



The Book Of Ecclesiastes



**A Study Guide With Introductory Comments,
Summaries, Outlines, And Review Questions**

MARK A. COPELAND

The Book Of Ecclesiastes

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This study guide was developed in preparation for teaching adult Bible classes.

- ♦ The objectives for each section are usually things I plan to emphasize during the class.
- ♦ I have found that summarizing and outlining helps me to better understand the Word of God. It is a practice I highly recommend to others.
- ♦ I generally delete the answers to the review questions before printing the material and giving it to the students. But that you might know what answers were intended by the questions, I have included them in these guides.

These outlines were developed in the course of my ministry as a preacher of the gospel. They are included in **The Executable Outlines Series**, a collection my sermon outlines and Bible study materials. Visit the EO web site (exeout.com) to browse or download more material. Feel free to use them as they are, or adapt them to suit your own personal style. To God be the glory!

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copeland@usa.com

The Book Of Ecclesiastes

Introduction

The book of Ecclesiastes has long fascinated many people. Some feel it is the most puzzling book in the Old Testament. It has been called one of the most melancholy books of the Bible. It has been used by some to teach that man ceases to exist after death.

It is not a book that Christians should ignore. As with all Old Testament Scripture, it was written for our learning (**Ro 15:4**) and admonition (**1 Co 10:11**). It is therefore profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness (**2 Ti 3:16-17**).

The book has special relevance today in our materialistic society, for it helps us to see the vanity of many earthly pursuits. It contains lessons for all, but especially for the young who have so much to lose should they make the wrong choices early in life.

TITLE

In the Hebrew Bible, the book is called “**Qoheleth**” (Kohelah) which means “preacher” (cf. **1:1**). The term suggests one who speaks to an assembly. The translators of the Septuagint (a Greek version of the Old Testament) called it “**Ekklesiastes**”, which also means “preacher”. The word is derived from “ekklesia”, meaning “assembly”.

AUTHOR AND DATE OF WRITING

Jewish and early Christian tradition attribute the book to **Solomon**. The author identifies himself as “**the son of David, king in Jerusalem.**” (**1:1**) He also refers to himself as “**the Preacher**” (**1:1,2,12; 7:27; 12:8,9,10**). Internal evidences point to Solomon. Note the references to:

- ◆ His wisdom - **1:16**; cf. **1 Kin 3:12**
- ◆ His building activities - **2:4-6**; cf. **1 Kin 7:1-12**
- ◆ His wealth - **2:7-9**; cf. **2 Chr 9:13-28**
- ◆ His activities after writing this book - **12:9-10**; cf. **1 Kin 4:30-34**

Some question whether certain conditions described in the book (cf. **3:16; 4:13-16; 5:8**) existed during the reign of Solomon. But these conditions could have been noted by Solomon in neighboring countries, or in lower-level positions of his administration.

In my opinion, the evidence is simply not compelling to reject the traditional view of Solomon as the author. If Solomon is indeed the author, then the book was written around **945 B.C.**

PURPOSE FOR WRITING

The Preacher wondered what many have asked: “*What profit has a man from all his labor in*

which he toils under the sun?” (1:3). In other words, what value or purpose is there for living? What is the meaning of life? Having been blessed with great material resources and wisdom, the Preacher was able to explore all avenues in his search. He writes to share with us the results of his own investigation, and to offer observations and words of counsel gleaned from his search.

MESSAGE

There are two main messages. The first is stated in the prologue: *“All is vanity” (1:2).* This theme is repeated by the Preacher time and again:

- ◆ Prior to describing his search for meaning - **1:14**
- ◆ Throughout the course of his search:
 - ✓ The vanity of pleasure - **2:1**
 - ✓ The vanity of industry (labor) - **2:11,22-23; 4:4**
 - ✓ The vanity of human wisdom - **2:15**
 - ✓ The vanity of all life - **2:17**
 - ✓ The vanity of leaving an inheritance - **2:18-21**
- ◆ Throughout his words of counsel and wisdom:
 - ✓ The vanity of earthly existence - **3:19-21**
 - ✓ The vanity of acquiring riches over family - **4:7-8**
 - ✓ The vanity of political popularity - **4:16**
 - ✓ The vanity of many dreams and many words - **5:7**
 - ✓ The vanity of loving abundance - **5:10**
 - ✓ The vanity of wealth without the gift of God to enjoy it - **6:2**
 - ✓ The vanity of wandering desire - **6:9**
 - ✓ The vanity of foolish laughter - **7:6**
 - ✓ The vanity of injustice in this life - **8:14**
 - ✓ The vanity of the days of darkness - **11:8**
 - ✓ The vanity of childhood and youth - **11:10**

Indeed, the key word in this book is *“vanity”*. It occurs 35 times in 29 verses. It means “futility, uselessness, nothingness.” But a key phrase to be noted is *“under the sun”*. It is found 29 times in 27 verses. It suggests that this message of vanity is true when one looks at life purely from an earthly perspective. Leave God and the afterlife out of the equation, and life is truly vanity!

Therefore another message in this book is **the importance of serving God throughout life**. This is the message the Preacher would leave with the young (cf. **11:9-12:1**), and is stated in his final words:

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.” (12:13)

Throughout the book, we will find what the Preacher later describes as “goads” and “nails” (cf. **12:11**). These are wise sayings that will “prod” our thinking, and exhortations that will provide stability and direction for living. Ecclesiastes is certainly a book worthy of careful study!

BRIEF OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION AND PROLOGUE (1:1-3)

I. THE PREACHER'S SEARCH FOR MEANING IN LIFE (1:4-2:26)

II. THE PREACHER'S OBSERVATIONS FROM LIFE (3:1-6:12)

III. THE PREACHER'S COUNSEL FOR LIFE (7:1-12:7)

EPILOGUE AND CONCLUSION (12:8-14)

REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE INTRODUCTION

- 1) **What is the book of Ecclesiastes called in the Hebrew Bible? What does it mean?**
 - Qoheleth (Koheleth); preacher
- 2) **What does the word “ecclesiastes” mean? What Greek word is it derived from?**
 - Preacher;
 - Ekklesia, meaning “an assembly”
- 3) **According to Jewish and early Christian tradition, who is the author, and when was it likely written?**
 - Solomon; 945 B.C.
- 4) **What internal evidence is there to identify the author? (1:16; 2:4-6,7-9; 12:9-10)**
 - His wisdom
 - His building activities
 - His wealth
 - His activities after writing the book
- 5) **What question does the Preacher seek to answer in this book? (1:3)**
 - “What profit has a man from all his labor in which he toils under the sun?”
- 6) **What key word is found in this book? What key phrase is repeated time and again?**
 - Vanity; under the sun
- 7) **What are the two main messages found in this book? (1:14; 12:13)**
 - The vanity of life under the sun (life purely from an earthly perspective)
 - The importance of fearing God and keeping His commandments
- 8) **According to the brief outline above, what are the three main divisions of the book?**
 - The Preacher's search for meaning in life (1-2)
 - The Preacher's observations from life (3-6)
 - The Preacher's counsel for life (7-12)

The Book Of Ecclesiastes

Chapter One

OBJECTIVES IN STUDYING THIS CHAPTER

- 1) To consider the author, theme, and underlying question of this book
- 2) To note the Preacher's observations about the cycles of life, and his conclusion regarding the value of human wisdom

SUMMARY

Ecclesiastes opens with a prologue in which the author identifies himself, declares his theme, and introduces the question addressed in this book. He describes himself as "the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem" (cf. **1:12**). As he begins his "sermon", he does so in way that certainly grabs your attention: declaring all to be vanity (useless). Having our attention, he asks the question that will be answered in the course of his sermon: what profit does a man have from all his labor in which he toils under the sun (**1-3**)?

It is a question that is prompted by what he sees in the cycles of life. Generations of people come and go. The sun rises and sets, only to do the same day after day. Wind currents and water cycles are constantly repeated, and man is never satisfied with what he sees or hears. While we think new things are being done, it is only because we don't remember the past. In reality there is nothing new under the sun (**4-11**).

With the question introduced, the Preacher describes his own search. As king over Israel in Jerusalem, he wanted to know what everyone one wants to know - what profit is there for all the labor done under the sun? Right up front he tells us what he found: all is vanity and grasping for the wind. Having been blessed with greatness and wisdom (from God, cf. **1 Kin 3:12-13**), he began his search exploring wisdom, madness and folly. He found that much wisdom and knowledge (i.e., human wisdom) was only the source of much grief and sorrow (**12-18**).

