



A study compiled and presented by Brody Clark

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"THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES"

Introduction And Prologue (Ec 1:1-3)

INTRODUCTION

1. The book of Ecclesiastes has long fascinated many people...
 - a. Many feel it is one of the most puzzling books in the Old Testament
 - b. It is considered by some the most melancholy book of the Bible
 - c. It is often quoted by those who deny that man has a soul which continues after death
2. It is not a book Christians should ignore...
 - a. In our materialistic society, there is a great need to understand its basic message
 - b. In our youth-oriented society, it is of special value as its message appears directed to the young
3. As with all Old Testament scripture, it was written...
 - a. For our learning - Ro 15:4
 - b. For our admonition - 1 Co 10:11
 - c. For doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness - 2 Ti 3:16-17

[With this lesson, therefore, we begin a series of studies based upon this book. We begin with...]

I. AN INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK

A. TITLE...

1. In the Hebrew Bible, the book is called "Qoheleth"
 - a. Which means "the words of the preacher" - cf. Ec 1:1
 - b. The term suggests one who speaks to an assembly, an ecclesiastic or preacher
2. The translators of the Septuagint version called it "Ekklesiastes"
 - a. Which also means "preacher"
 - b. Derived from the word "ekklesia" (assembly)

B. AUTHORSHIP...

1. Jewish and early Christian tradition attribute the book to Solomon
2. The author identifies himself only as "the son of David, king in Jerusalem" - Ec 1:1
3. Internal references certainly point to Solomon:
 - a. His wisdom - Ec 1:16; cf. 1 Ki 3:12
 - b. His building activities - Ec 2:4-6; cf. 1 Ki 7:1-12
 - c. His wealth - Ec 2:7-9; cf. 2 Chr 9:13-28

C. DATE...

1. Assuming that Solomon is indeed the author
2. That would place the date of the book around 945 B.C.

D. MESSAGE...

1. The futility of life "under the sun" - cf. Ec 1:2; Ec 1:14
 - a. A key word is "vanity" (occurs 35 times in 29 verses), which means "futility, uselessness, nothingness"

- b. A key phrase is "under the sun" (occurs 29 times in 27 verses), which suggests "from an earthly point of view" -- The book illustrates the vanity of life when looked at solely from an earthly perspective
- 2. The importance of serving God throughout life - cf. Ec 11:9-10; Ec 12:1; Ec 12:13-14
 - a. The meaning of life is not found in experiencing the things of this world
 - b. The meaning of life is found in serving the Creator of this world!

E. THE BOOK CONTAINS "GOADS" AND "NAILS" - Ec 12:13-14

- 1. Words of the wise, designed to "goad" or "prod" our thinking
- 2. Words of the preachers (lit., masters of the assemblies), given to "nail" or "anchor" our lives
 - In this book we will find statements that prod our thinking, and exhortations that provide stability and direction for living!

[With this brief introduction, let's now consider....]

II. THE PROLOGUE TO THE BOOK

A. AUTHOR IDENTIFIED - Ec 1:1

- 1. "the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem"
- 2. These are the words of Solomon...
 - a. A dramatic autobiography of his experiences and observations
 - b. Some of which, perhaps, while alienated from God! - cf. 1 Kings 11:1-13
 - c. Some of the preliminary conclusions expressed throughout the book may have been those drawn while he was still alienated and searching for meaning -- If written by Solomon, and penned toward the end of his life, this would be evidence that Solomon repented before his death

B. THEME STATED - Ec 1:2

- 1. "Vanity of vanities...vanity of vanities, all is vanity"
- 2. All is futile, useless, meaningless!
- 3. Of course, this vanity pertains to life "under the sun" - cf. Ec 1:14
 - All the effort one makes in life, as far as "this life" is concerned, is like "grasping for the wind"!

