

ECCLESIASTES

You have heard the expression about everything that happens to me is bad and getting worse. Well, “EAT A FROG THE FIRST THING EVERY MORNING AND NOTHING WORSE CAN HAPPEN TO YOU ALL DAY.”

Introduction

The “preacher” carried out a single objective to discover if man is capable of finding joy, fulfillment, and lasting satisfaction in things that are purely of an earthly nature. The “Preacher’s conclusion: “ALL IS VANITY.” It is a striving after wind.

The “Preacher” reveals the true picture of life. He does not attempt to hide selfishness, hypocrisy, greed, oppression, tyranny, ambition or social inequities. He tells it like it is. The “Preacher” recognizes that God has control of His world. But to the “Preacher,” God never comes into sharp focus. God is always in the distance.

The basic question of the Book of Ecclesiastes: Is there any profit in all of man’s work which he does upon this earth? The paradox of life is that the richest men are often the lowest men and those with the greatest wealth are the ones who possess the greatest need.

Each new generation appears to discover something new, but they are merely inventing new names to define and describe ancient pursuits. The main purpose of the book of Ecclesiastes is found in chapter 12:13: “Fear God and keep His commandments.”

Ecclesiastes asks the questions that the rest of the “Bible” answers. If the average non-Christian individual would but read it today, it would bring him much more quickly to Christ. Solomon could see immediately that God is the only alternative to this world and its offerings and that Jesus is God’s first and last argument to man’s claim to receive fulfillment and peace.

Ecclesiastes was written by Solomon toward the end of his life, in approximately 985 B.C.

Ecclesiastes (Greek) and Koheleth (Hebrew) means to assemble as a congregation, and many believe for the purpose of receiving a message.

The first six chapters establish the premise that all earthly things are futile and that the only way man can have personal satisfaction is to live within God's providential blessings.

Once we are led to see that earthly values cannot satisfy, we are ready for the conclusion of the book.

1. To work in harmony with God through the words of one Shepherd.
2. To fear God and keep His commandments.
3. To realize that God will bring every work into judgment.

Chapter 1

Verse 1

The name of "Solomon" never appears in this book. There is little doubt about the "Preacher's" purpose. He wants to find delightful words and write words of truth correctly. Chapter 12:10 The "Preacher" uses God's Word as a "goat" to prod and drive toward a goal. Chapter 12:11

Solomon arrives at an exciting, positive conclusion. Chapter 12:13 His thorough examination of all things and his extensive experimentations with greatness, work, and pleasure led him to the frustration of dead-end streets and blind alleys.

The vanities of the world behind him, Solomon draws his reader to the inescapable doorway to the new life. It is a long, difficult journey from Solomon's opening statement, "All is vanity" and his final conclusion to "Fear God."

Verse 2

"All is vanity" is not one of despair but simply states the truth concerning the nature of this world and everything in it. Vanity conveys the idea of a "short life." Vanity comes from the Hebrew word "Abel" which is used 37 times in Ecclesiastes.

At the very beginning of this book we are confronted with the basic question: Is this life in its toil, pleasures, possessions, challenges, and ambitions all there is to living, or is there a Word of God to give hope to man in the midst of his activities.

Verse 3

“Advantage” means preeminence or gain. The meaning here is of a collected materialistic gain. Man toils, labors, and plans, but it is like grasping the wind. “Under the sun” has to do with earthly things. Man toils and dreams but for little profit beneath the earthly sun.

Verses 4-8

Man and earth share in the gloomy, monotonous routine of activities. Both are transitory. One generation enters as the former generation exits.

Verses 9-11

Solomon says the world is caught in a routine sameness and that man cannot tell everything, bear everything or see everything. Things are considered novel or new only because they have been forgotten. Much of what Solomon wrote throughout the book, is based on this premise.

Solomon’s message is: If one keeps his eyes upon this world alone, then his labor is worth very little. He discovers that all his labor becomes entangled in the gray maze of monotonous, endless activities of not only his own life and generation, but of every generation that “goes” and “comes.”

Verses 13-14

Solomon is going to explore all that is done under heaven. “Seek” carries the idea of studying that which is near at hand. “Explore” mean to investigate something at a greater distance.

Verse 15

Man is not capable of remaking his world or himself. We can be pretenders and mask wearers, but we really cannot make the crooked straight or add to man’s account in order to make him acceptable before God.

Verse 17

“Madness and folly” are usually associated with wickedness and improprieties. The wisdom pursued and employed by Solomon is best described as that which is discovered “under the sun.” This wisdom is available to everyone who is willing to pursue it.

Chapter 2

Verse 1

Solomon states his conclusion at the beginning, “It too was futility.” The question being tested is, “What is good for man in the few years he has on this earth?” This is the key question in the book of Ecclesiastes.

Verse 2

Solomon associates laughter with pleasure which should be thought of as harmless delights in this context. Madness is the idea of boasting and foolishness, not mental insanity. Solomon’s conclusion is that there is no lasting value in the exercising of sensuous pleasure.

Verse 3

Solomon now turns to three additional categories of pleasure. First, there is food and folly; second, aesthetic improvements; and third, cultural improvements and the pleasures of possession. 1 John 2:15-16

“Wine” could represent all the pleasures of the table as well as just the enjoyment of wine. “Folly” implies the harmless nonsense that so often accompanies the pleasure of dining with friends.

Verses 5-7

Solomon built numerous buildings and public works in Jerusalem. He spent thirteen years building his own palace. He had vineyards, gardens, parks, and ponds of great aesthetic value.