OUTLINE

I. PROLOGUE TO THE BOOK (1:1-3)

A. AUTHOR IDENTIFIED (1)

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

B. THEME STATED (2)

1. "Vanity of vanities...vanity of vanities, all is vanity"
2. All is futile, useless, meaningless!

C. QUESTION RAISED (3)

1. "What profit has a man from all his labor in which he toils under the sun?"
2. This is the question the "Preacher" sought to answer

II. FUTILITY OBSERVED IN THE CYCLES OF LIFE (1:4-11)

A. NOTHING SEEMS TO CHANGE (4-7)

1. Generations come and go, while the earth abides forever
2. The sun is constant with its rising and setting
3. The winds continue their whirling cycle
4. The water cycle also, as rivers run into the seas, and then through evaporation and rain return to the rivers again

B. NOTHING SEEMS TO SATISFY (8)

1. Despite all our labors, man is never truly satisfied
2. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing

C. NOTHING IS NEW UNDER THE SUN (9-11)

1. What will be done is that which has been done
2. If thought to be new, it is has been done in ancient times
3. We simply don't remember the past, nor will the future remember the present

III. THE FUTILITY OF HUMAN WISDOM (1:12-18)

A. THE PREACHER DESCRIBES HIS SEARCH (12-15)

1. He was king over Israel in Jerusalem
2. He determined to use wisdom to seek and search all that has been done "under heaven"
3. A task that he understood God had given to all men, to challenge them
4. He summarizes what he found, having seen all the works done "under the sun"
 - a. They are vanity and grasping for the wind
 - b. For there is little one can do to make significant changes

B. THE PREACHER APPLIED HIS GOD-GIVEN WISDOM (16-17a)

1. He acknowledged the greatness and wisdom he had attained
2. He therefore sought to apply it to understand wisdom, madness, and folly

C. THE PREACHER CONCLUDES (HUMAN) WISDOM IS FUTILE (17b-18)

1. It was like grasping for wind
2. More wisdom and knowledge just increases grief and sorrow

REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE CHAPTER

1) What are the main points of this chapter?

- Prologue to the book (1-3)
- Futility observed in the cycles of life (4-11)

- Futility of human wisdom (12-18)
- 2) How does the author describe himself? (1)**
 - The Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem
- 3) What is the theme of this book, as stated in verse 2?**
 - “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity”
- 4) What is the key question that this book seeks to address? (3)**
 - “What profit has a man from all in his labor in which he toils under the sun?”
- 5) What illustrations are given to show the futility observed in the cycles of life? (4-7)**
 - The passing of generations
 - The rising and setting of the sun
 - The whirling cycles of the wind
 - The water cycle, from rain to sea back to rain
- 6) What is never satisfied? (8)**
 - The eye with seeing, the ear with hearing
- 7) Why is there nothing new under the sun? (9)**
 - History simply repeats itself
- 8) Why do we think something is new? (10-11)**
 - We have forgotten what has happened in history
- 9) What did the Preacher determine to do? Why? (13)**
 - To seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven
 - It was something God has given man to do
- 10) Having seen the works done under the sun, what did he conclude? Why? (14-15)**
 - All is vanity and grasping for the wind
 - Because one cannot make any significant changes that are lasting
- 11) What did he acknowledge he had attained? (16)**
 - Great wisdom and understanding
- 12) What did he set his heart to know? (17)**
 - Wisdom, madness, and folly
- 13) What conclusion did he draw? Why? (18)**
 - It was grasping for the wind
 - For in much wisdom is much grief, and increasing knowledge increases sorrow

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Chapter Two

OBJECTIVES IN STUDYING THIS CHAPTER

- 1) To note the degree to which the Preacher sought for meaning in life under the sun
- 2) To consider his estimation of mirth, pleasure, wine, wisdom, folly and wealth in providing purpose for living
- 3) To appreciate his conclusion for what is best in life, and the One who makes it possible

SUMMARY

In this chapter the Preacher describes the extent of his search for the meaning of life “under the sun.” He explored mirth and pleasure, finding them to be vanity. He experimented with wine and folly, while guiding himself with his wisdom. Not withholding anything his eyes desired, he used his great wealth to build and accumulate everything his heart wanted. He certainly enjoyed himself while doing it (1-10).

Yet when the Preacher looked back on all he had done, he found it to be vanity and grasping for the wind. Reflecting upon the comparative value of wisdom and folly, he did find wisdom to excel folly. But he also observed that death came to both the wise and the fool, and both soon forgotten. This prompted him to hate life. Even his accumulated wealth provided little respite, for he must leave it to one who may prove to be a fool. Thus he found such efforts to be grievous, leading one to sorrowful days and restless nights (11-23).

He concludes it is best to eat and drink, enjoying what good there is in one’s labor. He realized, however, that the ability to truly enjoy life is a gift from God. He saw that God gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy to a man who is good in His sight. To the sinner, God might give the ability to gather and collect great wealth, but it eventually winds up in the hands of him who is good before God. Thus much labor without God’s blessing is truly vanity and grasping for the wind (24-26).

OUTLINE

I. THE PREACHER’S SEARCH FOR MEANING (2:1-10)

A. A SUMMARY OF HIS SEARCH (1-2)

1. He tested mirth and pleasure, and found them to be vanity
2. He found laughter to be madness, and mirth to accomplish little

B. A DESCRIPTION OF HIS SEARCH (3-10)

1. He experimented with wine and folly
 - a. While guiding himself with wisdom

- b. Seeking to find what is good for men to do “under heaven all the days of their lives”
2. He made many things
 - a. Houses and vineyards
 - b. Gardens and orchards
 - c. Water pools to water fruit trees
3. He acquired whatever he wanted
 - a. Male and female servants, with more born in his house
 - b. Herds and flocks, more than any in Jerusalem before him
 - c. Silver, gold, special treasures of kings and provinces
 - d. Male and female singers, musical instruments of all kinds
4. He became great, and seemingly happy
 - a. Greater than all in Jerusalem before him
 - b. Having all his eyes desired, his heart rejoicing in his labor

II. THE PREACHER’S REFLECTION UPON HIS SEARCH (2:11-23)

A. REFLECTING UPON HIS LABOR (11)

1. Looking back on all his works and labor
2. Find them to be vanity, grasping for wind
3. Concluding there was no profit under the sun

B. REFLECTING UPON WISDOM, MADNESS, AND FOLLY (12-17)

1. He considered the relative value of wisdom, madness, and folly
2. He found that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness
3. Yet the same end (death) befalls the wise and the fool, and both are soon forgotten
4. Prompting him to hate life for its vanity and grasping for the wind

C. REFLECTING UPON HIS WEALTH (18-23)

1. He came to hate his labor and toil under the sun
 - a. Because he must leave it to one after him
 - b. Not knowing whether those who inherit it will be wise or foolish
2. He came to despair his labor under the sun
 - a. For despite one’s wisdom, knowledge and skill, one’s heritage must be left to one who has not labored for it
 - b. This he concluded was vanity and a great evil
 - c. In the end, all one had as a result of his labor and the striving of his heart:
 - 1) Sorrowful days, restless nights
 - 2) Grievous works, leading to vanity

III. THE PREACHER’S CONCLUSION FROM HIS SEARCH (24-26)

A. MAN SHOULD ENJOY THE GOOD IN HIS LABOR (24a)

1. There is nothing better
2. Than to eat, drink, and to enjoy good in one’s labor

B. THE ABILITY TO ENJOY IS A GIFT FROM GOD (24b-26)

1. He saw that this was a gift from God
2. For no one can truly enjoy life without God (cf. footnote, NIV, NASB)
 - a. To those good in His sight, God gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy
 - b. To the sinner, God gives the work of gathering and collecting
 - 1) To give to the one who is good before God
 - 2) For the sinner, his work becomes vanity and grasping for the wind

REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE CHAPTER

1) What are the main points of this chapter?

- The Preacher's search for meaning (1-10)
- The Preacher's reflection upon his search (11-23)
- The Preacher's conclusion from his search (24-26)

2) In his search, what sort of things did the Preacher explore? (1-3)

- Mirth and pleasure
- Wine and folly

3) What guided his heart during the course of his search? (3)

- Wisdom (perhaps that given the Preacher by God?)

