

ECCLESIASTES

Author:

The book itself does not give us the name of the author, but most of the indications point to King Solomon. See 1:1,12,16; 2:4-9; 12:9.

Date:

Solomon reigned 970-930 BC. He wrote this book probably toward the end of his life.

Theme:

What is good in this world? Is it possible to make life meaningful? What is the purpose of this life we must live? These are the kinds of questions that stirred Solomon to search for the truth about life. God decided to show that the total of what is known to men is very little. He wanted to make known to them how empty and meaningless life is for those who are at a distance from Himself. He determined to have this truth written down and included in the Bible. He chose the individual who should reveal this truth through his own researches and experiences and write it down. He made that individual wiser than any other man whoever lived, wiser than Socrates or Buddha or Confucius or anyone else whoever gained a reputation for wisdom (except, of course, the Lord Jesus Christ who is more than a mere man and is Himself the “wisdom of God” 1 Cor 1:24,30; Col 2:2-3,9). Also God made that individual richer than any other person on earth. He gave him the opportunities and the abilities to experience everything than men can experience. Also God gave him an intellect that wanted to inquire into everything, the kind of mind that could thoroughly examine evidence and weigh it carefully, and a powerful desire to discover the meaning of life. The man God chose is Solomon. One of the results of God’s choice is this little book of Ecclesiastes. We can learn from it that man’s wisdom, thoughts and efforts are not enough to discover the truth about life and its meaning. For that we need the Word of God. In that alone we can find a foundation for a satisfying and meaningful life, and a happy eternity.

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

²Vanity of vanities, says the teacher, vanity of vanities. All *is* vanity.

³What profit does a man have from all his labour which he undertakes under the sun?

⁴One generation passes away and *another* generation comes, but the earth remains forever.

⁵The sun also rises, and the sun goes down and hurries to its place where it rose.

⁶The wind goes toward the south and turns around to the north; it swirls about continually, and the wind returns again on its circuits.

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

⁸All things *are* wearisome; man cannot utter *it*. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, or the ear filled with hearing. ⁹The thing that has been, *is* what will be; and what has been done *is* what will be done; and *there is* no new *thing* under the sun. ¹⁰Is there

anything of which it may be said, "See, this *is* new?" It has already been in olden times, which were before us.

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

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

¹³And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom everything that is done under heaven; this unhappy task God has given to the sons of man with which to be occupied.

¹⁴I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, look, all *is* emptiness and chasing the wind.

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

¹⁶I spoke in my own heart, saying, "Look, I have amassed and acquired more wisdom than all *those* who have been before me in Jerusalem; yes, my heart has had great experience in wisdom and knowledge".

¹⁷And I gave my heart to know wisdom,

1:1 We see in 12:9-10 what Solomon did as a "teacher" – he searched for knowledge, tried to find the best words to express it, and taught the people with righteous and true words. The Hebrew word here translated "teacher" could also be translated "preacher" or "guru". In Solomon's case much of his teaching was done, it seems, by writing rather than speaking. Ecclesiastes, Song of songs, and most of Proverbs are from his pen (and from God Who inspired him to write).

1:2-3 Solomon did not mean that the fear of God, and obedience to God's Word are vain (see 12:1,13. See too Paul's words in 1 Cor 15:58). He meant that all of man's activities "under the sun" – that is, on his own and apart from God – are vain. This key phrase "under the sun" occurs 29 times in this book. A similar phrase "under heaven" occurs 3 times. The word "vanity" occurs 35 times. This is very remarkable in so small a book. At the end Solomon indicates that man can be what he ought to be, can escape from the vanity of life under the sun, only by having a right relationship to God and those things which are above the sun.

1:2 "*Vanity*" – the Hebrew word literally means a breath, or a breeze, a vapour or mist or darkness. From that it came to mean something that was empty or futile.

1:4-11 Solomon now begins to give his reasons for saying all *is* vanity under the sun. Though the earth permanently remains, all men must die and leave it (v 4). In Ecclesiastes death is a dark shadow cast over all of life (2:16,18,21; 3:2,18-20;

5:15-16; 6:12; 7:2; 8:8; 9:2-6,12; 12:5-8). A brief existence that is taken up only with the things of earth must be meaningless. If this life is all there is for the individual, then life is a tiresome burden and not worth living. There can never be any permanent satisfaction in studying the ceaseless cycles of nature which do not change (vs 5-8); there can be no hope that something really new will come along that can give men ultimate satisfaction in this world (vs 9,10); achievements that bring name and fame are also vain, even if people remember them, and they won't remember them for long (v 11).

1:12-14 Solomon did not reach his conclusion about the vanity of life on earth through ignorance or superficial examination. He made the most thorough search of this subject that was possible to him, perhaps the most thorough search any man ever made.

1:14 "*Chasing the wind*" – this phrase occurs 9 times. It signifies completely useless, fruitless effort.

"*Chasing*" – or "grasping for". The Hebrew word does not mean "vexation". "wind" = or "breath" or "spirit".

1:15 He gives here two further reasons for the uselessness of human effort – much is crooked and wrong in man's existence on earth, but man cannot make it right; and there are so many things lacking for a fully satisfying life that man cannot even know all of them, let alone supply the lack.

1:16 Who but Solomon could truly say this? (1 Kings 3:12; 4:29-31).

and to know madness and folly; I have come to see that this also is striving for wind.

¹⁸For in much wisdom *is* much grief; and he who gains more knowledge gains more sorrow.

2 I said in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure; so enjoy pleasant things; and, look, this also was emptiness.

²I said of laughter, “*It is madness!*”, and of pleasure, “What does it accomplish?”