C. QUESTION RAISED - Ec 1:3

- 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
 - a. Is there any value or profit for all the things we do on this earth?
 - b. If our labor is meaningless as far as this life is concerned, what can we do?
- 3. In this book he will share...
 - a. What he learned from personal experience
 - b. What he learned from personal observations
 - c. Wise counsel based upon the wisdom and inspiration God gave him

CONCLUSION

- 1. Solomon begins to answer his own question in the next verse, which we will save for our next study
- 2. It has been said that the Bible answers life's most often asked questions; e.g...
 - a. Who am I?
 - b. Where did I come from?

- c. Why am I here?
- d. What am I to be doing?

3. The book of Ecclesiastes certainly addresses such questions; which is why...

- a. It is worthy of our careful study
- b. It is of value to all, especially the young -- I pray, therefore, that we will hear what the "Preacher" will have to say to us!

There is another "Preacher", also "the son of David", who is "king in Jerusalem" as well as everywhere else. His name is Jesus... "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" - Col 2:3

Have you heeded the words of that Preacher (cf. Mt 7:21-23; Mk 16:15-16)...?

"THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES"

The Preacher's Search For Meaning - I (Ec 1:4-18)

INTRODUCTION

1. Why am I here? What am I to be doing?
 - a. These are questions that nearly everyone asks at some point in their life
 - b. They are questions the author of Ecclesiastes sought to address

2. In our introductory lesson we saw...
 - a. The author identified - Ec 1:1
 - 1) The Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem
 - 2) I.e., Solomon
 - b. The theme stated - Ec 1:2
 - 1) All is vanity
 - 2) I.e., life from an earthly perspective ("under the sun") is futile, meaningless - Ec 1:14
 - c. The question raised - Ec 1:3
 - 1) What profit is there for a man from all his labor under the sun?
 - 2) I.e., what benefit can one derive from all his efforts in this life?

3. In the first two chapters, Solomon demonstrates how he came to this conclusion
 - a. From his observations regarding the cyclical nature of life and its apparent meaninglessness
 - b. From his own experiences as he sought to find meaning through various avenues

[As we continue to listen to the "Preacher", then, we find him describing...]

I. THE FUTILITY OBSERVED IN THE CYCLES OF LIFE

- A. NOTHING SEEMS TO CHANGE - Ec 1:4-7
 1. The earth appears to abide forever, even as generations of men come and go
 2. The sun is constant with its rising and setting
 3. The winds continue their whirling cycle
 4. The water cycle also continues, as rivers run into the seas, and then through evaporation and rain returns to the rivers again -- Looking at nature, it seems nothing ever changes; it just goes in circles and remains the same!

- B. NOTHING SEEMS TO SATISFY - Ec 1:8
 1. Despite all our labors, man is never truly satisfied
 2. What satisfaction one may think he has is only fleeting
 3. Given time, we soon desire something else

- C. NOTHING IS NEW UNDER THE SUN - Ec 1:9-11
 1. What will be done is that which has been done
 2. If thought to be new, it is only because we have forgotten what occurred before
 - a. What about our modern technological advances?
 - b. What about the technology that created the pyramids, Stonehenge, etc.? -- Given time, future civilizations will forget what we are doing today, and only "rediscover" what has been learned again and

again!

[Faced with what appeared to be such meaningless cycles in life, the "Preacher" sought to determine man's true purpose. He first shares with us his own experience with...]

II. THE FUTILITY OF HUMAN WISDOM

A. THE PREACHER PREFACES HIS SEARCH - Ec 1:12-15

1. He was king over Israel in Jerusalem
 - a. I.e., Solomon
 - b. Who had been given wisdom from God - 1 Ki 3:9-12; 1 Ki 4:29-34
2. He determined to use such wisdom to seek and search all that has been done "under heaven"
 - a. A task that he understood God had given to all men
 - b. A task for which he knew he had been especially equipped
3. He summarizes what he found, having seen all the works done "under the sun"
 - a. He concludes they are vanity and grasping for wind
 - b. For there is little one can do to make significant changes