4) What things did he accumulate during his search? (4-8)

- Houses and vineyards
- Gardens and orchards
- Fruit trees and water pools to water them
- Male and female servants, along with servants born in his house
- Herds and flocks
- Silver, gold, special treasures
- Male and female singers, musical instruments of all kinds

5) How great did he become? What stayed with him? (9)

- Greater than all who were in Jerusalem before him
- His wisdom

6) What did he get? (10)

- Whatever his eyes desired, any pleasure his heart wanted

7) What was his reaction to this great accumulation of wealth? (10-11)

- He rejoiced in his labor
- But looking back on his works, he found them vanity and grasping for wind, with no profit under the sun

8) What conclusions were drawn about the value of wisdom and folly? (12-16)

- Wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness
- Yet death comes to them both, and they are soon forgotten

9) What did this reflection lead him to do? Why? (17)

- Hate life
- Because all work under the sun was grievous, vanity, and grasping for wind

10) What else caused him to hate his labor? (18)

- The thought that he must leave it to one who comes after him

11) Why did this trouble him? (19-21)

- For the one who receives his inheritance gained through wisdom, knowledge and skill might prove to be a fool

12) What did he conclude was the result of one's labor, striving, and toil for things under the sun? (22-23)

- Sorrowful days, restless nights
- Grievous work, leading to vanity

13) What did he say was the best man could achieve? (24)

- To eat and drink, and enjoy good in his labor

14) But who was capable of achieving this? (24-26)

- The one who was good in God's sight, to whom God gave wisdom, knowledge, and joy

15) What did the sinner receive? For what purpose? (26)

- The task of gathering and collecting
- To give to him who was good before God

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Chapter Three

OBJECTIVES IN STUDYING THIS CHAPTER

- 1) To reflect upon the Preacher's observations gleaned from his search for the purpose of life under the sun
- 2) To understand why God's ways are sometimes inexplicable, and why injustice along with wickedness are allowed to exist
- 3) To be reminded as to what is best for man to do in life under the sun

SUMMARY

In the first two chapters, the Preacher described the extent of his search for the purpose of life under the sun. In this chapter, and the three to follow, he shares observations gleaned during the course of his search.

In a well-known passage, we are told that to everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven. The Preacher has seen that God has given man the task to seek out God's purpose by putting eternity in man's heart. But then he also saw that no one is able to find out what God does from beginning to end, and no one can change what He decides to do. Why does God act this way? Why are His purposes often incomprehensible? The Preacher offers that God does this so man might fear before Him, seeing that God will require an account for what is done. This prompts the Preacher to state again (cf. **2:24-26**) what he believes is the best one can do: to rejoice, do good, to eat and drink, enjoying the good in their labor. This he concludes is the gift of God (**1-15**).

Next he describes what he saw "under the sun". In places where there should have been judgment and righteousness, he saw wickedness and iniquity! Why does God allow it? He reasoned in his heart that God will judge the righteous and wicked, and that there must be a time for every purpose and for every work. He told himself that God tests men, to help them see that they are little different from beasts. Both man and beasts die, and both return to the dust. From a purely earthly perspective, there is no advantage of man over beasts, for one cannot see whether the spirit of man goes upward (but cf. **12:7**) while the spirit of animals goes downward to the earth. This led him to the perception stated once again (cf. **2:24-26; 3:12-13**), that it is best for a man to rejoice in his works. This is man's heritage, for who can bring one (back) to see what will happen (on the earth) after him (**16-22**)?

OUTLINE

I. THE INEXPLICABLE PURPOSE OF GOD (3:1-15)

A. A TIME FOR EVERY PURPOSE (1-8)

1. To everything there is a season
2. A time for every purpose under heaven
 - a. A time to be born, and a time to die
 - b. A time to plant, and a time to pluck what is planted
 - c. A time to kill, and a time to heal
 - d. A time to break down, and a time to build up
 - e. A time to weep, and a time to laugh
 - f. A time to mourn, and a time to dance
 - g. A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones
 - h. A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing
 - i. A time to gain, and a time to lose
 - j. A time to keep, and a time to throw away
 - k. A time to tear, and a time to sew
 - l. A time to keep silence, and a time to speak
 - m. A time to love, and a time to hate
 - n. A time of war, and a time of peace

B. MAN'S INABILITY TO FIND OUT GOD'S PURPOSE (9-15)

1. God has put it in man to seek out what he cannot find
 - a. Again, the Preacher asks what profit there is one's labor
 - b. He sees that God has:
 - 1) Given man the task with which to be occupied
 - 2) Made everything beautiful in its time
 - 3) Put eternity in man's heart
 - c. Yet no one can find the work that God does from beginning to end
2. What the Preacher concludes is best for people to do
 - a. Rejoice, and do good in their lives
 - b. Eat, drink, and enjoy the good of all their labor
 - c. It is the gift of God (cf. **2:24-26**)
3. What the Preacher offers as God's reason for the way He works
 - a. He knows that whatever God does, man cannot change
 - b. God acts the way He does, that men should fear before Him
 - c. For God requires an account of what is past (done)

II. THE INJUSTICE AND WICKEDNESS OF MEN (3:16-22)

A. WHAT THE PREACHER SAW (16)

1. In the place of judgment, there was wickedness
2. In the place of righteousness, there was iniquity

B. WHAT THE PREACHER REASONED (17-21)

1. God will judge the righteous and the wicked
2. There must be a time for every purpose and for every work
3. God evidently allows injustice to test the hearts of men
 - a. That they may see that they are like beasts
 - b. That what happens to beasts will happen to them

- 1) As one dies, so dies the other
- 2) Man has no advantage over beasts
- 3) All return to the dust
- c. Who knows that the spirit of man goes upward, and the spirit of the beast goes downward?

C. WHAT THE PREACHER CONCLUDED (22)

1. There is nothing better than rejoicing in one's own works, which is his heritage
2. For who can bring man to see what will happen after him?

REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE CHAPTER

1) What are the main points of this chapter?

- The inexplicable purpose of God (1-15)
- The injustice and wickedness of men (16-22)

2) What does the preacher say about everything under heaven? (1)

- There is a season, a time for every purpose

3) List some examples of how he illustrates "a time for every purpose" (2-8)

- A time to be born, and a time to die
- A time to weep, and a time to laugh
- A time to keep silence, and a time to speak
- A time of war, and a time of peace

4) What question does the Preacher restate? (9, cf. 1:3)

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

5) What four things has he seen? (10-11)

- The God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied (cf. 1:13)
- God has made everything beautiful in its time
- God has put eternity in man's heart
- No one can find out the work God has done from beginning to end

6) What does the Preacher conclude is best for people to do? Why? (12-13)

- Rejoice, and do good in their lives
- Eat, drink, and enjoy the good of all their labor
- It is the gift of God (cf. 2:24-26)

7) Why has God made what He does unchangeable? (14)

- That men should fear before Him

8) What will God require? (15)

- An account of what is past

9) As the Preacher looked in places where there should have been judgment and righteousness, what did he see? (16)

- Wickedness and iniquity

10) What did he reason in his heart about this? (17)

- God shall judge the righteous and the wicked
- There shall be a time for every purpose and for every work

11) What did he tell himself was the reason God allowed such things? (18)

- God tests men, that they may see that they are like beasts

12) What does man have in common with beasts? (19-20)

- They both die
- They both return to the dust

13) What is different between man and beast? (21)

- The spirit of man goes upward (cf. 12:7)
- The spirit of the beast goes down to the earth

14) What did the Preacher perceive was best for man to do? Why? (22)

- To rejoice in his own works, for that is his heritage
- Who can bring him to see what will happen after him?

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Chapter Four

OBJECTIVES IN STUDYING THIS CHAPTER

- 1) To reflect upon the Preacher's observations gleaned from his search for the purpose of life under the sun
- 2) To consider the vanity of skillful work, isolation, and popularity
- 3) To appreciate the value of friendship and working together

SUMMARY

The Preacher continues to share his observations gleaned during the course of his search for the purpose of life under the sun. Earlier he related the injustice he saw (cf. **3:16**). Now we are told how he considered those who were oppressed with no comforter. In such a state, he concluded the dead were better than the living, and better than both was to never be born (**1-4**).

The Preacher then describes what he saw as the vanity of toil and skillful work, especially when one is alone. While one who does nothing is a fool and consumes his own flesh, it is better to have a little with quietness than a lot with much toil. A grave misfortune is the person with no companion, son, nor brother, who labors endlessly for riches that do not satisfy and does not consider who will receive that for which he deprives himself of much good in life. On the other hand, the Preacher saw great value in friendship. He illustrates the principle of synergy in their work and how they can help one another in times of need (**5-12**).

The chapter closes with an illustration of the vanity of popularity. While a young and wise man who becomes king may be popular at first, with the passing of time he is not appreciated by those who come along later (**13-16**).