³I sought in my heart to give myself to wine, *while* my heart was still guiding *me* with wisdom, and to lay hold on folly, until I could see what was good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their life.

⁴I undertook great works. I built houses for myself. I planted vineyards for myself.

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

⁶I made pools of water for myself, with which to water a forest of growing trees.

⁷I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves born in my house. I also had great possessions of large and small cattle, more than all who were in Jerusalem before me.

⁸I also gathered silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and of the provinces. I obtained male and female singers for myself

and things delightful to the sons of men, musical instruments, and that of all sorts.

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

¹⁰And I did not refuse my eyes whatever they desired. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased in all my labour, and this was my reward for all my labour.

¹¹Then I looked at all the works that my hands had done, and at the labour that I had undertaken to do, and, see, all was emptiness and chasing the wind, and *there* was no profit under the sun.

¹²And I turned to look at wisdom, and madness, and folly; for what *can* the man *do* who succeeds the king? *Only* what has already been done.

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

¹⁴The wise man's eyes *are* in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And I saw also that one event happens to them all.

¹⁵Then I said in my heart, “It will happen to me just as it happens to the fool, and why was I then more wise?” Then I said in my heart that this also *is* emptiness.

¹⁶For *there is* no more permanent remembrance of the wise than of the fool, since what now is will be forgotten in days

1:17 “*Madness and folly*”— is this a partial explanation of 1 Kings 11:1-8? Solomon did not leave any stone unturned in his search for meaning in life. He investigated matters it is better for men in general to leave alone. In his explorations he went into realms of foolishness and darkness (2:3,8,10,12; 7:25). He wanted to experience whatever it was possible to experience to see if there was any sense to any of it. He is not an example to us in this. We need not enter those depths where he went. His experiences and conclusions are set forth by God in this His Word to teach us important lessons so that we might avoid the way he went. Solomon came back from the realms of foolishness and darkness and declares to us that there is nothing there but useless, fruitless, vain activity. Even the pursuit of human wisdom apart from God is an empty thing and in the end brings only sadness.

2:1-10 In his search for meaning in life Solomon turns to pleasures, even mad and foolish pleasures. He declares his purpose in v 3. He is tormented by the supreme question every man should ask. In our brief life on earth what should we be doing? Is there anything really worthwhile? Is there some good that men should pursue? Observe that he

does not here go to the one place men should go for the answers to such questions – the Word of God. As the source of information he puts his own thoughts and experimentations. Notice 1:16; 2:1,15; 3:18 – “I said in my heart”.

2:4 Some of Solomon's great projects are recorded in 1 Kings chapters 6–10.

2:9 These words could have been spoken truly only by King Solomon (1 Kings 10:7,23; 1 Chron 29:25; 2 Chron 1:1,12.)

2:10 He was in a condition where he could have anything he wanted and he denied himself nothing. He indulged himself in every pleasure of the flesh, the senses, and the mind (compare this with the words of the Lord Jesus in Luke 9:23-24).

2:11 Solomon experienced some satisfaction in his work for a little while, but when it was all over this was his conclusion – nothing was worth doing. He had not found the secret of a meaningful life. He found no joy in wealth and pleasure.

2:12-17 So he takes up again thoughts of wisdom and folly. For man's brief stay on earth he concludes that wisdom is far superior to folly. But since all must die even this superiority comes at last to nothing. Since death destroys all these distinctions he thinks that life is meaningless.

to come. And how does the wise *man* die? Like the fool.

¹⁷Therefore I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun *brings* sadness to me; for all *is* emptiness and chasing the wind.

¹⁸Yes, I hated all *the results* of my labour which I had done under the sun, because I would leave it to the man who succeeds me.

¹⁹And who knows whether he will be a wise *man* or a fool? Yet he will have the control of all *the results* of my labour for which I have worked, and in which I have displayed my wisdom under the sun. This *is* also emptiness. ²⁰Therefore I utterly despaired *in* my heart of all the labour which I had done under the sun.

²¹When there is a man who has laboured with wisdom, and with knowledge, and with skill, still he will leave his portion to a man who has not worked for it. This also *is* emptiness and a great wrong.

²²For what does a man have for all his labour, and for his hearty striving, with which he has laboured under the sun?

²³For all his days *are* painful and grievous; yes, his heart cannot rest at night. This is also emptiness.

²⁴*There is* nothing better for a man *than* that he should eat and drink, and *that* his soul should find pleasure in his work. I also saw that this *is* from the hand of God.

²⁵For who can eat, or who else can hasten *to it*, more than I?

²⁶For to a man who *is* pleasing in his sight God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy,

but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and collecting, so that he may give *it to the one who is* pleasing in God's presence. This also *is* emptiness and chasing the wind.

3 To everything *there is* a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven:

²A time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to uproot *what is* planted.

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

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

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

⁶A time to get and a time to lose; a time to search and a time to give up;

⁷A time to tear and a time to sew; a time to keep silent and a time to speak;

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

⁹What profit does the worker have from that in which he labours?

¹⁰I have seen the task God has given to exercise the sons of men.

¹¹He has made everything beautiful in his time; also he has set eternity in their heart, yet no man can find out the work that God has done from beginning to end.

¹²I know that *there is* nothing better for them than for a *man* to rejoice, and to do good in his life,

¹³And also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good *results* of all his labour; *it is* the gift of God.

2:17 Life without meaning is painful, hateful, intolerable. Let us understand from this what God wants us to understand, namely, that without God, without heavenly purpose, without life eternal that comes through the Lord Jesus, life is empty and futile.

