealed truth that he knew up to that point in time) was able to declare an answer. Since God has created us and gives us all meaning, that is who will ultimately be the judge. Abraham of old knew that God was the ultimate judge in life and in death when he asked, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Genesis 18:25). This eternal reality comes into stark clarity in light of the New Testament. Hebrews 9:27, “27 And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.” Jesus promised life after death (Luke 23:46). Stephen knew of its reality (Acts 7:59). In fact, on the night before his crucifixion, Jesus said,

“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. 4 And where I go you know, and the way you know,” (John 14:1-4).

Solomon knew of man’s existence after death. The Old Testament gives plenty of information so that a faithful Jew, even though only studying the first five books of the Old Testament, could reason that there is life after death (cf. Matthew 22:29-33). Death is the end of life on earth, of life under the sun. So, with death ends the glory of this life. But, life does not end at death, only life on earth. Man’s eternal spirit will return to God to stand in judgment before him (2 Corinthians 5:10).

12:8

8 *"Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "All is vanity."*

12:8

As we look through vs. 1-8, we see the final vanity: death itself. This is the twenty-first vanity by my count. Since all ends in death, death becomes the ultimate vain thing.

In light of the whole book, a step back allows us to recount the vanities:

- All the works of men (1:14)
- Indulgence in pleasure (2:1)
- The profit of one's labor (2:11)
- The quest for wisdom (2:15,17)
- Earthly accomplishments (2:19-23)
- Achievement (2:26)
- An over-emphasis on life and living (3:19)
- Competition (4:4)
- Hoarding riches (4:7,8)
- Trying to please everyone (4:16)
- Words and promises (Especially when they are used foolishly) (5:7)
- Money (5:10)
- The irresponsible use of riches (6:2-4)
- Greed or greedy ambition (6:9)
- The mastery of language (6:10,11)
- Evil companionship (7:6)
- Trying to assign meaning to every detail of life (7:15)
- An indifference towards evil (8:10)
- An unjust system of justice (8:14)
- The desire to relive or retrieve the past (11:8)
- Looking to the future for happiness or satisfaction (11:10)

Death is that last enemy that all people face. Death has clouded over Solomon's life and has been reflected in many chapters in Ecclesiastes. I would guess that death clouds over many people today. For some, it heightens doubt. For others, it robs joy. For many, it is neglected until too late. But now, for Solomon, death itself like all things under the sun is vanity. It is a transition. It is an end of life but a beginning of something else. Its importance is not in itself. Death's importance is found in something beyond the sun.

This passage (12:8) is repetitive of Ecclesiastes 1:2. The first one served as introduction and the last as a conclusion. Yet, the context of these two passages are far different. In chapter one, a dim light was painted where Solomon, estranged from God and hating life, saw in this life nothing worth living for. Thus, it was all vanity. However, in the end, Solomon must conclude that while all is vanity, that is okay! How could that be okay? Because now, God is in the picture. Or, we might better say that Solomon sees that God is the picture. With clear vision, with properly applied wisdom, with revealed

truth, Solomon is no longer finding nothing where he seeks something. Instead, he sees God and knows that his life is worth living because of who God is and what God has done. While everything under the sun is vanity, while a life without God is vain, when God is served and loved and obeyed, man can live a life with purpose and meaning while enjoying life on this earth. But, that type of life can only be lived under the sun when mankind looks to the one who created and now sits above the sun.

12:9-10

9 And moreover, because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yes, he pondered and sought out and set in order many proverbs.

10 The Preacher sought to find acceptable words; and what was written was upright—words of truth.

12:9

Here, the wise man, who had not lost his wisdom even when he had not fully practiced it, continued to teach knowledge. This seems to have been a cornerstone of Solomon's life (1 Kings 4:32). Now, with focus and understanding and experience, Solomon is able to describe his place in concluding this great experiment and conveying his findings.

Together, verses 9-10 serve as a summary of the teaching or preaching life of Solomon and show that he thought about how to hand down such important informant.

In every generation, the wise man really thinks about the best way of expressing eternal truths. Every preacher, teacher, parent, and elder must consider the best way to communicate God's truth. While we do not have any need to live a life of sin and folly like Solomon did, we do need to think about how to communicate the truth of God's word.