OUTLINE

I. THE OPPRESSION OF MEN (4:1-3)

A. WHAT THE PREACHER REVIEWED (1)

1. He considered the oppression done under the sun
2. He saw the tears of the oppressed, who had no comforter
3. He observed power on the side of the oppressors

B. WHAT THE PREACHER REASONED (2-3)

1. He praised the dead more than the living
2. Better than both is the person who:

- a. Has never existed
- b. Has not seen the evil work done under the sun

II. THE VANITY OF TOIL AND SKILLFUL WORK (4:4-6)

A. IT BREEDS ENVY IN OTHERS (4)

1. He saw that toil and skillful labor is envied by others
2. This too is vanity and grasping for wind

B. TWO WAYS TO REACT TO THIS VANITY (5-6)

1. The fool does nothing, and consumes his own flesh
2. It is better to have a little with quietness

III. THE VANITY OF ISOLATION (4:7-12)

A. THE VANITY OF BEING ALONE (7-8)

1. He saw more vanity under the sun
2. A person who was alone, without companion, son, or brother
 - a. With no end to his labors, with no satisfaction with his riches
 - b. Who does not consider for whom he labors and deprives himself of good
3. This was vanity and a grave misfortune

B. THE VALUE OF FRIENDS (9-12)

1. Two are better than one, for they have good reward for their labor
2. If one falls, the other can lift him up
3. Their combined body heat can keep them warm
4. They can withstand one who would seek to overpower them
5. A threefold cord is not quickly broken

IV. THE VANITY OF POPULARITY (4:13-16)

A. A TALE OF TWO MEN (13-15)

1. It is better to be a poor and wise youth, than an old and foolish king who will not accept criticism
2. For the young man, though born poor, comes out of prison to become king and the living were with him

B. YET POPULARITY IS SHORT-LIVED (16)

1. The young king might rule over a populous nation
2. But another generation will arise that will not rejoice in him

REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE CHAPTER

1) What are the main points of this chapter?

- The oppression of men (1-3)

- The vanity of toil and skillful work (4-6)
- The vanity of isolation (7-12)
- The vanity of popularity (13-16)

2) What did the Preacher observe regarding oppression? (1)

- Power was on the side of the oppressor, the oppressed had no comforter

3) What did this observation prompt the Preacher to do? (2-3)

- Praise the dead more than the living
- Reason that better than both was never to be born

4) What did he observe about toil and skillful work? (4)

- It prompted envy from one's neighbor
- It too was vanity and grasping for the wind

5) How does he describe the fool who doesn't work? (5)

- As one who folds his hands and consumes his own flesh

6) What is better than both hands full, but with toil and grasping for the wind? (6)

- A handful with quietness

7) What is described as vanity and a grave misfortune? (7-8)

- One who is alone, who labors endlessly for riches that do not satisfy
- Who never considers for whom he is toiling and depriving himself of much good

8) How does the Preacher illustrate the value of friendship? (9-12)

- Two working together accomplish more (the principle of synergy)
- Having someone to help you if you fall
- Surviving a cold night by sharing body heat
- Two can withstand one
- A threefold cord is not easily broken

10) How does the Preacher illustrate the vanity of popularity? (13-16)

- With the example of a youth who becomes king, but as he gets older he is not appreciated by the people who come afterward

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Chapter Five

OBJECTIVES IN STUDYING THIS CHAPTER

- 1) To reflect upon the Preacher's observations gleaned from his search for the purpose of life
- 2) To notice the proper way to approach God in worship, and the danger of foolish vows
- 3) To appreciate the limitations of riches, and how the ability to enjoy them is a gift from God

SUMMARY

Having observed much folly during his search for the purpose of life, the Preacher offers counsel on such things as worshipping God, making promises, injustice in high places, and properly using riches.

He urges caution when one goes to the house of God. It is better to draw near to hear than to offer the sacrifices of fools. Therefore be careful what you say (cf. **Ja 1:26**). When you do make a vow or promise, don't delay to pay it. It is better not to vow, than to vow and not keep it. Do not let your mouth get you into trouble, thinking you can simply excuse your way out of promises you have made. The righteous anger of God is to be feared (**1-7**).

Returning to an earlier theme (cf. **3:16-17; 4:1-3**), he says not to marvel when you see the oppression of the poor, or the perversion of justice and righteousness. Remember that every one answers to someone higher. Even the king is dependent upon those who serve him, implying that he too will be held accountable (**8-9**).

Another theme throughout the Preacher's observations is the proper use of riches. Here he discusses the vanity of loving riches, and the evil of hoarding riches to one's hurt. Riches in of themselves do not satisfy, they can be the source of much anxiety, and can easily perish through misfortune (**10-17**).

It is fitting to enjoy the good in one's labor, but the ability to enjoy is a gift from God. God will keep one who is so blessed busy with the joy of his heart (**18-20**).

OUTLINE

I. THE WORSHIP OF GOD (5:1-3)

A. WALK CAREFULLY (1)

1. When you go to house of God, draw near to hear
2. Do not give the sacrifice of fools, for they do evil

B. TALK CAUTIOUSLY (2-3)

1. Do not be rash with your mouth

2. Do not be hasty with your heart may utter before God
3. Let your words be few
4. Dreams (misleading?) come through much activity
5. A fool is known by his many words

II. THE TAKING OF VOWS (5:4-7)

A. FULFILL YOUR VOWS (4-5)

1. When you make a vow, do not delay to pay it
2. God has no pleasure in fools, pay what you have vowed
3. It is better not to vow, than to vow and not pay

B. WATCH YOUR MOUTH (6-7)

1. Do not let your mouth lead you to sin
2. Don't think you can excuse your rash statements and avoid God's anger
3. The multitude of dreams and many words are vanity; fear God!

III. THE INJUSTICE OF MEN (5:8-9)

A. DON'T MARVEL AT OPPRESSION (8a)

1. When you see the oppression of the poor
2. When you see violent perversion of justice and righteousness

B. EVERYONE IS ACCOUNTABLE (8b-9)

1. High officials must answer to even higher officials
2. As the profit of the land is for all, even the king is served by the field

IV. THE VANITY OF RICHES (5:10-17)

A. THEY DO NOT SATISFY (10-12)

1. He who loves silver and riches will not be satisfied with increase
2. As goods increase, so does one's appetite; there is little profit (satisfaction) other than to see them
3. While the sleep of a laboring man is sweet, the abundance of the rich troubles his sleep

B. THEY ARE PERISHABLE (13-17)

1. A severe evil seen is riches kept (hoarded) to the hurt of the owner
2. Such riches can perish through misfortune, leaving the owner...
 - a. With nothing for one's descendants
 - b. To go as naked as he came into this world
 - c. Eating in darkness, with much sorrow, sickness, and anger

V. THE PROPER USE OF RICHES (5:18-20)

A. ENJOY THEM AS A GIFT FROM GOD (18)

1. It is good to eat, drink, and enjoy the good of one's labor

2. This is one's heritage from God

B. THE ABILITY TO ENJOY IS A GIFT FROM GOD (19-20)

1. Riches, and the ability to enjoy them, are a gift from God
2. One whom God has so blessed will not reflect unduly on his life, because God keeps him preoccupied with joy and gladness

REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE CHAPTER

1) What are the main points of this chapter?

- The worship of God (1-3)
- The taking of vows (4-7)
- The injustice of men (8-9)
- The vanity of riches (10-17)
- The proper use of riches (18-20)

2) How should one conduct themselves when they seek to worship God? (1)

- Walk prudently; draw near to hear, not offer the sacrifice of fools

3) What two principles concerning vows are given by the Preacher? (4,5)

- When you make a vow, do not delay to pay it
- It is better not to vow, than to vow and not pay

4) Why should we not marvel when we see oppression, and perversion of justice and righteousness? (8)

- For those in positions of authority have authorities watching over them

5) Why is it vanity to love riches? (10)

- Those who love riches will never be satisfied

6) What is a frequent consequence of having an abundance of wealth? (12)

- Troubled sleep caused by worrying about wealth

7) What is described as “a severe evil under the sun”? (13-17)

- Riches kept (hoarded) to one's own hurt
- Riches lost through misfortune, leaving one in sorrow, sickness, and anger

8) What does the Preacher see as good and fitting for one to do? (18)

- To eat, drink, and enjoy the good of one's labor under the sun

9) What is described as “the gift of God”? (19)

- To be given riches and wealth, to be able to eat of it, and rejoice in one's labor

10) Why will a person blessed by God not dwell unduly on the days of his life? (20)

- Because God will keep him busy with the joy of his heart

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Chapter Six

OBJECTIVES IN STUDYING THIS CHAPTER

- 1) To reflect upon the Preacher's observations gleaned from his search for the purpose of life
- 2) To understand the limitations of riches, and that the ability to enjoy them is a gift from God

SUMMARY

The Preacher continues his observations about the vanity of riches in this chapter (cf. **5:13-20**). He describes a sad, but very common situation: a man blessed with riches, wealth and honor so that he has all that he desires; yet God does not let him have it, and it is consumed by someone else! Such a man, even if he has a hundred children and lives two thousand years, is described as no better than a stillborn child (**1-6**).