2:18-23 Solomon sees that there is no permanent value in all the great works he has accomplished, in the vast possessions he has acquired. He knows that he must die and leave all of it behind (see also Ps 39:6; 49:10; Luke 12:20-21,33; 1 Tim 6:6-10).

2:24-26 Solomon thinks that all anyone can do is to make the best of a bad situation and try to find some little happiness in this brief life by submitting to God. Verse 25 is very obscure in Hebrew and so there is a variety of translations.

3:1-9 Solomon turns from thoughts of his own works and experiments to the world outside. Is there anything there to give life meaning? No.

There is only a meaningless cycle of activities. What is done in one time is undone in another. He is not saying each man should do or will do all the things in this list; only that this is the general course of life on earth. And in all of it put together he cannot see anything of permanent value (v 9).

3:10-15 Any satisfaction in life he can get now comes from thoughts of God. God's works are beautiful and beyond man's understanding (v 11), perfect and permanent (v 14). But man cannot understand what God has done and is doing, so it is better, he says, to stop being concerned about it and try to find some happiness in his own works (vs 12,13. Also v 22 and 1:24).

In v 11 there is this significant phrase – "He has set eternity in their heart". This is one reason why the things of time, all that is passing and impermanent fail to satisfy our heart.

¹⁴I know that whatever God does, it will be forever; nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken away from it; and God does it so that *men* will fear in his presence.

¹⁵That which has been, still is, and that which is to be has already been; and God requires what is past.

¹⁶And, moreover, under the sun I saw the place of judgment, *that* wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, *that* iniquity was there.

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

¹⁸I said in my heart concerning the matter of the sons of men, that God tests them that they might see that they are *like* beasts.

¹⁹For what happens to the sons of men happens to beasts; the same thing happens to them. The one dies just as the other dies; yes, they all have the same breath, so that a man has no advantage over a beast; for all *is* emptiness.

²⁰All go to one place; all are of the dust,

and all return to dust again.

²¹Who knows the spirit of man which goes upward, and the spirit of the beast which goes downward to the earth?

²²Therefore I saw that *there is* nothing better than that a man rejoice in his own works; for that *is* his lot. For who will bring him to see what will be after him?

4 So again I considered all the acts of oppression that are done under the sun, and saw the tears of *those being* oppressed; and they had no comforter, and the power *was* on the side of their oppressors; but they had no comforter.

²Therefore I praised the dead who have already died more than the living who are still alive.

³Yes, better off than both of them *is the one* who has not yet been, who has not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.

⁴Again I considered all labour and all successful achievement, that it comes from man's envy of his neighbour. This *is* also

3:14 The fear of the Lord is a theme he often wrote about (5:7; 7:18; 8:12-13; 12:13; Prov 1:7; 9:10; 15:33). To produce it in men is one basic reason for God's actions in the world. It is of supreme importance in a life pleasing to God (notes at Gen 20:11; Ps 34:11-14; 111:10; 130:3-4). In Solomon's eyes it is one thing that is not meaningless, for it has to do with Him who is above the sun.

3:15 “*God requires what is past*” – or it might also be translated “*God calls back the past*”.

3:16-17 Injustice in the world is a fact that troubled the minds of many thoughtful persons in the Bible (Job 24:1-12; Ps 10:1-12; 13:1-2; 73:2-12; Hab 1:2-11). Solomon knew that the only answer for man's injustice is God's just judgments overturning the false judgments of men. But he did not know when or how this will take place. (Christians now know – Matt 16:27; Acts 17:31; Rom 2:2-11.)

3:18-21 Observe carefully his words in v 18 (also 2:1,15) – “*I said in my heart*”. These verses (and some others in this book) are not a revelation God gave him but how things appeared to him with his human wisdom. We must not get our doctrine from what Solomon thought, but from what God has revealed through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. Solomon himself learned the truth of his question in v 21 and stated it in 12:7. But man with his unaided reasoning can never find the answer to what happens after death. God must reveal it. We have this revelation in the Bible, to some extent in the Old Testament, fully in the New Testament (see Job 10:21-22; Ps 16:9-11;

49:15; Isa 26:19; Dan 12:2-3; 2 Tim 1:10).

4:1 Solomon looks about the world again and finds it hard to practice the principle he lays down for others in 1:24; 2:24; 3:12-13,22. He is utterly depressed by what he sees – the senseless cruelty (vs 1-3), achievement produced by envy (v 4), foolishness (vs 5,6), lonely and dissatisfied toil (vs 7-12), and the meaninglessness of high position and popularity (vs 13-16). It is all a vain and empty show. All of man's activities are pointless and fruitless. There is nothing in any of them to admire, nothing that points to the good thing that a man should do all the days of his life.

Solomon saw something at least of what John put so clearly in his first letter:

“For all that is in the world – the desire of the flesh and the desire of the eyes and the pride of life is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passes away, and its desires with it; but whoever does the will of God lives forever” (see 1 John 2:15-17).

Solomon concludes that life in this kind of world is so bad that death is better, and not being born at all is the best of all (vs 2,3. See notes at Job 3:1,20-22).

How thankful we should be for the revelations of the New Testament! There we see the eternal value and meaning of human activity performed for Christ's glory (Matt 10:42; John 12:26; 1 Cor 15:58). A true Christian need never despair because of what he experiences or sees in this world. God has a wonderful purpose and will fulfill it (Rom 8:18-30).

emptiness and chasing the wind.

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

⁶Better *is* a handful *with* quietness, than both hands full *with* labour and chasing the wind.

⁷Then again I looked at emptiness under the sun.