Solomon had many slaves, flocks, and herds, horses, and silver and gold. He possessed such treasure unique to kings and not the common man.

Solomon was a dictator. Everything depended upon his will. He ruled the Philistines, Moabites, Edomites, Ammonites, Canaanites, Hittites, and Syrians. He even possessed male and female singers.

Verse 8

The “pleasures of men” suggests that the concubines were for sexual enjoyment of the men. Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines.

Verses 9-10

Solomon did not yell out, “I have found it. I have discovered the secret of man’s happiness.”

Verse 11

His conclusion was that all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun.

Verse 12

Solomon goes on to say that human nature is the same generation after generation.

Verse 13

“Wisdom” is still earthly wisdom which excels madness and folly as light excels darkness. Light is the symbol of truth from God while darkness is the symbol of sin.

Verses 13-17

Solomon compares the wise man and the foolish man.

WISE MAN

Light

Eyes in his head

Same fate (death)

No remembrance

Will be forgotten

He will die

FOOLISH MAN

Darkness

Walks in darkness

Same fate (death)

No remembrance

Will be forgotten

He will die

Vanity robs even the wise man of any possible profit of his labor “under the sun.”

Verse 18

The legacy of one’s labor is often lost to fools when one dies. It worries Solomon as to who would receive his great fortune.

Verses 19-23

Solomon had cause to worry. Two men ascended to his throne upon his death which caused the kingdom to be divided. As a result, Solomon lost control over all the “fruit” of his labor, a work he had placed his whole heart into.

Verse 24

Solomon’s conclusion is that labor is good only when it is acknowledged as from the hand of God. This is the first time that Solomon reaches “above the sun” and speaks of God in Ecclesiastes.

Verse 25

Wise men work in harmony with God’s laws, please God, and find enjoyment and favor.

Verse 26

The “good person” is the one who receives approval from God and enjoys his labor. The “sinner” is the one who does not find his approval from God and is given the task of gathering and collecting, so that he may give to the one who is good in God’s sight.

“Joy” carries the idea of cheerfulness and satisfaction with life. It is the excitement of discovery and living life to its fullest each day. To try and discover happiness where God has not ordained that happiness has always been man’s failing.

In the New Testament Jesus uses the beatitudes to show that “joy” will overtake men when they discover the “real joy” where God has ordained it to be found. (Matthew 5:1-10)

Chapter 3

Solomon has said that as one generation passes away another generation moves in to take its place. In this chapter Solomon gives a detailed account of the activities of each generation from birth to death.

Man may run contrary to God's appointed times and seasons, but if he does, he will experience frustration and failure. Nothing in any of these descriptions suggests evil activities or immoral behavior.

Verse 1

These verses do not suggest that all things are predetermined. If all things are predetermined and man has no choice, there could be no distinction between the "good" man and the "sinner."

Verses 2-8

In these verses Solomon is giving an overview of the total life of one generation. His objective is to bring man to see that there is nothing better than to resign himself to the work and pleasures of the day, recognizing that it is a gift to man from the hand of God.

Verse 9

Solomon has called attention to the major areas of men's interests and demonstrated how each generation is engaged in the same activities. He calls it an evil (grievous) task that has occupied men in each generation.

Verse 11

God has placed a desire in the heart to search out and to know. Man has a desire to explore the meaning of all the events of life, but it is not within man to discover all the answers. "From the beginning even to the end" probably refers to the work which God does in relation to one's lifetime. Man can derive some profit from life even if it is very meager.

Verses 12-13

Man is instructed to rejoice, do good, eat, drink, and see the good in his labor. The "reward" is called a "gift" from God.

Verses 14-15

God has made everything beautiful, good, and appropriate and all that He does is perfect.

Verse 16

In spite of God's perfect order, it is being prostituted by the corruption of evil men and evil doers who have control of the authoritative positions.

Verse 17

God will judge both the righteous man and the wicked man.

Verses 18-20

So intense is the corruption of justice that he is led to conclude that man is no different from animals in many respects. The pressures of both authority and responsibility test a man. When man is left to himself without the benefit of the heavenly wisdom, he proves his beastly nature.

Verse 21

Solomon says that it is difficult to believe that man can behave with such beast-like characteristics. Who can understand the spirit of either?

Verse 22

The person addressed is not the evildoer but the "good man." He cannot see the future but he is convinced that he will trust God and be happy in the activities of the day.

Chapter 4

Verse 1

The basic problem of every age is that the wicked prosper and often have the authority on their side while the righteous are often poor and suffer oppression. Oppression is any system where men govern men, authority is often corrupted.

Verse 2

The fortunate ones are those who have already died.

Verse 3

Better off are those individuals who have never been born. Solomon is not speaking of abortion in order to shut out the life of one before he sees the light of day, but rather the one never conceived or possibly miscarried.

Verse 4

Rivalry is unrewarding because it stems from a jealous spirit and a desire to excel over one's neighbor. And once he can honestly say, "I have accomplished more, and gathered more, and collected more than those around me"—what does it really mean?

"Skill" suggests that one spends hours in developing the ability to produce something that will bring an earthly profit. His tireless effort in becoming an expert, motivated by an unworthy desire, accomplishes nothing.

Verse 5

"Fool" means a sluggard or stupid person. His slothfulness leads him to the comfort of the couch and causes him to fold his hands and sleep during the daylight hours. "Consumes his own flesh" is not a reference to cannibalistic practices, but the excess energy of his body is consumed through laziness rather than productive work.

If "skills" and "consumes his own flesh" are not the answers to life what is?"

Verse 6

This verse says in effect, "do not get on the treadmill. Just take life day-by-day and rejoice and do much good in your lifetime."