His reflections on riches lead the Preacher to conclude that man's labor might feed his mouth, but it does not really satisfy the soul. It is better to have the sight of the eyes (i.e., to enjoy what you see), than to have the wandering of desire which is vanity and grasping for the wind. Since man cannot change that he is subject to life's vanities and unable to contend with God, accumulating many things may only increase vanity in this life. By asking who knows what is good in this short life, and who can tell what will happen in this life after we are gone, the Preacher implies that only God (and not the accumulation of wealth) provides the answer to the vanity of life "under the sun" (**7-12**).

OUTLINE

I. A SAD SITUATION (6:1-6)

A. A COMMON AFFLICTION AMONG MEN (1-2)

1. To receive riches, wealth, and honor from God, all that one desires
2. Yet not be able to enjoy it
 - a. Because God does not give him the ability or power to do so
 - b. Instead a foreigner consumes it (this is vanity, and an evil or grievous affliction)

B. EVEN WITH MANY CHILDREN AND LONG LIFE (3-6)

1. Unless the soul is satisfied with goodness, a stillborn child is better off even though...
 - a. It may come in vanity and depart in darkness
 - b. It's name may be covered with darkness
 - c. It has not seen the sun or known anything
2. For the stillborn child has more rest than one who suffers this affliction
 - a. Even if he lives two thousand years
 - b. For they all eventually go to the same place

II. REFLECTIONS ON RICHES (6:7-12)

A. RICHES CANNOT SATISFY THE SOUL (7-9)

1. They can be consumed, but don't really satisfy
 2. They don't make the wise any better than the fool
 3. They don't make one better than the poor who knows how to conduct himself properly
- cf. **Pro 15:16; 19:1; 28:6**
- Indeed, better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire, which is vanity

B. RICHES CANNOT CHANGE THE VANITY OF LIFE (10-12)

1. No matter what one becomes, he is still "man", unable to contend with God
2. Man is still subject to many things which increase the vanity of life
 - a. Who knows what is good for man?
 - 1) All the days of his vain life?
 - 2) Which he passes like a shadow?
 - b. Who can tell a man what will happen after him "under the sun"?
-- Unless it be God, no one!

REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE CHAPTER

1) What are the main points of this chapter?

- A sad situation (1-6)
- Reflections on riches (7-12)

2) What does the Preacher see as a common affliction among men? (1-2)

- Someone is given riches, wealth and honor, but God does not give him the ability to enjoy it

3) How is a stillborn child better than one who suffers such an affliction? (3-6)

- The stillborn has more rest, never having seen the sun nor the turmoil of this life

4) What is not satisfied by all the labor of man? (7)

- The soul of man

5) What is better than the wandering of desire? (9)

- The sight of the eyes (i.e., enjoying the present, the good that one has)

6) What is unchangeable about man? (10)

- He cannot contend with Him (i.e., God) who is mightier than he

7) Why is man no better by accumulating riches alone? (11)

- Because many things increase vanity

8) What is man unable (without help from God) to determine? (12)

- What is good in this life, which is passes like a shadow
- What will happen after him in this life

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Chapter Seven

OBJECTIVES IN STUDYING THIS CHAPTER

- 1) To understand what makes for "better living" in this vain world
- 2) To appreciate the limitations of wisdom in providing answers

SUMMARY

In the first six chapters the Preacher has shared with us his search for meaning (**1:1-2:24**) and observations gleaned during the course of his search (**3:1-6:12**). He has repeated his conclusions time and again..

- ♦ Life "under the sun" is vanity - **1:2,14; 2:11**
- ♦ Yet there is good that one can do, provided one is blessed by God - **2:24-26; 5:18-20**

In the remaining six chapters the Preacher shares his counsel through a mixture of proverbs and narration. He imparts wisdom designed to make the most of life "under the sun". In other words, while life under the sun is "vanity", how then should we live?

The first half of chapter seven offers "**counsel for better living**" with a series of comparisons. For example, honor is better than luxury, your day of death is better than your day of birth, a funeral is better than a party, etc. His estimation of what is better may often sound strange, but it comes from who has learned from both experience as well as inspiration (**1-14**).

The second half of the chapter offers "**counsel for balanced living.**" There are challenging and difficult statements which should be understood in their context, and in the context of the Bible as a whole. It appears the Preacher is mainly warning against extremism, and against the presumption that one can find the answer to every question in life (**15-29**).

OUTLINE

I. COUNSEL FOR BETTER LIVING (7:1-14)

A. HONOR IS BETTER THAN LUXURY (1a)

1. A good name is highly valued
2. Better than precious ointment (representative of luxury)

B. YOUR DEATH DAY IS BETTER THAN YOUR BIRTHDAY (1b)

1. One's birth is the beginning of sorrows - cf. **Job 14:1; 3:1-3; Jer 20:14-18**

2. One's death can be the beginning of eternal bliss - cf. **Isa 57:1-2; Re 14:13**

C. A FUNERAL IS BETTER THAN A PARTY (2-4)

1. Better to go to the house of mourning than the house of feasting
 - a. For the funeral home is the end of all men
 - b. Where the living will take it to heart
2. Sorrow is better than laughter, for a sad countenance makes a heart better
 - a. Thus the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning
 - b. While the heart of fools is in the house of mirth

D. A REBUKE OF THE WISE IS BETTER THAN THE SONG OF FOOLS (5-7)

1. For the laughter of the fool is vanity, like the crackling of thorn under a pot
2. Oppression destroys a wise man's reason, and a bribe debases his heart

E. THE END IS BETTER THAN THE BEGINNING (8a)

1. Similar to what we have already seen regarding birth and death - cf. **Ecc 7:1**
2. Not all that starts has an end; in the completion of a task one finds satisfaction

F. PATIENCE IS BETTER THAN PRIDE (8b-9)

1. The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit
2. Do not be hasty to be angry, for anger rests in the bosom of fools

G. THE PRESENT IS BETTER THAN THE PAST (10)

1. We should not say "why were the former days better?"
2. One is not wise in thinking in such a manner

H. WISDOM IS BETTER THAN WEALTH (11-12)

1. Wisdom along with an inheritance is good, and profitable for the living
2. Wisdom is a defense like money, but wisdom gives life to those who have it

I. RESIGNATION IS BETTER THAN INDIGNATION (13-14)

1. There are some things of God we cannot change
2. God has appointed both the day of prosperity and the day of adversity, so man is unable to determine what will happen after him
3. The solution?
 - a. In the day of prosperity be joyful
 - b. In the day of adversity consider (e.g., what lessons might be learned)

II. COUNSEL FOR BALANCED LIVING (7:15-29)

A. DO THINGS IN MODERATION (15-22)

1. The righteous don't always prosper, nor do the wicked always suffer
 - a. Avoid extremism in seeking to righteous and wise, lest you destroy yourself
 - b. Avoid extremism in wickedness and foolishness, lest you die before your time
2. Don't refrain from true righteousness and wisdom
 - a. Fearing God will help one escape extremism

- b. Wisdom is a source of strength
- c. But no one is perfect
- 3. Don't take to heart everything you hear
 - a. You may hear another curse you
 - b. Yet you have likely cursed someone at sometime

B. WISDOM ALONE IS NOT THE ANSWER (23-29)

- 1. There are questions wisdom can't answer
 - a. Some things are beyond one's ability to find
 - b. No matter how hard and long you search
- 2. A wicked woman is certainly to be avoided
 - a. Which he found out in his search for wisdom
 - b. She is more bitter than death
 - c. He who pleases God shall escape from her, but the sinner shall be taken by her
- 3. A good man is hard to find
 - a. In his search, he found only one in a thousand
 - b. A good woman was even rarer
 - c. God made man upright, but man has sought out many schemes

REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE CHAPTER

- 1) What are the main points of this chapter?**
 - Counsel for better living (1-14)
 - Counsel for balanced living (15-29)
- 2) What is better than precious ointment? (1)**
 - A good name
- 3) Which is better, the day of death or the day one's birth? (1)**
 - The day of death
- 4) Why is it better to attend a funeral rather than a party? (2)**
 - The funeral house is the end of all men, and the living take it to heart
- 5) Why is sorrow better than laughter? (3)**
 - By a sad countenance the heart is made better
- 6) Where does the heart of the wise reside? The heart of the fool? (4)**
 - In the house of mourning
 - In the house of mirth
- 7) Which is better, to hear rebuke from the wise, or a song from a fool? (5)**
 - The rebuke of the wise
- 8) What is the laughter of the fool? (6)**

- Like the crackling of thorns under a pot; vanity

9) What destroys a wise man's reason? What debases the heart? (7)

- Oppression; bribery

10) What other two comparisons are made? (8)

- The end is better than the beginning

- Patience is better than pride

11) Why should one not hasten to be angry? (9)

- Anger rests in the bosom of fools

12) What is not a wise thing to say? (10)

- Why were the former days better than these?