⁸There is someone without another; also, he has neither child nor brother; yet *there is* no end to all his labour, nor is his eye satisfied with riches, nor *does he say*, "For whom do I labour, and deprive my soul of good *things?*" This *is* also emptiness; yes, it *is* a sorry business.

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

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

¹¹Again, if two lie down together, then they have warmth; but how can one be warm *alone?*

¹²And while one can overpower him who is alone, two can withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

¹³Better *is* a poor and a wise youth than an old and foolish king who will no longer accept advice.

¹⁴For he may come out of prison to reign, even though he *may have been* born poor in his kingdom.

¹⁵I saw that all the living under the sun side with the second youth who takes his place.

¹⁶*There is* no end to all these people, to all who were before them; also those who come later will not rejoice in him. Surely this also *is* emptiness and chasing the wind.

5:1-7 Solomon now turns to the matter of religion. It is the one thing he does not think is vain, the thing that men should have above everything (note on 3:14). But he sees very little of it that seems real to him. Most people dream of prosperity and success and are willing to make even foolish vows, and speak many empty words to God. In other words, what passes for religion with most people is a vain, empty, worthless thing. See notes at Ps 50:7-21; Isa 1:11-17. Compare Matt 15:8-9; 23:2-32.

5:8-17 Society is full of corruption and self-seeking. Men struggle for wealth which is meaningless. In v 8 Solomon tells us not to be surprised at what happens. He has learned that

5 Guard your steps when you go to the house of God, and draw near to listen rather than to give the sacrifice of fools; for they do not know they are doing evil.

²Do not be rash with your mouth, and do not let your heart be hasty to speak anything in God's presence; for God *is* in heaven, and you on earth, so let your words be few.

³For a dream comes through the abundance of business, and a fool's voice *is known* through the abundance of words.

⁴When you make a vow to God, do not be slow in paying it, for *he has* no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed.

⁵*It is* better for you not to vow than that you vow and not pay.

⁶Do not let your mouth cause your body to sin, nor say before the *temple* messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry at your words, and destroy the work of your hands?

⁷For in the multitude of dreams and many words *there is* also emptiness; but you *must* fear God.

⁸If you see the oppression of the poor, and the violation of judgment and justice in a province, do not be surprised at the matter; for one *official* has a higher one watching over *him*; and *there are* higher ones than they.

⁹Moreover the produce of the earth is for all; the king *himself* is served by the fields.

¹⁰He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver, nor he who loves wealth with *his* income. This also *is* emptiness.

¹¹When goods increase, those who eat them increase; and what benefit *is there* to their owners, except to fix his eyes *on them?*

¹²The sleep of a labouring man *is* sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the wealth of the rich will not allow him to sleep.

¹³There is a grievous evil *which* I have seen

corruption in society comes from greed and injustice in men's hearts. Corrupt human beings cannot produce satisfactory societies (7:20; 9:3).

5:10-12 Instead of bringing satisfaction, more and more wealth produces more and more worry. These words were written, not by a poor man who envied the rich, but by one of the richest persons who ever lived.

5:13-16 Riches are not lasting even in this world, and nothing can be taken out of the world when a man dies (2:18-23). The only riches we can keep forever are those we give away. See Matt 6:19-20; Luke 12:33; 18:22). Selfishness will end in self-destruction and the loss of everything the selfish man pursues for himself.

under the sun, *namely*, riches being hoarded by their owners to their hurt.

¹⁴But those riches are lost through a bad venture, and *when* he becomes the father of a son *there is* nothing in his hand.

¹⁵As he came naked out of his mother's womb, so he will depart as he came, and take nothing from his labour which he can carry away in his hand.

¹⁶And this also *is* a grievous evil, *that* he will go just as he came; and what profit does he have who has laboured for the wind?

¹⁷Also all his days he eats in darkness, and *he has* much sorrow and wrath and sickness.

¹⁸See what I have seen: *it is* good and proper *for one* to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for this *is* his lot.

¹⁹Also *concerning* every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and has given him power to partake of it, and to accept his lot and to rejoice in his labour, this *is* the gift of God.

²⁰For he will not reflect much on the days of his life, because God keeps *him* occupied with the gladness in his heart.

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

²*There is* a man to whom God has given riches, wealth, and honour, so that he lacks nothing of all his soul desires, but God has not given him power to partake of it, and a stranger consumes it. This *is* emptiness, and it *is* a grievous affliction.

5:17 This is the result of a life lived for the things of this world. God has made us for Himself, not for anything less. If we live for those lesser things our lives will end in misery.

5:18-20 Solomon returns to the thoughts expressed in 2:24-26 and 3:12-14. If there is any happiness for man on earth it is the gift of God.

6:1-6 Solomon has said it is good for men to find satisfaction and happiness in their work. But he well knows that many are never able to do this. The meaninglessness of life finds them out. Again he says that it is better for such people if they had never been born (4:2-3).

6:6 "*One place*"— he here means the grave, not what may happen beyond the grave.

6:7-9 Man continually tries to find satisfaction in the world, but never can. Both the rich and the poor, the wise and the foolish are victims of

³If a man becomes the father of a hundred *children*, and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many, and his soul is not filled with good, and also he does not have a *proper* burial, I say *that* a still-born child *is* better off than he.

⁴For it comes in with emptiness, and departs in darkness, and its name is covered with darkness.

⁵Moreover it has not seen the sun, or known *anything*. This one has more rest than the other;

⁶Yea, even though he lives twice a thousand years, but has seen no good. Do not all go to one place?

⁷All the labour of man *is* for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not satisfied.

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

⁹Better *is* what the eyes see than the wandering of the desire. This *is* also emptiness and chasing the wind.