B. THE PREACHER APPLIED HIS GOD-GIVEN WISDOM - Ec 1:16-17a

1. He acknowledged the greatness and wisdom he had obtained
 - a. In answer to prayer, Solomon had obtained great wisdom
 - 1) Again, cf. 1 Ki 3:9-12
 - 2) Compare this also to Ja 1:5
 - b. This is "God-given wisdom", to be contrasted with "human wisdom"
2. He therefore sought to apply it to wisdom, madness, and folly
 - a. The "wisdom" here we believe is "human wisdom" (e.g., philosophy)
 - b. For this is wisdom that he set his heart to know (learn)

C. THE PREACHER CONCLUDES HUMAN WISDOM IS FUTILE - Ec 1:17b-18

1. He perceived that such wisdom was like grasping for wind; it did not provide the answer to his problem
2. He also saw that such wisdom and knowledge provide much grief and sorrow
 - a. As we might say today, it provides "information overload"
 - b. One becomes burdened as we learn of many things in life
 - 1) Things we have no control over
 - 2) Yet things we often worry over

CONCLUSION

1. In beginning his search for meaning, the wise Preacher naturally began with wisdom...
 - a. Thus he set his heart to "know wisdom"
 - b. But he found such wisdom to be "grasping for the wind"
2. Some do not believe we are to take his words as an indictment against all wisdom...
 - a. For there is a "God-given wisdom" for which one should seek - cf. Pro 2:1-9; Ja 1:5
 - b. This kind of wisdom can bless one's life - cf. Pro 3:13-18
3. But it is an indictment against "human wisdom"...

- a. A wisdom that seeks to understand life, but leaves God out of the picture
- b. A wisdom that can only leave one "grasping for the wind"

In our next study, we shall continue with the Preacher's "search for meaning" and notice his observations regarding pleasure, madness, and folly.

In the meantime, remember what Paul wrote in contrasting human wisdom with God's wisdom:

But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God; and righteousness and sanctification and redemption; that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the LORD." (1 Cor 1:30-31)

Have you accepted and obeyed the true wisdom from God, Jesus Christ, who gives meaning and purpose for life?

"THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES"

The Preacher's Search For Meaning - II (Ec 2:1-26)

INTRODUCTION

1. Our previous lesson noted how the Preacher began his search for meaning in life
 - a. Observing the futility seen in the cycles of nature and life - Ec 1:4-11
 - b. Beginning with human wisdom - Ec 1:12-18
 - 1) Having already been blessed with great wisdom from God
 - 2) Which he used to search out the value of human wisdom
2. What was his conclusion concerning such wisdom in providing the answer?
 - a. Trying to find the answer in human wisdom was "grasping for the wind" - Ec 1:17
 - b. Such wisdom was the source of much grief and sorrow - Ec 1:18
3. So he began to look elsewhere, and in the second chapter we read...
 - a. Of his efforts to explore the value of mirth, pleasure, wine, folly
 - b. Of his search to find meaning in the acquisition of wealth and in great accomplishments

[Did he find the answer there? If not, what conclusions did he reach? In this lesson we shall simply allow the Preacher to tell us for himself. We first note how...]

I. THE PREACHER TESTED LIFE

A. HE SUMMARIZES WHAT HE FOUND...

1. Mirth and pleasure are vanity - Ec 2:1
2. Laughter is madness, mirth accomplishes little if anything - Ec 2:2

B. HE DESCRIBES WHAT HE DID...

1. He experimented with wine and folly - Ec 2:3
 - a. Using the wisdom he had
 - b. For he was seeking to find what was truly good for people to do "under heaven all the days of their lives"
2. He made many things - Ec 2:4-6
 - a. Such as houses, vineyards, gardens, orchards, water pools
 - b. Notice also 1 Ki 7:1-12; 1 Ki 9:15-19
3. He acquired whatever he desired - Ec 2:7-8
 - a. Such as servants, livestock, silver, gold, treasures, singers, and "the delights of the sons of men" (concubines or musical instruments? cf. NIV, NASB, NKJV)
 - b. Notice 1 Ki 9:28; 1 Ki 10:10; 1 Ki 10:14; 1 Ki 10:21; 1 Ki 10:27; 1 Ki 11:1-3
4. He became great and seemed to be happy - Ec 2:9-10
 - a. Greater than any before him, while maintaining his wisdom
 - b. Having all his eyes and heart desired, finding enjoyment in his labor

C. HIS CONCLUSION FROM WHAT HE DID...

1. Upon reflection, looking back at what he did - Ec 2:11a
2. He concluded:

- a. "All was vanity, and grasping for the wind." - Ec 2:11b
- c. "There was no profit under the sun." - Ec 2:11c

[The conclusion drawn by the Preacher may seem strange, when he admitted that he found joy in his labor (Ec 2:10). But when we consider what he says next, we begin to understand why after his great experiment...]