13) What is good along with an inheritance? Why? (11-12)

- Wisdom; it is a defense just as money is a defense

13) What is the value of knowledge? (12)

- It gives life to those who have it

14) What should we consider about the work of God? (13)

- No one can make straight what He has made crooked

15) What should we do in days of prosperity? In days of adversity? Why? (14)

- Be joyful

- Consider

- God has appointed both so that man can not find out what will come after him

16) What two things had Solomon seen in the days of his vanity? (15)

- A just man perishing in his righteousness

- A wicked man prolonging life in his wickedness

17) Against what does Solomon caution? (16-18)

- Extremism in being righteous and wise, and in being wicked and foolish

18) How strong is wisdom? (19)

- Stronger than ten rulers of the city

19) Is there anyone who does not sin? (20)

- No

20) What should one not take to heart? (21-22)

- Everything people say

21) In his effort to be wise, what did Solomon find? (23-25)

- There were things beyond his ability to discern

22) What did he find more bitter than death? (26)

- A woman whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are fetters

23) Who can escape such a woman? (26)

- He who pleases God

24) In his search, what had he found, and not found? (27-28)

- He found one man among a thousand

- A woman among all those he had not found

25) What else had he found? (29)

- God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes

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Chapter Eight

OBJECTIVES IN STUDYING THIS CHAPTER

- 1) To glean wisdom for enduring evil and oppressive governments
- 2) To note the similarity between the Preacher's conclusion and the book of Job about the inability of man to discern all of the work of God

SUMMARY

Among the "vanities" in life is living in circumstances over which we have little control. Such as the kind of government ruling the country in which we live. The Preacher observed that evil men are often in positions of power, and offers his counsel for enduring such "vanity."

Wisdom is helpful, capable of softening one's countenance (so one is not overly troubled?). Submitting to governing authorities is important, especially in view of the power wielded by those in authority. There will be times when the wicked rule, bringing misery. Be patient, while judgment against such evil may be delayed it will come in its own time and the wicked will soon be forgotten after their demise. In the meantime, it is best to fear God (**1-13**).

Another "vanity" is how the righteous sometimes suffer while the wicked prosper. The Preacher reiterates his conclusion that it is best to seek to enjoy what good God gives in one's labor under the sun. Even the wisest man is unable to discern all that God is doing, no matter how hard he tries. A lesson similar to the one taught in the book of Job (**14-17**).

OUTLINE

I. ENDURING THE GOVERNMENTS OF MEN (8:1-13)

A. SUBMIT TO AUTHORITIES (1-8)

1. Wisdom has its value, able to change one's countenance
2. Obey the king's command, for God's sake
 - a. Don't be hasty to leave the king's presence
 - b. Don't take your stand for an evil thing
 - c. Respect his power, and you will be unharmed
3. A wise man will understand that judgment will come in its own time, so don't resort to wickedness (i.e., rebellion) to alleviate misery - cf. **Ro 13:1-7; 1 Pe 2:11-17**

B. ANTICIPATE WICKED RULERS (9-13)

1. There will be times when men rule to their own detriment
2. They will soon be forgotten after their demise

3. Why do some persist in their evil?
 - a. Because their judgment does not occur immediately
 - b. Even so, it is still better to fear God

II. ENDURING THE VANITY IN LIFE (8:14-17)

A. EXPECT PERPLEXITY (14, 16-17)

1. Sometimes the righteous suffer, and the wicked prosper, which is vanity
2. One cannot always understand why things happen the way they do (remember Job?)

B. ENJOY LIFE (15)

1. Delight in the fruits of your own labor
 - a. Eat, drink, and be merry
 - b. As you labor in the days God has given you in life under the sun
2. The advice given throughout this book - **2:24-26; 3:12-13; 5:18-20**

REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE CHAPTER

1) What are the main points of this chapter?

- Enduring the governments of men (1-13)
- Enduring the vanity in life (14-17)

2) What benefit does wisdom have? (1)

- It can make the face of a man to shine, softening its sternness

3) Why should one be in submission to the king (i.e., government)? (2-4)

- For God's sake
- Because of the power which the king has at his disposal

4) Generally speaking, what will one experience who heeds the king's command? (5)

- Nothing harmful

5) What will a wise man discern even though misery may increase greatly? (5-7)

- There is a time and judgment for every matter

6) What is said of those who are given to wickedness? (8)

- Wickedness will not deliver them

7) What had the Preacher observed about the rule of men? (9)

- There is a time when a man rules over another to his own hurt

8) What did he observe about the wicked who had come and gone from the place of holiness? (10)

- They were soon forgotten after their death

9) Why were the hearts of some men set to do evil? (11)

- Because the sentence against evil was not executed speedily

10) What did the Preacher conclude about a sinner whose days are prolonged? (12-13)

- It will be well for those who fear God
- It will not be well with the wicked

11) What did the Preacher describe as a vanity which occurs on the earth? (14)

- There are just men who receive what should be for the wicked
- There are wicked men who receive what should be for the righteous

12) In view of such vanity, what does the Preacher commend? Why? (15)

- To eat, drink, and be merry (i.e., enjoy life)
- For this is what God gives to man as he labors in life under the sun

13) What did the Preacher conclude after diligently observing the business that is done on the earth? (16-17)

- That no one can know all of the work of God, even if one is wise

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Chapter Nine

OBJECTIVES IN STUDYING THIS CHAPTER

- 1) To reflect upon the inevitability of death, and the uncertainty of life
- 2) To consider how time and chance happens to all
- 3) To appreciate the importance of a joyful, diligent life, and heeding the words of the wise

SUMMARY

The Preacher continues to share counsel gleaned from observations on life made during his search for meaning. He noted that all things come alike to all, it matters not that you are righteous or wicked. One thing that certainly happens to all is death, after which one is soon forgotten and has no share in this life (things done "under the sun"). Should one therefore despair? No, the Preacher again encourages us to live joyfully, especially with the wife of our youth, and to work diligently in what time we have in this life. Once you die, you won't be able to continue your efforts in the grave. This is our portion in life, and God has already accepted our works (1-10).

The Preacher also observed that time and chance happens to all, and that evil times come suddenly. The uncertainty of life can be softened with the aid of wisdom, which the Preacher praises as better than strength and the weapons of war. Thus the words of the wise should be heard, even when spoken softly, or coming from a poor man (11-18).

OUTLINE

I. ENDURING THE INEVITABILITY OF DEATH (9:1-10)

A. DEATH HAPPENS TO ALL (1-6)

1. It happens to both the righteous and the wicked
 - a. While the righteous are in God's hands
 - b. And the sons of men are full of evil
2. While we live, there is hope; when we die...
 - a. We know nothing of what goes on here on earth
 - b. Others' memory of us soon fades

B. ENJOY LIFE (7-10)

1. While death is inevitable, we should still enjoy life
2. Live joyfully with the wife God has given you
3. Work diligently while you are here; you won't be able to do anymore after you die

II. ENDURING THE UNCERTAINTY OF LIFE (9:11-18)

A. EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED (11-12)

1. Time and chance happens to all
 - a. Being swift and strong does not mean you will always win
 - b. Being wise, understanding, and skillful does not always ensure food, riches, or favor
2. Sometimes death will come unexpectedly, like animals caught in a trap

B. ESTEEM WISDOM (13-18)

1. The Preacher saw how wisdom saved a city
 - a. Even though found in a poor man
 - b. Even though the man was soon forgotten
2. Therefore he praises the value of wisdom
 - a. As better than strength, though a poor man's wisdom is often despised
 - b. As better than weapons of war, though spoken quietly by the wise

REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE CHAPTER

- 1) What are the main points of this chapter?**
 - Enduring the inevitability of death (1-10)
 - Enduring the uncertainty of life (11-18)
- 2) What did the Preacher consider about the righteous and the wise? (1)**
 - They and their works are in the hand of God
- 3) What two observations did he make regarding the righteous and the wicked? (2-3)**
 - All things come alike to all
 - One thing happens to all
- 4) What one event does he discuss that happens to everyone? (3-5)**
 - Death
- 5) What two things does he see in the hearts of men? What happens to them? (3)**
 - Evil, madness; they die
- 6) Who still has hope? Why? (4-5)**
 - Those who are living
 - For they know they will die
- 7) What is said of the dead? (5-6)**
 - They know nothing, they have no more reward
 - The memory of them is forgotten
 - Their love, hatred, and envy have perished
 - They no longer have a share in things done "under the sun"