Verses 7-12

Two ideas run concurrently through these verses.

1. Riches should be used for practical good.
2. Friends or companions may be of much greater value than wealth.

Verse 7

Money will not bring comfort, warmth, protection, companionship, or personal satisfaction. Solomon labels such concern for wealth, “vanity.”

Verse 8

Solomon lists some improper attitudes toward riches:

1. He was not gathering a fortune for the security of an heir or companion.
2. There was no end to his labor. His sole purpose in life was to collect more and more riches.
3. He became exceedingly wealthy and yet he was never satisfied with the amount he had collected.
4. He deprived himself of what might have been meaningful pleasures to him.

Verse 9

If wealth does not bring satisfaction or produce a profit when collected with the improper attitude, what does? A friend! A friend can help you when you fall physically or spiritually.

Verse 10

This verse seems to best fit the context of a financial collapse. When one sees his fortune slip from his hands quickly, it is important to have a friend come to the rescue.

Verse 11

How can one be warm alone? There is inner warmth that comes because of close friendships.

Verse 12

The idea of the “threefold strands” is that if one friend is of greater value than riches, then there is truly great strength in having two more genuine, trusted friends.

Verse 13

Solomon is the old and foolish king, who no longer knows how to receive instruction.

Verse 14

The lad who has come out of prison is Jeroboam, who has come out of his prison being exiled to Egypt. The lad is poor, in prison and yet wise. The king is old, foolish, and set in his ways. The country would be better served by the lad than the king. The present king will no longer accept advice or counsel.

Verse 15

To realize that one can come from unlikely circumstances to become king, to supplant one who already has control, demonstrates the lack of security of life even in the highest office of the land. For a little while the new king will bask in triumph. Once the fleeting moment of success is past and the multitudes realize that what they have is another human being like themselves, his popularity will be a thing of the past.

Verse 16

The multitudes throng to his side and quickly change the scene to picture the next generation asking, "Who is he?" They do not have the same respect for him and are no longer happy or satisfied with his rule. This too, is vanity and striving after wind.

Chapter 5

In this chapter, Solomon resorts to admonition for the first time. He is concerned about the possible corruption of the heart as it reaches toward God in worship. He is aware that their approach is more formalistic than genuine, more ritualistic than contrite. Since God is the object of worship and therefore has ultimate worth, to worship Him in word only would be ultimate folly.

Verse 1

"Guard your steps" means to "examine your heart" make sure your motives are pure. It is possible to give the appearance of worshipping God correctly when actually nothing is happening between you and God.

Hypocritical worship is another illustration of the vanity of all things.

The sacrifice of fools is men who oppress the poor, deny justice, and righteousness, and have an unhealthy love for money. Often the fool has an improper attitude in God's house. Men in every generation have been guilty of meaningless sacrifices in worship. Even our "words" are considered as a sacrifice to God. Hebrews 13:15

One is personally responsible for his own behavior when he comes before God. The picture we get from verse 1 is not the picture of a hardened, rebellious, heretic who sets himself against God and is in opposition to all that is holy. It is the picture of a fool attending worship. "Fool" is a term that suggests stupidity and ignorance rather than evil or brutishness, one lacking in common sense and ability to do things correctly.

The fool does not come to listen, but to talk. In the talking he yields to the temptation to promise much more than he is capable of delivering.

Promises which cannot be kept are meaningless chatter that slips so easily from the lips but never finds its way through the heart, becomes the sacrifice of fools."

Verse 2

The message is to keep your words few and mean what you say. The motivation for making your word sacrifice thoughtful is the fact that you are standing in the presence of God. It is the Creator that you have come to worship. Vain repetitions are repeated without feeling and become just so many empty words and are unacceptable sacrifices before God. Matthew 6:7

"God is in heaven and you are on the earth," makes a distinction between God and men. The temple was built for God, not man. The worship is before God, not man. The "fool" is man, not God.

Verses 4-6

Solomon turns from the subject of prayer to that of vows. One is considered fool if he is either late in paying his vow to God or fails to pay it. Deuteronomy 23:21-23

A promise is binding among men of integrity, how much more so a promise to God. God expects payment when we vow.

Verse 7

This verse captures both the idea of empty prayers and empty vows and admonishes toward a more positive fruitful activity toward God.

Verses 8-9

Disharmony among men is the inevitable result of hypocritical worship. When men make a mockery of public worship, going through the outward forms, but denying the true spirit of worship, corruption runs rampant throughout the land.

It is only when men are right before God that they are capable of living together in peace and harmony.

Verse 10

Solomon makes it clear that it is the love for money and not money itself, which causes the problem.

Verses 11-12

There are two disadvantages of riches which are kept to the owner's hurt.

1. The more you gather, the more people you must employ to look after your possessions and so you simply become a provider of the necessities of life for others who have not labored to enjoy your wealth.
2. The restful sleep which is so vital to the renewal of strength and a proper spirit to both enjoy and care for what one possesses, is taken from you.

“Look on” in verse 11 means the riches which are left over after expenses of caring for all that it takes to support his wealth, he finally fixes his eyes upon and asks, “What profit is this?”

The “full stomach” of verse 12 means that the rich man has eaten all that he can possibly hold. It was the most delicate and palatable of the finest or rarest prepared foods.

Verse 13

The owner hoards riches to his own hurt by accumulating riches for the sake of riches. Then he discovers that not only do the riches fail to satisfy and keep one from sleep, they actually harm the owner.

Verse 14

Through bad investments the father lost all he possessed and stands empty handed, unable to give his son a penny.