12:10

Solomon in wisdom wanted to use the best words to communicate these things. By God's Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16), he was able to do just that. Therefore, what we hold in our hands, the Bible book of Ecclesiastes, is part of God's word of truth.

How can we teach others these truths (1 Timothy 2:2)? How can we teach people around us the truth, not only of the book of Ecclesiastes but of the entirety of God's word (cf. Psalm 119:160: Matthew 4:4)?

Notice that Solomon gives us today some guidelines for becoming teachers and preachers of God's word:

1. Ponder and seek out truth.
2. Seek acceptable words.
3. Set those words in order.
4. Communicate (write, preach, teach) those words of truth to other.

There are four elements that encompass the work of the teacher:

1. Find delightful words. They are pleasing and well spoken. They are much more effective than those spoken haphazardly and carelessly. Tell them that they are doing wrong, but do not do it rashly. Do not have a condescending attitude. 2 Timothy 4:3 - With great patience and understanding. Do not be "holier-than-thou."
2. Write. This is another way of spreading God's message (and is what Solomon did!). Solomon was a man of wisdom and wrote (1 Kings 4:32). Isaiah was a man of vision and wrote (Isaiah 30:8). Paul was a man of mission and wrote (Romans 15:1). While these men were inspired by the Holy Spirit directly (2 Peter 1:20-21), we too are people of wisdom, vision, and mission. Ours is a different sense of these English words, but still, the work of ministry can be very effective when we write.
3. Preach words of truth and write words of truth. No matter our chosen media of communication, the message must be the truth. Jesus embodies and personifies Truth (John 14:6). God's Word is Truth (John 17:17). It is the Truth that sets men free (John 8:32) when we abide in God's Word (John 8:31).
4. Correctly support them. The best points to make are the ones that God has already made. No one can make better points. When we preach and teach, when we write or message, we want to convey God's word in its context, in its simplicity, and in its fullness (Acts 20:27). This is how Isaiah preached: line upon line and precept upon precept (Isaiah 28:10-13). When we study God's word, we want to convey the message, the fruit of that study in our teaching. We do not want to use God's Word as a spring to jump into things which the text does not touch. We do not want to bring our preconceptions into the text. Instead, we teach the text as supported by the text.

12:11-12

11 The words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd.

12 And further, my son, be admonished by these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is wearisome to the flesh.

12:11

Goads were and are used to poke animals into action. Even in the time of the Judges, oxen which plowed the fields were prodded or poked with ox-goads. It was one of these agricultural instruments which Shamgar used to slay 600 Philistines (Judges 3:31).

In our text, words, wise words, are metaphorically like goads. Similarly, the well-placed nails (a small but still sharp instrument) carry the same idea. Solomon's words recorded in Ecclesiastes and set in the calling together of that grand assembly (cf. 1:1) were not meant for as mere philosophies. They were not meant to be simply pondered and discussed. These words are

moving words: words which call the listener and now the reader to action (cf. 12:1).

For preachers and teachers, words are our tools. When we preach God's Word, wise words from our Father above (cf. James 3:17), people are moved to action. Remember that God's Word is powerful in working in people's lives (cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:13-14). Like well-driven nails the point is driven home and it accomplishes what you wanted it to.

Notice that vs. 11 gives us the ultimate Source of Solomon's writing: God, the One Shepherd. Solomon's father, David, sought our Jehovah as his Shepherd (Psalm 23:1). It is God who is the "Shepherd of Israel" (Psalm 80:1).

This clearly affirms that the book is inspired by God. God is the source of His message, and He is then claiming inspiration. In many ways, this echoes Luke's claims (Luke 1:1-3). Inspiration does not negate Solomon's research, his missteps, or personal experience. Inspiration does not mean that the writer does not have to do research, but that the final message will be inspired. He did not miss a variable. He did not misread the results. There are not more advanced statistics which must be run on the findings. We can have confidence in these words (and in the ultimate conclusion of 12:13-14). It is this final message and the assurance of inspiration that promises us that we are not reading the ramblings of an idolator (cf. 1 Kings 11:1-10) but the very Word of God (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16).

12:12

Solomon's children or grandchildren and the youth of the nation of Israel could be the direct and immediate beneficiaries to his words. They could find wisdom and admonition in this teaching, in God's teaching.