II. THE PREACHER HATED LIFE

A. AFTER REFLECTING UPON WISDOM, MADNESS, AND FOLLY...

1. Realizing his unique opportunity (who can do more than what he has done?), he considered the relative merits of wisdom, madness, and folly - Ec 2:12
2. He saw that wisdom was better than folly - Ec 2:13-14a
 - a. Just as light is better than darkness
 - b. At least the wise man can see where he is going
3. But ultimately the advantage of human wisdom is vanity! - Ec 2:14b-16
 - a. For both the wise man and the fool die
 - b. After death, there is no more remembrance of the wise than of the fool
4. Thus the Preacher hated life, because all the work done "under the sun"...
 - a. Was grievous to him
 - b. Was vanity and grasping for the wind - Ec 2:17

B. AFTER REFLECTING UPON HIS WEALTH...

1. He came to hate his labor - Ec 2:18-19
 - a. Because he must leave it to one after him
 - b. Who knows whether those who inherit it will be wise or foolish? - cf. Solomon's son, Rehoboam, 1 Ki 12:1-19
 - c. In either case, someone else will rule over all the results of his labor!
2. He came to despair about all of his labor "under the sun" - Ec 2:20-23
 - a. For a man with wisdom, knowledge and skill must leave his heritage to one who has not labored for it
 - b. He did not think this was right ("this also is a vanity and a great evil")
 - c. In the end, what does he have to show for all his efforts?
 - 1) Sorrowful days, restless nights
 - 2) Grievous work, leading to vanity

[Looking at life "under the sun", trying to find meaning in this life for all of one's labors, the Preacher came to hate and despair of all of his great efforts. But as he said, "my wisdom remained with me" (Ec 2:9).

With that wisdom he shares for the first time what one should do in life. As he does so, we see that...]

III. THE PREACHER ACCEPTED LIFE

A. MAN SHOULD SEEK TO ENJOY THE GOOD IN HIS LABOR...

1. There is nothing better, a conclusion he will draw six times
 - Ec 2:24a; cf. Ec 3:12-13; Ec 3:22; Ec 5:18-19; Ec 8:15; and Ec 9:7-9
2. Note carefully:

a. The Preacher is NOT promoting the fatalist view of "Let's eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." Isaiah 22:13

b. He is saying to enjoy what you do and what God has given you - cf. 1 Ti 6:17

B. THE ABILITY TO ENJOY ONE'S LABOR IS A GIFT FROM GOD...

1. He saw that the ability to enjoy one's labor is a gift from God - Ec 2:24b

2. For no one can truly enjoy life without God - Ec 2:18-19 (cf. footnote, NIV, NASB)

a. To those good in His sight, God gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy - Ec 2:26a

b. To the sinner, God gives the work of gathering and collecting - Ec 2:26b

1) To give to the one who is good before God - cf. Pro 28:8

2) For the sinner, his work therefore becomes (to him) vanity and grasping for the wind! - cf. Ec 6:1-2 -- Yes, some are very successful in accumulating wealth, but for what end?

CONCLUSION

1. For the first time, the Preacher has introduced God into the picture

2. Until now, he has looked at life "under the sun," without God...

a. He has sought for meaning through wisdom, folly, madness, pleasure and wealth

b. Even when successful, the realities of life and death can cause one to hate life -- He could only conclude that "under the sun," all is vanity and grasping for wind

3. But now, with God giving wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man...

a. One can enjoy the good in his labor

b. A purpose and meaning for life is now possible

That purpose and meaning for life will be developed further as we make our way through the book. In the meantime, since "God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in His sight" (Ec 2:26), have you consider what is essential to please Him?