Verse 15

Man is born with nothing and shall leave this life with nothing. Death terminates all wealth. This lesson is difficult for many to learn.

Verse 16

This is a grievous evil, as a man is born so shall he be upon his death, so why toil for the wind?

Verse 17

Man lives his life in sorrow, dejection, and heaviness of heart if riches become his only goal.

Verse 18

One must rejoice and discover the gladness that comes from his labor. To receive such a reward, one must:

1. Eliminate the love for money and abundance.
2. Do not offer hasty words before God.
3. Do not put your trust in the acclaim of men. Realize that men are fickle and drawn by success rather than integrity.
4. Avoid selfishness which results in loneliness.
5. Admit to the anomalies of life. Sorrow over the oppression of the poor, but do not despair.
6. Do not fail to see the hand of God in control of His world.

Verse 19

Riches and wealth when looked upon with a proper attitude and used in harmony with God's ordained will, bring joy.

Verse 20

The "bonus" for those who consider the years of his life is that God will keep him occupied with the gladness of heart. They have a reward in finding joy in their labor and living. They soon forget the undesirable experiences of the past which causes a greater joy for the present.

One's present life can be rewarding and filled with joy. One way to accomplish this is to be busy doing what God desires. It is a much desired blessing to be able to close the door to the past and find joy in the present.

Chapter 6

This chapter continues the theme of the futility of riches. It is not possible to find satisfaction through possessions where God does not permit it, even when those possessions include everything the heart could desire.

Wealth is relative. To the poor, a rich man is one who possesses more than he does.

Verses 1-2

God permits man to acquire all that his heart desires, but He does not permit the man to enjoy what he has acquired, because he failed to acknowledge God in his endeavor.

The rich man fails to enjoy his possessions when he has everything his heart desires because he cannot divorce himself from the power of his wealth. He is still greedy of gain; he is hoarding his riches to his own hurt; he is not content and perhaps fails in health as a result of his greedy spirit and thus cannot use what he has gathered.

When riches capture the heart and control the will of an individual it is indeed an evil.

Verse 3

You would think that a large family and a long life would bring joy, but it may not. The failure to have a proper burial was a disgrace. To leave a body upon the ground to be devoured by animals or birds of the air was reserved for the enemies of Israel or the despicable members of their society.

Verses 4-5

The baby born prematurely by a miscarriage is said to be better off than the rich man. It is nameless, unrewarded, and never experiences one day of life. Such an untimely birth is more to be desired than the long life of the rich man.

Verse 6

This verse contains three significant points.

1. Regardless of how long one may live, it would not change the circumstances nor would one come to different conclusions.
2. The reason being that the man who is under consideration did not enjoy good things.
3. Both the still born and the rich man return to dust where there will be no remembrance of previous things.

Verse 7

The rich man labors endlessly for the products of food and pleasure and yet his desires are never satisfied.

Verse 8

A wise man who fails to enjoy what he possesses is no better off than a fool. The reason being is that both die and there are no distinctions in the grave.

Verse 9

It is better to take what one has and enjoy it rather than entertain a craving for what is possibly in the future and uncertain.

Verse 10

Man is created, not the Creator. Man depends upon his Creator to empower him to eat of that which he possesses.

Verse 11

Man's profit is there if he can come to the end of his day and honestly say, "See, this is my profit for today." The rich have nothing more than the poor at the end of their day.

Verse 12

Apart from God's help, man's desires will lead to the frustrating burden of feasting on the wind. Man's life is like a shadow, fleeting.

This verse does not refer to eternity, but rather to the activities which shall occur upon the earth tomorrow, the day after that or in the following year. Since God is in control of His world and is the One who permits man to enjoy living, then it would follow that man should cease fretting about what might happen and live each day with the simple trust and enjoyment.

Chapter 7

This chapter is going to deal with one's character and integrity. To be honest and to have the respect of one's peers is the objective.

Verse 1

The theme of birth and death is carried through this chapter. To the Christian death is not the worst thing that can happen. Sometimes it is welcomed as a sweet release from suffering or escape from a disease-ridden body which no longer should be joined with the spirit.

To the Christian death is often viewed as a victory, a triumph. A good man with a good name dies and leaves behind a good reputation. The day of one's death is better than the day of his birth, when he has lived his life successfully.

Verse 2

The "house of feasting" is a birthday party. It is better to seek out the "house of mourning." In this house one is comforted with the issues of life and death.

These are the issues which are grave enough to influence destinies and bring about sober reflections on one's present activities.

Verse 3

When one faces the reality of death and the coming of judgment before his Creator, he is drawn in his mind to consider his own ways. His face is made sad because he is seeing himself with the veneer and sham produced by self-deceit removed. His sinful ways are apparent.

Repentance is implied because his sadness results in his heart being made happy.

Verse 4

The "wise" man is the one who dwells upon the meaning of life as he faces the reality of death.

Verse 5

"Rebuke" is the idea of offering grave admonition that heals and strengthens while it wounds. Listening to the song of fools is the equivalent of luxuriating with the world in pleasure and mirth.

Verse 6

The laughter of fools is short lived, meaningless, loud, and without lasting value. Quick-burning, dried, thorn bushes will crack and pop while appearing to give lasting heat beneath the kettle. Their contribution to the cooking process is meaningless. The laughter of fools is a temporary contribution without redeeming value. James 4:8-9

Verse 7

A bribe-taker ruins his reputation because it ruins his good name and does not maintain his personal integrity. When one is influenced by a bribe he renders distorted judgments. He compromises and is now vulnerable to various areas of corruption.