¹⁰What has been is already named, and it is known what man *is*; no one can contend with him who is mightier than he.

¹¹Since there are many things that increase emptiness, what *is* man the better?

¹²For who knows what *is* good for man in *this* life, all the days of his futile life which he spends like a shadow? For who can tell a man what will come after him under the sun?

7 A good name *is* better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of one's birth.

their desires.

6:10-11 God knows all about man and everything else. He is the Almighty and no one can win an argument with Him. The more one multiplies words in his argument the more he says what is meaningless (compare Job 9:1-4; 38:1-2; 40:1-5; 42:1-6).

6:12 Solomon admits failure to find in the world what he set out to find (2:3). The wisest man whoever lived (1 Kings 3:12) confesses his ignorance. See also 7:23-24; 8:17.

7:1-6 Solomon is convinced of the meaninglessness of his own life (v 15). Still he is sure that wisdom is better than folly and that there is a wise way of looking at things, and a wise way of living this brief life. He now sets out to describe what he thinks is the way of wisdom. He continues this theme to the end of the book.

7:1 4:2-3; 6:3.

² *It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for that is the end of all men; and the living should take it to his heart.*

³ *Sorrow is better than laughter, for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.*

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

⁵ *It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools.*

⁶ *For the laughter of fools is like the crackling of thorns under a pot. This also is emptiness.*

⁷ *Surely oppression makes a wise man foolish, and a bribe destroys the heart.*

⁸ *Better is the end of a thing than its beginning, and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.*

⁹ *Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit to anger, for anger rests in the bosom of fools.*

¹⁰ *Do not say, "Why is it that former days were better than these?" For you are not asking wisely concerning this.*

¹¹ *Wisdom is good with an inheritance, and those who see the sun will have benefit from it.*

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

¹³ *Consider the work of God; for who can straighten what he has made crooked?*

¹⁴ *Be happy in the day of prosperity, but in the day of adversity consider. God has made the one as well as the other, so that man should not discover what comes after him.*

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

¹⁶ *Do not be too righteous; neither be overly wise. Why should you destroy yourself?*

¹⁷ *Do not be too wicked; neither be foolish. Why should you die before your time?*

¹⁸ *It is good for you to grasp the one, and not to let your hand go from the other; for he who fears God will depart from all extremes.*

¹⁹ *Wisdom strengthens the wise more than ten mighty men who are in the city.*

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

²¹ *Also do not take heed to every word that is spoken, or you may hear your servant curse you;*

²² *For also your own heart knows that you yourself have often cursed others.*

²³ *All this I have*

7:2 The wise man will not reject the thought of death but will face it and learn much needed lessons from it.

7:3-6 It is far more important for the heart to become wise than for men to go into empty pleasures which, for a time, bring laughter to the face. Sorrow can teach important lessons nothing else can teach.

7:5 Ps 141:5; Prov 13:18; 15:31-32.

7:7 Ex 23:8; Lev 19:15; Deut 10:17; Ps 26:10; Prov 6:35; 15:27; 17:8.

7:8 Prov 14:29; Jam 1:4.

7:9 Prov 16:32; 17:14; 1 Cor 13:4-5.

7:11-14 1:15. What God does man cannot undo. And what God may do no one can tell (3:11; 8:17; Rom 11:33). God creates either good times or bad according to His perfect knowledge of what is just, right, and fitting for a people and a place. God wants men to consider their ways, turn to Him, recognize Him as the giver of all good things, and come to revere, trust, and love Him alone.

7:15-18 Verse 15 gives a truth that Job knew and Job's friends refused to consider (Job 21:4-34). The wise man Solomon knew very well that sometimes the good die young and the wicked live on to a ripe old age. He probably means that some righteous people perish at the hands of the wicked.

7:16-18 It is not easy to see exactly what Solomon

meant by his words in v 16. Possibly he was warning against self-righteousness and pride of wisdom. Perhaps he is making a false conclusion from his own worldly wisdom. Remember, this book gives Solomon's thoughts about what is best for men, not what God may think. All he says must be tested by the revelation God has given through Christ and His apostles.

Possibly Solomon means this: In a meaningless and wicked world for a man to try to push righteousness too far is to make himself an object of hatred and may cost him his life (compare Isa 59:15). If men do not desire righteousness it is useless and dangerous to force it on them. See Matt 7:6. We must be as righteous in our personal lives as it is possible to be, but we are not to be the accusers, prosecutors and judges of others who care nothing for our righteous principles. Of course great wickedness and foolishness are even more dangerous (v 17). It may bring the wrath of God as well as the wrath of men. The man who truly fears God will be able to discern the right course to follow (v 18).

7:19 2:13; Prov 8:14; 21:22.

7:20 2 Chron 6:36; Ps 14:3; Prov 20:9; Eccl 9:3; Rom 3:23. A truth known by every truly wise man.

7:23 1:17. Since he could not attain wisdom some of his conclusions were less than wise. See also 6:12; 8:17.

tested by wisdom. I said, “I will be wise”, but it was far from me. ²⁴Who can discover what is far off and exceedingly deep? ²⁵I applied my heart to know and to search and to seek out wisdom, and the reason of things, and to know the wickedness of folly, and of foolishness and madness; ²⁶And I find more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands like chains. Whoever pleases God will escape from her, but the sinner will be taken by her. ²⁷Look, I have discovered this, says the teacher, adding one thing to another, to find out the explanation ²⁸which my soul is still seeking, but have not found: I have found one good man in a thousand, but I have not found a woman among all those. ²⁹Look, I have found only this: God has made man upright, but they have sought out many devices.

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

²I counsel you to keep the king’s command, because of the oath before God.