Any books beyond God's Book, the Bible, are not able to hold up. True knowledge is found in Holy Scripture. That is where wisdom and knowledge are found. With the books of men, you could read and read and read but you would only get parts of the limits of finite knowledge. Further, those books (written by uninspired men) should always be read in light of the truth of Scripture. Do not focus on man's material. Let it be a supplement and no more. Study the Bible, but read books.

Writing has been shown to exist since at least 3500 BC. Solomon lived about 980 BC. For over three thousand years before Christ there has been writing. Would not Solomon be surprised to know how many books there are today!

12:13-14

13 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all.

14 For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.

12:13

The experiment has been concluded, and the results are in. A law has been clearly seen. Solomon takes on the place of the herald to announce the grand conclusion. Or, from another viewpoint, it is as if you were in a court room and everybody is presenting their cases. Now the judge will conclude. Solomon, the man who has done all that is in this book, now concludes that we should fear God and keep His commandments.

Solomon has sampled life with all of its ups and downs. He has found vanity and nothingness. He still had a missing piece in his life. Above all, he needed to understand that God exists outside and above the sun. Only with this eternal and heavenly perspective can life on earth (literally under the sun) be lived properly.

Fear God. Keep His commandments. This is in the right order. Fearing God does precede keeping His commandments. People who do not fear God will not keep His commandments. When you fear Him, you recognize His power and authority and that you will have to answer to Him. Do what you want, but you will have to answer to God. These are the only things that are not called vanity by this writer. They are the beginning and the end. They are the ultimate and cannot be outdone (cf. Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 1:7).

“The Fear of the Lord” is a very powerful study in Scripture. Many times, we read “the Fear of the LORD” in our NKJV Bibles are part of Solomon’s writings. Fearing God is a cornerstone of Ecclesiastes and of the Wisdom Literature of Scripture:

- Proverbs 1:7 - It is the beginning of knowledge.
- Proverbs 1:29 - It is a choice that men can make.
- Proverbs 2:5 - It is understandable for man.
- Proverbs 8:13 - It is to hate evil (because God hates evil).
- Proverbs 9:10 - It is part of knowing the Holy One.
- Proverbs 10:27 - It brings blessings of long life.
- Proverbs 14:2 - It produces and upright walk and life.
- Proverbs 14:26 - It give confidence.
- Proverbs 14:27 - It is a fountain of life.
- Proverbs 15:16 - It brings contentment.
- Proverbs 15:33 - It is the instruction of wisdom received with humility.
- Proverbs 16:6 - It motivates men to depart from sin.
- Proverbs 19:23 - It leads to a satisfied and saved life.
- Proverbs 23:17 - It can sustain the righteous.
- Proverbs 24:21 - It accompanies good citizenship.

All stand in stark contrast to “the fear of man” which deceives, entraps, and destroys (Proverbs 29:25).

Notice also that fearing God gives:

- Confidence (Ecclesiastes 3:14)
- Clarity (Ecclesiastes 5:7)
- Contentment (Ecclesiastes 8:12)

Fearing God is a cornerstone of faithfulness. This means that man has the appropriate view of God as sovereign. God alone is God (cf. Deuteronomy 6:4). This is not a paralyzing fear but a reverent, respectful fear. The fear of the Lord has reverence for God's power and holiness. The fear of the Lord recognizes God's knowledge and perfection. The fear of the Lord respects God's word. The fear of the Lord replicates God's attitudes, actions, and words.

And the fruit of fearing God is obedience. When we recognize that God alone is God and His Word is the standard of life and death, then we understand the importance of putting that word into action. When we read "keep his commandments," we need to see the necessity of obedience. While we live in a different time and under a different law, the New Testament, these principles are timeless! On reason why, this is a great statement is because it is all encompassing. These are wise words to all people of all times.

If you read other English translations, you might notice the word "whole" in this verse. It should be italicized to note that translators added it in for clarification. While these additions are usually helpful and their italicization allows us as Bible students to know when something is added for clarification, the word "whole" is best left out. This is how the New King James Version translates the verse and leaves us without the distraction or difficulty.