Verse 8

The end of a thing is better than its beginning. Hind sight is better than foresight. The wise man knows it is better to resign all of one's future plans into the providential control of the Creator. This does not release one of the responsibility of planning for tomorrow, but it does safeguard against the proud spirit.

Verse 9

A quick temper in company with frustration is the earmark of a fool. Another mark of a fool is to welcome, harbor, and entertain anger. Such irresponsible behavior will not produce a "good name."

Verse 10

The three signs of a lack of wisdom are impatience, willingness to harbor anger, and a failure to inquire wisely concerning the circumstances of the present, are the signs of a lack of wisdom.

The past always appear to be better than the present. With the passing of time there is the tendency to forget the evil experience of the day-to-day living that constitutes life in every age.

Verse 11

Wisdom, like an inheritance is a permanent possession and is superior to an inheritance. One can make more of life upon this earth than normally thought. Wisdom will add more to the enjoyment and purpose of life than would an inheritance.

Verse 12

One can escape from certain threats in life by employing wisdom just as he can escape certain thrusts through the use of money.

Verses 13-14

We can learn from these verses that we cannot alter the plans of God. He is in complete control of this world. When we consider this, it results in humility. Anxieties are eliminated resulting in serenity, calmness, and trust.

Man cannot straighten what God has bent. God has ultimate control of every-day events. A wise man will acknowledge that what he cannot change or control, he will accept. Philippians 4:11-12

God does not allow us to see the future. Withholding such information from man should cause him to learn to look to God. We do not know if tomorrow will be a good day or an evil day. We should rejoice in the day of prosperity and consider the true nature of God when evil days are experienced.

Verses 15-18

A wise man acknowledges the inequities of life but he will not despair. He will remember that God controls the ultimate outcome. There is a kind of righteousness that causes spiritual and mental harm. There is a wisdom which fosters pride and produces a false foundation upon which to build a life.

“Self-righteousness questions God’s dealings and judgments. It elevates man and leads him into arrogance. This will ruin him. It is the wisdom that grows out of self-righteousness which destroys. God’s judgment does not fall immediately upon the wicked. He gives us time to repent. If we do not repent our sin will not go unpunished.

Verses 19-22

Wisdom is better than the accumulative power of ten rulers in a city. They may be wise in the ways of the world, but if they do not “fear” the Lord, they do not possess the true strength.

Wisdom teaches us to be humble and to depend upon strength gained apart from human resources. No man is so righteous that he always does what is best. Repentance and confession are fruits of wisdom.

Another benefit that wisdom will bring is:

1. It will keep one from prying into every bit of gossip or information circulating in the area.
2. It will safeguard against a self-righteous attitude.

Gossip or unprotected words are words spoken in a moment of weakness or during a heated discussion which we would like to recall if we have the proper wisdom.

Verses 23-24

Wisdom is the tool used to test everything. The secret things of God are always a little distant from man's reach; at least until that time when God chooses to disclose the deep, deep mysteries.

Solomon set out to write about wisdom and in the midst of his adventure, he confesses his lack of it. There is a wisdom which God alone possess and man cannot discover it. Man's eyes are blinded by sin and the darkness is compounded because he lives in a sinful (dark) environment.

Verses 25-28

In verse 26, Solomon is not labeling all women as evil. He identifies the evil woman as the "woman whose heart is snares and nets." Women are capable of exerting great power over men, and power is evil.

Solomon was unable to discover the degree of wisdom which he desired, but he discovered the depths of evil to which men and women are capable of descending. So enslaved was he by their evil powers that he actually accepted the false wisdom of Ashtoreth and Milcom. 1 Kings 11:5-8

Verse 29

The message of this verse is:

1. God is not to blame for man's inability to discover wisdom. God made man upright and in that state man was in a position to know and understand the things which are now hidden from him. Man cannot achieve complete wisdom, but it is his own fault.
2. Man busies himself with innovation, vain speculation, and self-wise reasoning which compete in his own mind with the true wisdom of God. Man continues to invent pathways of departure from the presence of God.

Chapter 8

In this chapter and in chapter 9 will see five things that relate to the solving of some of the problems of life.

1. Verses 1-8 The authority of the land, suggests that submission to the law will result in pleasant relationships between the king and his subjects.
2. Verses 9-13 Work and function as a wise person even when the wise or righteous are oppressed.
3. Verses 14-17 One is instructed to work although he has limited resources under the sun, and although he discovers that God's ways are past finding out.
4. Chapter 9:1-10 Do not waste your opportunity.
5. Chapter 9:11-18 Do not have inconsistencies in your life.

Verse 1

Keep in mind that it is wisdom which leads to the correct solution.

“Stern face to beam” means hardness, harshness, boldness, and fierce face. Man has a cheerful soul and his face shines because he understands God's Word and God's providential activities. Sin causes the “stern face” while righteousness drives out sin and welcomes peace and contentment.

Verses 2-4

A wise man is one who recognizes the authority of the king and lives within the restrictions of the law. To depart from the king would be to align oneself with evil. The king has the authority to make decisions and place punishment upon the wicked.

Verse 5

For authority to be meaningful, there must be laws and subsequent punishment exacted upon those who break the laws. God patiently waits until sin has ripened fully on the vine.

We would like for punishment to fall swiftly as well as justly, but life is not always this way.

The wise heart recognizes that such judgment will come with certainty and thus tunes all his thoughts and activities to this channel.

Verse 6

A sinner anguishes beneath his sin because he knows it is of his own doing and his trouble is heavy upon him.