8) What does the Preacher counsel the living to do? (7-10)

- Eat and drink your food with joy
- Adorn yourself with good apparel
- Live joyfully with the wife of your youth
- Work diligently

9) What reasons does he give for such counsel? (7-10)

- God has already accepted your works
- That is your portion in life
- There is no work, device, knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave

10) What other observations did the Preacher make about life? (11-12)

- Time and chance happen to all men, despite their strength, wisdom, or skill
- Evil times often come suddenly upon men

11) What observations did he make about the value of wisdom? (13-18)

- Wisdom is better than strength
- A poor man's wisdom is often despised
- Quiet words of the wise should be heard rather than the shout of a ruler of fools
- Wisdom is better than weapons of war

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Chapter Ten

OBJECTIVES IN STUDYING THIS CHAPTER

- 1) To compare the harm of folly and the value of wisdom
- 2) To see the impact of folly on one's reputation, the government, and in business

SUMMARY

The Preacher continues to share wisdom that can help endure the many vanities in life. This chapter is filled with proverbial statements, in which he first deplores folly and the affect it can have on one's reputation (1-3).

The Preacher also describes how folly is often manifested in government, and in one's life and labors. The land suffers when governed by foolish men, and labor is made even more difficult. Yet wisdom can bring success to one's endeavors, and blessings to the land when found in the conduct of those who lead (4-20).

OUTLINE

I. FOLLY DEPLORED (10:1-3)

A. IT MARS THE FINEST OF REPUTATIONS (1)

1. Like dead flies putrefy the perfumer's ointment
2. So folly is to one respected for wisdom and honor

B. IT SERVES AS AN UNSAFE GUIDE (2)

1. The wise man's heart is at his right hand
2. The fool's heart is at his left hand (in the wrong place)

C. IT BETRAYS ITS OWN STUPIDITY (3)

1. A fool walks along the way without wisdom
2. He shows everyone that he is a fool

II. FOLLY MANIFESTED (10:4-20)

A. WHEN THE SPIRIT OF THE RULER RISES AGAINST YOU (4)

1. Do not leave your post
2. Allow conciliation to pacify great offense

B. WHEN FOLLY IS MANIFESTED IN GOVERNMENT AND LABOR (5-20)

1. An evil observed by the Preacher (5-7)
 - a. Error proceeding from the ruler
 - b. Folly exalted while the rich are debased
 - c. Servants in power while true princes are humbled
2. Those who labor with foolishness hurt and hinder themselves (8-10)
 - a. As illustrated through several examples given by the Preacher
 - b. The wisdom of the wise will know how to expedite his labors
3. The foolish seldom know how to restrain themselves (11-15)
 - a. They do not know how to hold their tongues
 - b. They do not know how to direct their labor
4. How folly and wisdom affect the condition of the country (16-19)
 - a. Woe to the land whose leaders...
 - 1) Are childish and feast in the morning
 - 2) Are lazy, resulting in broken down buildings
 - b. Blessed is the land whose leaders...
 - 1) Feast at the proper time
 - 2) Successfully rule, providing for true happiness and meeting every need
5. Be careful what you say (20)
 - a. Do not curse the king
 - b. Do not curse the rich
 - c. For what you say will likely reach their ears

REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE CHAPTER

- 1) **What are the main points of this chapter?**
 - Folly deplored (1-3)
 - Folly manifested (4-20)
- 2) **What comparison is used to illustrate how folly ruins the reputation of the wise? (1)**
 - As dead flies cause the perfumer's ointment to give off a foul odor
- 3) **Where is the heart of a wise man? The heart of the foolish man? (2)**
 - At his right hand; at his left hand
- 4) **When does the fool display his folly to everyone? (3)**
 - Even when he walks along the way
- 5) **How should one respond when the spirit of the ruler rises against them? (4)**
 - By remaining at their post (i.e., maintaining their faithfulness)
 - By seeking conciliation
- 6) **What evil had the Preacher seen under the sun pertaining to government? (5-7)**
 - Error proceeding from the ruler
 - Folly set in great dignity while the rich are set in a lowly place
 - Servants on horses while princes walk on the ground

7) What four illustrations appear to depict the lack of wisdom in business? (8-9)

- Digging a pit, then falling into it
- Breaking through a wall, only to be bit by a serpent
- Being hurt by the stone one quarries
- Endangered by the wood one splits

8) When the ax is dull, what is required? What will bring success? (10)

- More strength; wisdom

9) To what is a babbler compared? (11)

- A serpent that may bite when not charmed

10) How are the words of the wise? What will the lips of a fool do to him? (12)

- Gracious
- Swallow him up

11) What do the words of a fool begin with? How do they end? (13)

- Foolishness; with raving madness

12) What else is said about a fool? (14-15)

- He multiplies his words
- His labor wearies him

13) When is there woe upon the land? (16)

- When the king is a child, and the princes feast in the morning

14) When is a land blessed? (17)

- When the king is the son of nobles, and princes feast at the proper time

15) What is evidence of laziness and idleness? (18)

- Decaying buildings and leaking houses

16) What observations are made about feasting, wine and money? (19)

- Feasting is made for laughter
- Wine makes merry
- Money answers everything

17) Why should one not curse the king nor the rich? (20)

- What you say (even in private) may eventually get back to them

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Chapter Eleven

OBJECTIVES IN STUDYING THIS CHAPTER

- 1) To appreciate the value of benevolence and diligence in preparing for the future
- 2) To glean what counsel the Preacher offers for those who are young

SUMMARY

In this chapter the Preacher begins with encouraging benevolence and diligence as ways to guard against the uncertain future. By casting our bread upon the waters, willing to offer servings to many, and not withholding our hands in the evening, our benevolence may serve us well in the future should evil befall us. Likewise, things may happen beyond our ability to control or comprehend, but diligence in sowing seed and being mindful of the dark days to come can help to prepare us for their coming (1-8).

This chapter also introduces counsel from the Preacher designed especially for the young. The young man is encouraged to rejoice, letting his heart cheer him. He is told to walk in the ways of his heart and in the sight of his eyes, yet with the knowledge that God will hold him accountable for all that he does. So remove sorrow (i.e., rejoice!). But also put away evil during the fleeting years of childhood and youth (9-10).

OUTLINE

I. THE VALUE OF BENEVOLENCE AND DILIGENCE (11:1-8)

A. AN EXHORTATION TO BENEVOLENCE (1-2)

1. Cast your bread upon the waters, you will find it after many days
2. Give servings to seven, and to eight, for you do not know what evil will come

B. AN EXHORTATION TO DILIGENCE (3-8)

1. Many things (like rain and wind storms) are inevitable (3-4)
 - a. We cannot stop the clouds full of rain from falling
 - b. Trees will lie wherever they fall
 - c. If we spend our time just watching and not doing, we will not sow and reap
2. There are things we cannot comprehend (5-6)
 - a. Like the way of the wind (or spirit)
 - b. Like the development of the child in the womb
 - c. We cannot comprehend God's working; therefore do not restrict your efforts
3. There will be days of darkness (7-8)
 - a. It is great to be alive when one is well
 - 1) The light is sweet

- 2) It is pleasant to behold the sun
- b. But even if one lives many joyful days, they should know that evil days will come

II. ADVICE TO THE YOUNG (11:9-10)

A. REJOICE IN YOUR YOUTH (9a)

1. Let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth
2. Walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes

B. DON'T LOSE SIGHT OF THE JUDGMENT (9b)

1. God will bring you into judgment
2. You will answer for all that you do

C. REMOVE SORROW AND EVIL (10)

1. Remove sorrow from your heart
2. Put away evil from your flesh
3. For childhood and youth are vanity

REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE CHAPTER

- 1) What are the main points of this chapter?**
 - The value of benevolence and diligence (1-8)
 - Advice to the young (9-10)
- 2) Why does the Preacher encourage you to "cast your bread upon the waters"? (1)**
 - It will come back to you after many days
- 3) Why does the Preacher counsel you to "give a serving to seven, and also to eight"? (2)**
 - You do not know what evil will be on the earth
- 4) What is the point of these two admonitions?**
 - To be liberal and largesse in your benevolence, for it may help you during difficult days in the future
- 5) What two examples are given of things that are inevitable? (3)**
 - Clouds full of rain will empty themselves on the earth
 - Where a tree falls, there it will lie
- 6) What does the Preacher caution against? (4)**
 - Watching the wind and clouds to the neglect of sowing and reaping
- 7) What two examples illustrate our limited ability to comprehend the ways of God? (5)**
 - The way of the wind
 - How the bones of a child grow in the womb