12:14

Why should we fear God? The reason is clearly seen in vs. 14: Because He will bring every act to judgment. Ecclesiastes teaches there is a day of judgment coming. This is the basis of our behavior. Everything will be exposed before God; good or evil (John 5:28-29; Acts 17:31; 2 Corinthians 5:10). It shows the all-inclusiveness of God's judgment. Every sin in public or private will be exposed. The word translated "secret" or "hidden" (ASV) denotes that man cannot escape the eyes of God. God is aware and man is accountable. "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, Keeping watch on the evil and the good" (Proverbs 15:3). Psalm 139 (especially vs. 7-9) detail the omnipresence of God. This will be fully understood on judgement day.

There will be a single standard of judgment: truth. "But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things" (Romans 2:2) (cf. John 12:48). The gospel will meet us on that final day when Christ comes again: "in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel" (Romans 2:16).

The objective standard of truth determines what is good and what is evil. It will not be a subjective truth dependent upon the feelings or culture or government of various people. What God calls good is good. What God calls evil is evil.

Solomon has spent twelve chapters and 222 verses (in our English Bibles) to illustrate the eternal truth of this book. Simply put, with God - a life lived "under the sun," there is no meaning to life. Without God, there is emptiness, hopelessness, and worthlessness. However, when God is considered,

everything changes. With God in the picture, wisdom excels folly; labor excels laziness; friendships are enjoyed; riches are useful; and life is worth living. When one looks beyond the sun, God, His sovereignty, his judgment, and all things of eternal significance clearly rise to view.

For the 10th Century Israelite, these words from their wise king would have shown tremendous humanity and humility as he repented from the disastrous choices recorded in 1 Kings 11. For them, this book could have saved them the despair of a life without God. For them, if they heeded his counsel, lives could have been changed from youth up - all for the glory of God.

However, the book of Ecclesiastes does not only carry wisdom for 10th Century Israelites nor for those who lived under the Mosaic Law. The eternal truths of this book are relevant in our world today. People are still looking to everything under the sun to please and pleasure themselves. They are still forsaking God and His Word. They are still empty, hopeless, and hating life. And, even after all have been heard today - world religions, false doctrines, technological advances, lusts of the flesh, and more - the conclusion rings true almost 3000 years later: "Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all"

APPENDIX

WILL EARTH “BE BURNED UP” OR “ABIDE FOREVER”?	127
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Will Earth “Be Burned Up” or “Abide Forever”?

By: Eric Lyons

According to certain Bible critics, 2 Peter 3:10 contradicts Ecclesiastes 1:4. Whereas Peter wrote, “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both **the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up**” (emp. added), Solomon declared in the book of Ecclesiastes, “One generation passes away, and another generation comes; but **the earth abides forever**” (emp. added). Is one of these two declarations an “erroneous statement” as skeptic David Miles contends (2007), or is there a logical explanation regarding why the “burned up” Earth is said to “abide forever”?

A.

The answer to this question actually is very simple: The Bible frequently uses the term “forever” (Hebrew *olam*) in a more limited sense, to mean “a **long** duration,” and not necessarily a literal **eternal** existence (see *Olam*, 1999). Consider a few examples:

- Prior to the Israelites’ departure from Egypt, Moses instituted the Passover. He then added: “And you shall observe this thing as an ordinance for you and your sons **forever**” (Exodus 12:24, emp. added).
- Under the Law of Moses, when a servant pledged allegiance to his master, the master would “take an awl and thrust it through” the servant’s ear to the door (Deuteronomy 15:17). This was a sign that the servant would work for his master “**forever**” (15:17).
- After the Israelites visited King Rehoboam and petitioned him to lighten their burdens (2 Chronicles 10:3-4), the elders advised the king to be kind to the people and they would be his servants “**forever**” (10:7).

Like so many words throughout Scripture that have more than one meaning, the term “forever” must be understood in light of the context in which it is found. The above-mentioned passages clearly use “forever” in a limited sense, referring to a “long duration” and not literal unendingness. What’s more, considering how many words (e.g., “forever”) have more than one meaning, skeptics cannot justifiably label passages like Ecclesiastes 1:4 and 2 Peter 3:10 contradictory unless they can prove both passages are using the word in the exact same sense. The proper understanding of these passages is that though the Earth has outlasted countless generations (lasting “forever” in a limited sense), one day the Earth “will be burned up.”

Finally, we frequently use the word “forever” in a limited sense in the 21st century (e.g., “that lecture lasted forever”). One wonders why skeptics disallow the Bible writers the same freedom in their use of words such as “forever.”

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