Verse 7

The sinner's suffering is compounded because he knows neither when he will be punished nor what will be his punishment. He knows only that it is due him and will be forthcoming. (Friend's father)

Verse 8

The evil man has no more control over his inevitable punishment which shall come upon him than he does over the wind. One is locked in. There is no escape or discharge, from death and judgment.

Wisdom can deliver those who practice it. One will reap what he sows. The severity of their evil will demand judgment. They shall not escape.

Verses 9-10

We see the wicked person journeying to the temple. They are observed as worshiping God, but their worship is meaningless. Such hypocritical worship would not hold back their time of death or fortify them against the certainty of God's judgment. They were able to influence their peers and receive respectable burial, the burial due the righteous. This Solomon says is vanity.

Some of the living played along with their hypocritical game closing their eyes to the wicked deeds performed by those they helped bury. It is the wicked rulers who have died and received burial.

Verse 11

Since man does not pay immediately for breaking God's moral laws, he is deceived into believing that such evil behavior need never be recompensed. The wicked feel secure in their present state and give themselves to the full practice of evil.

Verses 12-13

These verses tell us that sinners often live to old age but that is not to be taken as the fact that they have received God's approval.

Verse 14

We learn that wicked men prosper as though they were righteous and the righteous suffer as though they had committed grievous sins. This is perplexing.

Verse 15

Solomon's answer to this perplexing problem is to quietly share in the blessings of life which are obviously placed here by God for one's enjoyment.

Verses 16-17

The one who tries to discover the solutions to the problems of life, or who is engaged in endless labor to increase their wealth, will never discover satisfaction and will never enjoy sleep.

Chapter 9

In the first ten verses Solomon says do not waste your opportunity—gain as much as you can from each day. Give yourself wholeheartedly to your work. Let your life be filled with happiness and cheer as you live it with the wife you have chosen and whom you love.

In verses 11-18 Solomon uses some illustrations which demonstrate the lack of consistency in life.

Verse 1

“All this” refers to the inability of men to know what the future holds for them.

“Love or hatred” refers to the broad scope of the experiences of life.

God is in control of His world, but He, at times, permits or allows the flow of history to ebb and tide unobstructed, and thus the events which fall to the ungodly should come to the wicked and those which fall to the wicked should come to the godly.

Verse 2

“One fate” for all is not death, but the experiences of life—“love and hatred.” None escape. All are caught up in the activities of “love and hatred.”

Verse 3

This verse covers the results of the godly suffering as if they were wicked and the wicked prospering as if they were godly.

1. The righteous should recognize that their deeds are in the hands of God and unfortunate calamities should not move them from their pursuit of good and righteousness.
2. The wicked sinners because they prosper and their wicked deeds often go unpunished, are self-deceived and believe there will never be a day of judgment before God.

Verses 4-6

These verses should be considered together so that we can receive the message God wants us to have.

1. So long as there is life there is hope, death closes the door permanently to all activity.
2. The contribution of love, hatred, and energy can no longer be made as the dead no longer share in the transitory futility of life on earth.

The lion was the most noble of beasts while the dog was considered a scavenger of the street. The most despicable or undesirable person still is better off than the first individual who has already gone to the grave. The reason is that because as long as there is life there is hope.

Since one knows he will die, he should so order his life as to come into a proper relationship with God. “Reward” lost by the dead refers to their consciousness. They no longer share in the knowledge, love, hatred, or events upon the earth. Solomon is not suggesting that sinners who are alive are of greater value than godly people who have already died. His emphasis is simply on the fact that life affords opportunities which the dead cannot experience.

Verse 7

When God approves one's works, life is enjoyable even "under the sun." "Works" refers to all godly, righteous acts of the good man and God's approval means their labors are in God's hands.

Verse 8

"White" signifies glory, purity, and joy. Solomon is arguing for a full happy life to be lived by the ones who labor through life with God's blessings.

Verse 9

"Enjoy life!" This suggests turning away from the scenes of sadness and experiences which rob one of joy. Fix your eyes on the hope of joy—on those things which will result in God's approval and subsequently your own happiness.

Verse 10

You cannot redeem lost opportunities in the grave. Live for today and do not long for the past or wait expecting to find joy tomorrow. Verses 11-18 demonstrates the lack of consistency in life.

Verse 11

The illustration of netted fish and trapped birds demonstrate that the outcome of man's efforts is unpredictable, and that his time of death falls upon him suddenly and without warning. Great talent and planned activities do not guarantee success.

Verse 12

"Fish" and "birds" follow the course of daily routine and innocently go about searching out that which is essential to their livelihood and so does man. Without warning the fish and birds are trapped and their future is sharply altered. And, so the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time.

"Evil" means a time of misfortune and could refer to numerous events which befall men. Luke 21:34-35

Verse 13

One can safeguard himself from the treachery of snares and traps by securing wisdom and practicing it.

Verse 14

Wisdom can deliver from insurmountable odds.

Verse 15

Wisdom is better than strength. Wisdom is better than weapons of war. Wisdom stands in bold relief against the great king and the military might of the city. A small city and a poor man with wisdom delivered the city when everything was going against it.

Verse 16

The tragedy which came after the victory was that the one through his wisdom who delivered the city was soon forgotten.

Verses 17-18

The tragic lesson to be learned is that one foolish act can undo the fruit of wisdom.

This interesting story has a counterpart in the Christian age.

1. Wisdom would be the New Testament entrusted today to the church.
2. The small city would be the church. (Luke 12:32, Hebrews 12:22-23)
3. The great king refers to Satan who sets himself against the chosen of God. (John 12:31)
4. The poor wise man would represent Jesus Christ whose wisdom, was by some, forgotten. (Mark 6:3; 2 Corinthians 8:9; Ephesians 1:7-8; Colossians 2:2-3)

Chapter 10

The first eleven verses are a series of sayings and illustrations which further demonstrate the principals set forth at the close of chapter nine.