8) How does the Preacher encourage diligence and benevolence? (6)

- In the morning, sow your seed (diligence)
- In the evening, do not withhold your hand (benevolence)

9) Why does he encourage diligence and benevolence? (6)

- For we don't know which of the two will prosper, perhaps even both

10) What is described as sweet and pleasant? (7)

- Light is sweet, and it is pleasant to behold the sun

11) If one is blessed to live many joyful years, what should he still bear in mind? (8)

- The days of darkness, for they will be many and all that is coming is vanity

12) What does the Preacher encourage the young man to do? (9)

- Rejoice in his youth
- Let his heart cheer him in the days of his youth
- Walk in the ways of his heart and in the sight of his eyes

13) Yet what does the Preacher also encourage him to remember? (9)

- God will bring him into judgment for the things he does

14) So what else the Preacher counsel the young man to do? Why? (10)

- Remove sorrow from his heart, put away evil from his flesh
- Childhood and youth are vanity (fleeting)

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Chapter Twelve

OBJECTIVES IN STUDYING THIS CHAPTER

- 1) To consider what further counsel the Preacher offers to the young
- 2) To note what happens to the spirit when the body dies
- 3) To hear the Preacher's conclusion after his search for the meaning of life "under the sun"

SUMMARY

The final chapter begins with a continuation of advice directed to the young. They are told to remember God in their youth, before difficult days come in which there will be found little pleasure. Such days are described through a series of illustrations that depict the feebleness of old age and eventual death. When the inevitable happens, the body will decay back to dust, and the spirit will return to God who gave it (1-7).

The Preacher brings his "sermon" to a close by restating his theme: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." An epilogue is added that informs the reader of the work the Preacher continued to do after concluding his search for the meaning of life. Because of his wisdom, he still taught the people and sought to set in order many proverbs. He sought to find acceptable and upright words, words of truth. Such words of the wise and scholarly are described as goads and well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd. One is to be admonished by these words, yet be aware that there is no end to the making of many books, and much study is wearisome to the flesh (8-12).

Finally, we are told the "grand conclusion" of the whole matter. The Preacher ends his search for meaning by concluding that the whole purpose for man's existence is to fear God and keep His commandments. That is because God will bring into judgment everything we have done (13-14).

OUTLINE

I. ADVICE TO THE YOUNG (12:1-7)

A. REMEMBER GOD IN YOUR YOUTH (1-2)

1. Before the difficult days come
2. Before the years come in which you find little pleasure
3. While the sun, moon, and stars are not darkened
4. While the clouds do not return after the rain

B. REFLECT UPON WHAT IS COMING (3-7)

1. The day is coming in which:

- a. The keepers of the house tremble (the arms weaken)
 - b. The strong men bow down (the legs become frail)
 - c. The grinders cease because they are few (the teeth fall out)
 - d. Those that look through the windows grow dim (the eyes lose their sight)
 - e. The doors are shut in the streets (the ears become hard of hearing)
 - f. The sound of the grinding is low (the mouth and speech become unintelligible)
 - g. When one rises up at the sound of a bird (the elderly easily awakened)
 - h. And all the daughters of music are brought low (the voice no longer able to sing)
 - i. They are afraid of height (the fear of falling)
 - j. And of terrors in the way (no longer feeling invincible)
 - k. When the almond tree blossoms (the wakefulness of old age setting in)
 - l. The grasshopper is a burden (an old man, bowed like the insect, able to move only with some difficulty)
 - m. And desire fails (fleshly desires wane)
 - n. Man goes to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets (death)
2. Remember your Creator before:
 - a. Before the silver cord (the spinal cord) is loosed
 - b. The golden bowl (the skull) is broken
 - c. The pitcher (the heart) shattered at the fountain
 - d. The wheel (the pelvis) broken at the well-- Figures alluding to decay of the body
 3. When finally:
 - a. The body returns to the dust
 - b. The spirit returns to God who gave it

II. EPILOGUE AND CONCLUSION (12:8-14)

A. THE EPILOGUE (8-12)

1. The grand theme restated: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity..."
2. The Preacher's ongoing work (because he was wise)
 - a. He continued to teach others
 - b. He pondered and sought to find many proverbs, upright words of truth
3. The value of such words of truth
 - a. The words of the wise are like goads
 - b. The words of the scholars are like well-driven nails-- Such truth comes from One Shepherd
4. It is good to be admonished by such words
 - a. Though there is no end to the making of many books
 - b. Though much study is wearisome to the flesh

B. THE GRAND CONCLUSION (13-14)

1. The conclusion of the whole matter
 - a. Fear God and keep His commandments
 - b. This is man's all (the whole duty of man)
2. For God will bring every work into judgment
 - a. Every secret thing

- b. Whether good or evil

REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE CHAPTER

1) What are the main points of this chapter?

- Advice to the young (1-7)
- Epilogue and conclusion (8-14)

2) What advice does the Preacher give to the young person? (1)

- Remember God in the days of your youth
- While things are going well, before the difficult days come

3) What thirteen illustrations are used to depict one growing old and feeble? (3-5)

- The keepers of the house tremble (the arms weaken)
- The strong men bow down (the legs become frail)
- The grinders cease because they are few (the teeth fall out)
- Those that look through the windows grow dim (the eyes lose their sight)
- The doors are shut in the streets (the ears become hard of hearing)
- The sound of the grinding is low (the mouth and speech become unintelligible)
- When one rises up at the sound of a bird (the elderly easily awakened)
- And all the daughters of music are brought low (the voice no longer able to sing)
- They are afraid of height (the fear of falling)
- And of terrors in the way (no longer feeling invincible)
- When the almond tree blossoms (the wakefulness of old age setting in)
- The grasshopper is a burden (an old man, bowed like the insect, able to move only with difficulty)
- And desire fails (fleshly desires wane)

4) How is death depicted at the end of verse 5?

- Man goes to his eternal home
- Mourners to about the streets

5) What four illustrations are used to depict the decaying of the body? (6)

- Before the silver cord (the spinal cord) is loosed
- The golden bowl (the skull) is broken
- The pitcher (the heart) shattered at the fountain
- The wheel (the pelvis) broken at the well

6) What occurs at death as described in verse 7?

- The dust returns to the earth as it was
- The spirit returns to God who gave it

7) What is the recurring theme throughout this book, as restated in verse 8?

- "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

8) What did the Preacher continue to do? (9-10)

- He taught the people knowledge
- He pondered and sought out and set in order many proverbs
- He sought to find acceptable and upright words, words of truth

9) What are the words of the wise and scholarly like? (11)

- Goads and well-driven nails
- Given by one Shepherd

10) What did the Preacher encourage his son? (12)

- To be admonished by the words of wisdom and truth

11) Yet what two things should one keep in mind? (12)

- There is no end to the making of many books
- Much study is wearisome to the flesh

12) What does the Preacher offer as the conclusion to his search for meaning? (13)

- Fear God and keep His commandments
- This is the whole duty of man

13) Why is this his conclusion? (14)

- For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, wither good or evil

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Concluding Thoughts

People have often searched for the meaning of life. From philosopher to the common man they have asked questions like: "Why am I here?" or "What is my purpose for life?"

Presuming there is no God nor life after death, many have concluded there is no purpose for living, and fallen into despair or hedonism. But a search that begins with wrong assumptions invariably leads to wrong conclusions. If what we see in this life is all there is, then truly "vanity of vanities, all is vanity!"

The Preacher, with his personal experiences and God-given wisdom, has demonstrated that, yes, life from an earthly perspective alone ("life under the sun") is truly vanity! But he has also declared that by fearing God and keeping His commandments one can endure the many vanities and perplexities of life, all the while enjoying the good things in life that God give us! As expressed by the Preacher himself:

"What profit has the worker from that in which he labors? I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied."

"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."

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

Ecclesiastes 3:9-13

May we like the Preacher, then, continue to seek out "*acceptable words*", "*words of truth*" (12:10) that will serve as **goals** to direct us, and as **well-driven nails** with which to build our lives.

Especially those truths from Jesus, who has come and spoken words designed to help us weather the storms of life:

"Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock:"

"and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock."

Matthew 7:24-25

With the help of the Preacher and the Savior, we can find meaning and hope in this vain world in which we live!