³Do not be in a hurry to go out of his sight. Do not stand up for an evil thing, for he will do whatever pleases him.

⁴Since the word of a king has power, who may say to him, “What are you doing?”

⁵Whoever keeps the king’s command

will experience no harm; and a wise man’s heart will discern both the proper time and procedure.

⁶Because for every matter there is a time and procedure, though the misery of man is heavy on him.

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

⁸There is no man that has power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither has anyone power over the day of his death. And there is no discharge in war; nor will wickedness deliver those who practice it.

⁹All this I have seen, and have applied my mind to every deed that is done under the sun. There is a time when one man rules another to his own hurt.

¹⁰And so I saw the wicked buried, those who had gone in and out of the holy place, and they were forgotten in the city where they had done so. This also is emptiness.

¹¹Because sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men among them is fully set on doing evil.

¹²Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and his days are prolonged, yet I know definitely that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear in his presence,

¹³But it will not be well with the wicked, nor will he prolong his days, which are like a shadow; because he does not fear in God’s presence.

7:24 Job 28:12-28; 1 Cor 1:19-25; 2:4-8.

7:25 1:17.

7:26 Prov 2:16-19; 5:1-6.

7:27 This was the great search of his life.

7:28 A word that came out of much experience (1 Kings 11:1-4). But Solomon, it seems, went after the wrong sort of women and it is not surprising that what he found was poor quality. We should not think this is a divine revelation concerning all women.

7:29 Gen 1:26-27,31; 3:1-7. Since man’s fall into sin all men seek how to get satisfaction in their own way without God.

8:1 In this chapter Solomon continues to give out some matters his wisdom has taught him.

8:2-5 See Rom 13:1-7; Titus 3:1; 1 Pet 2:13-14. A wise man knows that disobedience to the rulers God has appointed will bring even more misery to men. Of course, men’s supreme obedience must be to God the heavenly King. If earthly rulers command things contrary to God’s commands we are at liberty to disobey them (Acts 4:18-20; 5:29).

8:7 Jam 4:13-16.

8:8 “Over the spirit to retain the spirit”— this could

also be translated “over the wind to retain the wind” (the same Hebrew word means both wind and spirit).

“Nor will wickedness deliver those who practice it”— sin is more powerful than the strongest person and brings people into bondage (John 8:34; Rom 6:16; 7:18). Those who begin to practice sin and then try to get free of it will find out how powerful it is. There is a war going on continually on earth. It is between evil and good, and evil will never willingly let go its captives as long as this war is going on. Only Jesus can free the captives — Luke 4:18; John 8:36.

8:9 “One man rules another”— this may bring harm both to those who do it and to those who have to suffer it (compare 1 Pet 5:1-3; Matt 20:25-27).

8:11 When there is no punishment for wrong doing people may think they can get away with anything. So God has appointed those who bear the sword (Rom 12:3-4).

8:12-13 He knew what all truly wise men know. But he did not know how and when it would go better with God-fearing men. The New Testament reveals it fully (e.g. Matt 25:31-46; John 5:28-29).

¹⁴There is an empty thing which is done on earth; there are righteous *people* to whom things happen in accordance with the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked *people* to whom things happen in accordance with the work of the righteous. I said that this also is emptiness.

¹⁵Then I commended pleasure, because a man has no better thing under the sun than to eat and to drink and to be merry, for this will remain with him in his labour *during* the days of his life which God gives him under the sun.

¹⁶When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done on the earth (and *one's* eyes may not see sleep day or night),

¹⁷Then I saw all the work of God, *and* that a man cannot discover the work that is done under the sun. Because though a man labours to search *it* out, yet he will not find *it*; yes and though a wise *man* may think *he* knows, yet he will not be able to discover *the truth about it*.

9 For I considered all this in my heart to declare all of this: the righteous and the wise, and their deeds, *are* in the hand of God. No man knows whether *there will be* love or hatred *in all that* awaits him.

²All *things come* alike to all. The same event *comes* to the righteous and to the wicked, to the good and to the clean and to the unclean, to him who offers sacrifice and to him who does not offer sacrifice; as *it is* to the good, so to the sinner, *and* to him who takes an oath as *to him* who fears *to take* an oath.

³This *is* an evil among all *things* that are done under the sun, that *there is* the same event to all. Moreover, the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness *is* in their heart while they live, and afterwards *they* go to the dead.

⁴For to him who is joined to all the living there is hope; for a live dog is better off than a dead lion.

⁵For the living know that they will die, but the dead do not know anything, nor do they any longer have a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten.

⁶Also their love and their hatred and their envy have now perished; nor do they have any more share forever in anything that is done under the sun.

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

⁸Let your garments be always white, and do not let your head lack oil.

8:14 This shows that what Solomon said in vs 12,13 was a matter of faith, not of observation.

8:15 He returns to a previous conclusion (2:24; 3:12-13; 5:18-19). But there is a better way for men to live. That is to deny themselves for the sake of others and find their joy in Christ. See Luke 9:23; 14:27,33.

8:16-17 This wisest of men again confesses his ignorance (7:23-24. See Deut 29:29).

9:1 Solomon admitted that no one can understand what is going on in the world (8:17), but this did not keep him from considering matters and reaching some conclusions. Notice again that what follows gives his thoughts, not God's teaching. God revealed to us what Solomon thought but He did not put His stamp of approval on all of Solomon's thoughts.

9:2-6 He means that all die, all go to the grave. He does not know what may happen after death but he thinks the dead remain in silence and ignorance. Compare Job 10:20-22. Apart from God's revelation men may come to this conclusion, but the teaching of the New Testament is different (2 Cor 5:6-8; Phil 1:22-23; Heb 12:22-24; Rev 6:9-11; 7:9-10,13-17). It is far, far better to be a dead Christian believer than a

living unbeliever.