Verse 1

The tie in from chapter 9 verse 18 is “one sinner destroys much good” and is illustrated here by the flies which fall into the perfumer’s oil. A precious, expensive jar of perfume can be ruined by the foreign influence of dead flies.

The lesson to be learned is that a righteous person can be destroyed by one sinful act. One foolish thing can make people forget all the good you do.

The meaning of “dead flies” or literally “flies of death” is that the flies are poisonous, destructive creatures which can potentially corrupt and destroy. Even in life, how often does the one secret, unconfessed sin poison the mind until it renders the whole of man useless?

We can learn from the “flies of death” that there is no such thing as insignificant sins.

Verse 2

Pagans have long believed that the right is synonymous with good luck, while the left is identified with bad luck. We say today, “his heart is in the right place,” meaning his heart directs him toward the right.

For years many considered left-handed people shifty, sinister, and generally distrustful. This was true because the majority of people were right handed. So they associated wisdom with the right and foolishness with the left. The right hand has always been a place of honor.

Verse 3

“Walks along the road” suggests that in his simplest acts he gives evidence of being a fool.

Verse 4

If one moves from his position of wisdom, his only alternative is to follow the behavior of the fool.

Verses 5-7

When power or authority falls into the hands of unwise men, errors are committed and injustice reigns.

Verses 8-11

These verses give four illustrations which demonstrate the foolishness of working without the aid of wisdom.

Verse 8

“Digging a pit” would be an effort to try and snare another person or do him harm. “Breaking through a wall” implies an effort to steal from his neighbor. The principal of retribution is also taught. One who digs a pit will fall into it and the one who breaks through a wall will be bitten by a serpent.

Verse 9

This verse speaks to accidents happening in everyday work when wisdom is not employed.

Verse 10

When wisdom is not employed, the maximum benefit of men’s activities of work will be lessened.

Verse 11

One who possesses the secret of charming the snake but does not use it and is bitten by it, what benefit is gained from such wisdom. Wisdom teaches that both the serpent and the slanderer be controlled before they have an opportunity to destroy.

It is one thing to possess wisdom. It is something else to use it to your advantage.

Verse 12

This verse contrasts the wise man’s speech with the foolish man’s speech. Gracious words of praise and encouragement are considered “sacrifices” as they proceed from the mouth of those who possess wisdom.

The poison from the mouth of the fool destroys.

Verse 13

The beginning of the fool's conversation is found in jest and folly, but before it is ended the element of evil characterizes their words—"wicked madness."

Verse 14

One characteristic of the fool is that he boasts about tomorrow, his promised accomplishments, his own greatness, and his importance to society. When he boasts of tomorrow, he is speaking of that which he knows the least.

"Fool" means one who is a "dense confused thinker."

Verse 15

The fool's toil or labor is without God's approval. He does not have any common sense. He is so void of understanding that he does not know how to go to a city nor his way home.

Verse 16

The land is impoverished when the ruler behaves as a child.

"Princes feasting in the morning" means that the princes start the day frolicking in intoxication and sensual enjoyment when they should have attended to honest work and important matters of the state. Isaiah 5:11-12

Verse 17

This verse contrasts verse 16. When the king does use his wisdom, he is a blessing.

Verses 18-20

These verses demonstrate the value of wisdom over folly by using three negative warnings.

Verse 18

"Rafters" refers to the state of affairs in the nation. When rulers do not tend to their affairs, the nation falls apart. "Indolence" refers to much slothfulness or laziness. When there is little concern for the subjects, judicial matters go unattended. The rafters sag and through inattentiveness the house leaks.

Verse 19

The officials seek a feast, wine and money. They spend their time in revelry.

Solomon acquired the money to carry out all his outlandish experiments and pursue his luxurious personal pleasures by taxing the people heavily and survived the criticism of the people. However, Rehoboam could not get by with his excessive taxation. The people rebelled.

Verse 20

One should refrain from lifting a voice against a king.

“Curse” means to speak lightly of. Secrets have wings. Words spoken in confidence often find wings and fly to the ears of those spoken about. One must guard against entertaining evil thoughts in the heart, for in some unguarded moment the words will find their way through the lips to the ears of others.

Chapter 11

Solomon now turns to his final advice. He urges his readers to trust God and work hard. He demonstrates a concern for the happiness of others and urges work, combined with pleasure, before old age makes such activity impossible.

Verse 1

“Cast” means “send forth” and is the image of a merchant man sending forth his ship laden with trade goods. One does not know when the ship will return. Just as the ship returns to reward the one who sent it forth, so God will restore generously the one who demonstrates compassion upon others.

Verse 2

“Misfortune” is an evil that results in loss of possessions or friends. To avoid “misfortune” we are to help as many people as is possible. In helping others, when our need is apparent, help will be forthcoming.

Verse 3

Mankind may fret or even suffer from too much rain or too little, but he cannot control it. The tree may fall from the blowing of the wind and man cannot prevent its destructiveness.

Verse 4

One should do the very best work he can and let God care for him. One must employ wise judgment, not fear or inactivity.

Verse 5

Two illustrations are used in this verse to say that man does not know the activity of God. We do not know the path of the wind or how bones are formed in the womb of a woman, nor do we know the activities of God who makes all things.

Verse 6

This verse just reiterates the theme—work, do not be idle.

Verse 7

Light represents “life.” To see the sun communicates the idea of being alive. So, no matter how difficult the tasks may become, or how sad the circumstances surrounding life, it is still a good thing to be alive.

Verse 8

“Days of darkness” refers to the grave.

Verse 9

Solomon directs this advice to the young because they have the pathway of life before them. Their hopes, dreams, and ambitions will be shaped by the attitudes formed while still young. Solomon is encouraging the pursuit of pleasure tempered with the awareness that God will bring all activities into judgment.

Verse 10

Solomon tells the youth to avoid that which injures the inner and the outer man—the spiritual and the physical. That which robs youth of good times, pleasant days, desire of the eyes, and general happiness are to be shunned. Young people are exhorted to find genuine joy in their youth. Sin brings decay and sickness.

Chapter 12

Young people are to have fun, but they are to keep in mind God made them and why they were made. God is their Creator and so has the right to admonish them toward wise behavior. He knows what will bring man happiness.

Verse 1

Life is vigorous, the accent is on youth, the joys are sweet, the time to be alive is now. Soon the joys which are now within the reach of youth will slip away. Man always moves into the period of decline.

The “evil days” are a reference to the final, crippling stages of old age. The closing days of life lose the pleasure of youth and the prime of life.

“No delight in them” means that one does not find pleasure in the loss of strength, eyesight, and hearing; or does he look forward to the time when no longer can he walk or properly chew his food.

Verses 2-8, picture the final “evil days” which await man.

Verse 2

This verse presents a picture of the end of life under the sun. Just as man’s life slowly slips toward the grave the light diminishes. The sun, light, moon, and stars represent life from “childhood” to the “prime of life” until the “evil days.” Each light is extinguished and the darkness (death) comes.

“Clouds” are symbolic of trouble and could refer to judgment.

Verse 3

The “house” represents the whole person while the “watchmen” would be arms or hands. They are the protectors or guards of the house. They are afflicted with palsy and thus tremble.

The “mighty men” are the legs now bent and stooped. Man can no longer walk erectly.

The “grinding ones” are the teeth. They cease to function and “stand idle,” because they are few and are inefficient in the chewing process.

“Windows” refers to the eyes. No longer will they see the light under the sun.

Verse 4

The “door” refers to the mouth. Psalm 141:3 It is possible that since the teeth are nearly gone, the lips now shut more closely. The chewing described as a “door opening onto a street” suggests communication which has now ceased. The “sound of the grinding mill is low” because the lips are drawn over the toothless gums and the appetite and pleasure of eating is gone.

“The sound of the bird” suggests that older people arise at the first sounds of birds in the morning. They are anxious to start the day after restless and sometimes painful nights.

“The daughters of song” represent the voice and ears of the aged when they no longer can produce melodious songs or discern those sung by others. 2 Samuel 19:34-35

Verse 5

Old people when speech and hearing is dulled often find themselves having difficulty in ascending steps or hills and often they are short of breath.

“Terrors on the road” refers to obstacles over which they would stumble or wicked individuals over which they have little or no defense.

The “almond tree blossoms” refers to the white hair. The almond tree first puts out light pink blossoms which turn snowy white before falling from the limb to the ground.

The “grasshopper drags himself along” pictures the inept physical condition of the dying man.

The “caper berry” is desire and appetite. The “caper berry” is considered a stimulant and the obvious meaning is that neither the appetite nor the sexual desire can be aroused.

“Eternal home” speaks more to duration than it does to the place.

The “mourners” are paid “wailers” who prepare even before the death to make loud lamentations in the streets and places of commerce. (Iran)

Verse 6

“Remember him” refers to the frailties of old age which were intended to motivate young men to live their lives to the fullest joys before the body breaks and the soul slips away.

The “silver cord” and the “golden bowl” represent the lamp which hangs from the ceiling of oriental or near-eastern homes. They are valuable and much to be desired. But, this is symbolic of one’s life. It is going to be extinguished regardless of how fine it is. The cord breaks and allows the bowl to fall to the floor and break and the oil to be released upon the floor.

The “pitcher” and the “wheel” illustrate the same truth as the cord and lamp. The broken pitcher renders the well useless, while the wheel falls into the cistern when it breaks, preventing the water from being drawn.

The “pitcher” could be the heart and blood system, while the “wheel” at the cistern could represent the aorta and left ventricle.

Verse 7

The body of man returns to its primary source—the dust of the earth. The spirit is released from the body through the death event and does not join the process of decay but returns to God.

God is the Creator. This means He is the Owner. Solomon argues for the proper behavior on the basis of final retribution.

Verse 8

Since all is vanity, we should do all in our power to enter a living relationship with God who is the absolute true being.

Verse 9

This may be a reference to the book of Proverbs.

Verse 10

Solomon never turned to obscene language, but spoke discretely, guardedly, and “delightfully.”

Verse 11

The words of wise men are like goads. They are designed to guide both the teacher and his audience on the road of right behavior.

A “goad” is a stick or pole with a sharp point used to prod oxen or sheep in the direction one wishes them to move.

“Well-driven nails” means to plant or drive in, to fasten and secure. The words of wise-men “nail down” the truths which change men’s lives and their eternal destinies.

Solomon claims inspiration when he says, “They are given by one Shepherd.”

Verse 12

Solomon is warning against those books or writings which contradict the truth and lead one away from the path of righteousness. Ecclesiastes proves the emptiness of life apart from God, but it also demands that one fill the void of his life with the activity of doing the will of God.

Verse 13

The theme of Ecclesiastes is “fear God and keep His commandments.” Nothing escapes the knowledge of God. He will bring “every act” into judgment.