9:3 7:20; Mark 7:20-23; Rom 1:29-32. A sinful life is like insanity. Men live as they please without God and without hope, violating God's laws and their own consciences, seemingly not caring about God's judgment and the punishment that awaits them. They are like men recklessly playing foolish games in a building burning and ready to collapse on their heads. In the light of the truth of the Bible, to run after the empty things of the world, to be filled with illusions and delusions of their worth, to chase after the wind and live for vanity is madness. Literal insanity means to be out of touch with reality. Spiritual insanity is to be out of touch with spiritual reality. The spiritually insane are deluded and regard their fantasies about the spiritual world as reality and reality as fantasy.

9:7-10 Here are more conclusions of the natural mind of Solomon unaided by divine revelation. He thinks that since death ends men's brief and meaningless life and they lie down in silence and ignorance, the best he can do is to work hard and enjoy life if he can. Solomon returns to this view again and again for he cannot see anything more worthwhile (2:24; 3:12-13; 5:18-19; 8:15).

⁹Live joyfully with the wife whom you love, all the days of the life of your futility which he has given you under the sun, all the days of your futility; for that *is* your lot in *this* life, and in your labour at which you toil under the sun.

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

¹¹Again, I saw under the sun that the race *is* not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; nor *is* bread to the wise or riches to men of understanding or favour to men of skill, but time and chance happens to them all.

¹²Also man does not know *when* his time *will come*; like fish caught in a harmful net and like birds caught in a snare, so the sons of men *are* ensnared in a bad time, when it suddenly falls on them.

¹³Also I have seen this wisdom under the sun, and it *seemed* great to me:

¹⁴*There was* a little town and few men in it; and there came a great king against it and besieged it, and built great siege works against it.

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

¹⁶Then I said, “Wisdom *is* better than strength”. Nevertheless the poor man’s wisdom *was* despised, and his words were not heeded.

¹⁷The words of wise *men* in quiet *are to be* heard more than the shout of the one who rules over fools.

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

10 Dead flies cause the ointment of the perfumer to stink; *so does* a little folly him who has a reputation for wisdom *and* honour.

²A wise man’s heart *moves* toward his right, but a fool’s heart toward his left.

³And even when the one who is a fool

walks in the way, his wisdom fails *him*, and he says to everyone *that* he *is* a fool.

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

⁵There is an evil I have seen under the sun, like an error *that* proceeds from the ruler:

⁶Folly is given a very high place, and the rich sit in a low place.

⁷I have seen servants on horses, and princes walking like servants on the ground.

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

⁹Whoever quarries stones will be hurt with them, *and* he who splits wood will be endangered by it.

¹⁰If the iron axe is dull, and he does not sharpen the edge, then he must exert more strength. And wisdom *has* the advantage of success.

¹¹If the serpent bites before being charmed, there is no advantage to the charmer.

¹²The words of a wise man’s mouth *are* gracious, but the lips of a fool consume him.

¹³The beginning of the words of his mouth *is* foolishness, and the end of his talk *is* wicked madness.

¹⁴A fool is also full of words. A man cannot tell what will happen, and who can tell him what will happen after him?

¹⁵The labour of the fool wearies him; he does not *even* know how to go to the city.

¹⁶Woe to you, O land, when your king *is* a youth, and your princes eat in the morning!

¹⁷Blessed *are* you, O land, when your king *is* the son of nobles, and your princes eat at the proper time, for strength, and not for drunkenness!

¹⁸By much laziness the building sags, and through idleness of the hands the house leaks.

¹⁹A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes *life* merry, but money *has the* answer for everything.

²⁰Do not curse the king, not even in your thoughts; and do not curse the rich in your

9:11-12 He thinks man is a victim of chance and circumstance and has no control over his destiny.

9:13-18 He still considers wisdom a desirable thing, but he has no hope that the world will remember and reward the wise man.

10:1-20 Solomon thinks that even in a meaningless existence wisdom is superior to folly, and in this chapter he gives some proverbs to illustrate

this truth.

10:8 When people try to do evil to others they themselves may be harmed the most (7:14-16; 9:16; Ps 57:6; Prov 5:22).

10:11 Ps 58:4-5.

10:12-13 Prov 10:6,32; 14:3; 5:2; 18:7.

10:14 6:12; 9:1.

10:16 “Youth”— or “child”.

10:18 4:5; Prov 20:4; 24:30-34.

bedroom; for a bird of the air will carry the voice, and that which has wings will tell the matter.

11 Cast your bread on the waters, for you will find it after many days.

²Give a portion to seven and also to eight, for you do not know what disaster will come on the earth.

³If the clouds are full of rain they empty *themselves* on the earth, and if the tree falls toward the south or toward the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it will be.

⁴He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who considers the clouds will not reap.

⁵Just as you do not know the path of the spirit or how the bones *grow* in the womb of the pregnant woman, even so you do not know the works of God who makes everything.

⁶In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening do not let your hand be idle, for you do not know whether this or that will prosper, or whether they *will* both alike *be* good.

⁷Truly the light *is* sweet, and *it is* a pleasant *thing* for the eyes to see the sun,

⁸But if a man lives many years, *and* rejoices in them all, still he should remember the days of darkness; for they will be many. All that comes *is* emptiness.

⁹Rejoice, O young man, in your youth,

and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth, and walk in the ways of your heart and in the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these *things* God will bring you into judgment.

¹⁰Therefore expel sorrow from your heart, and put away trouble from your body, for childhood and youth *are* emptiness.

12 Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come, and the years draw near when you will say, "I have no pleasure in them"; ²Before the sun or the light or the moon or the stars are darkened, and the clouds return after the rain;

³In the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men bow, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those who look out of the windows grow dim,

⁴And the doors are shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the sound of the bird, and all the daughters of music are brought low;

⁵And when they are afraid of high *places*, and fears *are* in the way, and the almond tree blossoms, and the grasshopper is burdensome, and desire fails; because man goes to his everlasting home and the mourners go around in the streets.

⁶*Remember him* before the silver cord is loosened, or the golden bowl is broken, or

11:1 This truth appears in other places in the Bible – Ps 41:1-2; Prov 11:24; 14:21; 19:17; 22:9; Luke 6:35,38; 2 Cor 9:6-9; Gal 6:9-10; Heb 6:10. Cast your bread upon the waters means to give of what you have to help others. It may seem like a complete loss to you, even a foolish use of what you have (like literally casting bread on the waters). But God will see to it that you are rewarded.

"*After many days*" – it may be that our reward will not come to us until the second coming of Christ (Luke 14:14; Rev 22:12). Note and references on giving at 2 Cor 9:15.

11:2 In other words, if you help others when you can, they may help you later when you are in need, or God will see to it that someone helps you.

11:3 If God has filled our lives with good things we should pour them out to others. Once the tree of our life falls there will be no change in its direction, in its place.

11:4-6 Solomon is saying that we should get on with our work and leave with God things beyond our control and the unanswered questions.

11:5 "*Spirit*" – or "wind".

11:7-10 He says that in spite of the meaninglessness

of life there is some joy to be found especially for the young. But dark clouds rise over the horizon (last part of v 8), and God's judgment is coming (v 9). This is the last of the five times Solomon advises us to enjoy life (2:24; 3:12-13; 5:18-19; 8:15). But the grounds he gives for the enjoyment of life are feeble. He never says in this book that we should find our joy in God alone, not in the things He gives. He never says that our happiness should be to serve God and even to suffer for His sake. Probably at this point in his life, and with the knowledge he had, he could not say such things.

12:1-7 A moving appeal to the young in beautiful poetic language to turn to God the Creator before inevitable deterioration, old age, and death bring them down to the dust. Eyesight, nerves, strength, hearing, courage and vitality will all fail (vs 2-5). The cord that binds soul to body will snap, the bowl of our earthly existence will shatter, the vessel of our life will spill its water on the ground, and there will be no chance of drawing more from the well (v 6). Observe that he believed the spirit of man returns to God (v 7). He had stated his ignorance of this in 3:18-21.

the pitcher is shattered at the spring, or the wheel broken at the cistern.

⁷Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.

⁸“Vanity of vanities”, says the teacher, “all is vanity”.

⁹And moreover, because the teacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge. Yes, he pondered, and sought out, *and* set in order many proverbs.

¹⁰The teacher searched to find acceptable words; and *what was* written down was upright, *and* words of truth.

12:8 He ends as he began (1:2). All his study, all his learning, all his wisdom, all his deep research into the meaning of life has come to this. He thinks there is no meaning in life that the fact of inevitable death does not destroy.

12:9 See 1:1; 1 Kings 4:32.

12:10 Solomon is sure that he has written with complete sincerity. He has bared his soul. He has hidden nothing. He declared things as he thought they are.

12:11 By “Shepherd” here he probably means God Himself. God-inspired words of the wise are to give stability to thought (firmly embedded nails) and also to prod us on to truths which lie ahead (goats). This is one main purpose of Ecclesiastes. It gives us the fixed truth of the utter emptiness of life and all its activities “under the sun”, apart from God. And it is meant by God to prod us forward to find the meaning of life, and a higher kind of life, somewhere else (in the Lord Jesus Christ). In this way this book (like the whole law and the whole Old Testament) is meant to lead us to Christ (Gal 3:24). Just as Old Testament hopes of salvation lead to Christ, so the quest for life’s meaning finds its fulfillment

¹¹The words of the wise *are* like goads, and like nails hammered *in by* the masters of collected *proverbs*, *which* are given by one Shepherd.

¹²And further, my son, be warned by these. Of making many books *there is* no end, and much study *is* a weariness to the body.

¹³Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this *is* the whole *duty* of man.

¹⁴For God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether *it is* good or evil.

only in Christ. Christ alone redeems His people from a vain and meaningless life (1 Pet 1:18).

12:13-14 Solomon’s conclusion is as far as he could go as a man under the law, without further revelation from God. If there is to be meaning in life it must be found in reverence and obedience to God. These two things are everywhere emphasized in the Old Testament:

12:13 “*Fear*”— Gen 20:11; Job 28:28; Ps 34:11-14; 111:10; 130:3-4; Prov 1:7.

“*Keep*”— on obedience see Ex 19:5; 20:6; Deut 30:15-18; 32:45-47; 1 Sam 15:22; Ps 119:1-2; Isa 1:19.

Without these two things there is no wisdom, no meaning, no hope, either for the present or for the future. These two are the heart of what man ought to be. Solomon did not say how man (whom he describes in 7:20; and 9:3) can be what he ought to be, but he knew that man is responsible for his acts and must face God’s judgment. On judgment see 3:17; 8:12-13; 11:9; Acts 17:31; Rom 2:16; 2 Cor 5:9-10; Rev 20:11-12. How man can be what he ought to be is clearly revealed in the New Testament – John 1:12-13; 3:3-8; Rom 6:11-18; 8:4; Eph 4:22-24.