One begins with faith...

"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." (He 11:6)

"THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES"

The Preacher's Observations - I (Eccl Chapters 3 & 4)

INTRODUCTION

1. In Ecclesiastes, we find the question raised: "What profit has a man from all his labor in which he toils under the sun?" - Ec 1:3
 - a. The key phrase is "under the sun"
 - b. I.e., what profit is there in life when viewed from an earthly perspective?
 - c. I.e., what value is there in our labor when we fail to consider God's will in life? -- We have seen the answer given by the Preacher: "All is vanity" (Vanity: emptiness; worthlessness) - Ec 1:2; Ec 1:14
2. How did he reach this conclusion?
 - a. Based upon personal experience - Ec 1:13; Ec 1:16
 - b. Also from personal observations - Ec 3:10; Ec 3:16
3. Our previous lessons examined the experiences of the Preacher...
 - a. Now we begin to note his observations
 - b. In which he also shares his wisdom for living "under the sun"

[His conclusion that life "under the sun" was vanity was partly reached by observing...]

I. THE INEXPLICABLE PURPOSE OF GOD

A. ALL THINGS SERVE GOD'S DIVINE PURPOSE...

1. "To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven" - Ec 3:1-8
2. "He has made everything beautiful in its time." - Ec 3:11a
3. "...whatever God does, it shall be forever..." - Ec 3:14-15

B. YET MAN IS UNABLE TO FIND OUT GOD'S PURPOSE...

1. God has put it in man to search out this purpose - Ec 3:9-11a
2. But "no one can find out the work that God has done" - Ec 3:11b

C. WHY GOD ACTS THIS WAY...

1. "God does it, that men should fear before Him" - Ec 3:14c
2. I.e., to reverence God, and therefore seek to please Him - cf. Ac 17:26-27
 - a. God has made man an inquisitive creature
 - b. He has also made life such that we are always seeking for something better, or for some purpose -- Hopefully, we will keep seeking until we find Him!

D. THE PREACHER'S CONCLUSION...

1. There is nothing better than to:
 - a. "Rejoice and do good" - Ec 3:12
 - b. "Eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor" - Ec 3:13a
2. Yet the ability to do so is "the gift of God" - Ec 3:13b
 - a. So one must be in favor with God
 - b. Knowing that God will require an account of our actions - Ec 3:15b; cf. Ec 11:9; Ec 12:14

[Without revelation, we cannot discern God's purposes; without His blessing, we cannot enjoy the good of our labor. Therefore any effort to live without God can only be vanity as we will find His purposes inexplicable.

The Preacher's conclusion about the vanity of life was also reinforced by observing...]

II. THE INJUSTICE AND OPPRESSION OF MEN

A. WHAT THE PREACHER SAW...

1. Wickedness in the place of justice - Ec 3:16
2. Power on the side of the oppressor, with no comfort for the oppressed - Ec 4:1
-- Prompting him to think the dead were better than the living, even better were those who had never lived - Ec 4:2-3

B. WHAT THE PREACHER REASONED IN HIS HEART...

1. God will judge the righteous and the wicked - Ec 3:17a
2. God will somehow use injustice and wickedness in carrying out His purpose - Ec 3:17b (e.g., just as God used Assyria and Babylon to discipline Israel)
3. God allows injustice to test the sons of men - Ec 3:18-21
 - a. To help them see that they are like beasts, in that they will die and their bodies return to dust
 - b. While they are also different from beasts, in that their spirit returns to God who gave it - cf. Ec 12:7

C. WHAT THE PREACHER CONCLUDED...

1. Once again, the value of rejoicing in one's own works - Ec 3:22a
2. For this is what God allots him, not what may happen on earth after he is gone - Ec 3:22b

[In the remaining part of this section, we find the Preacher making various comments, which may be summarized as follows...]

III. THE VANITY OF SKILLFUL AND SELFISH WORK

A. IT CAN BREED ENVY IN OTHERS...

1. He saw how skillful work causes one to be envied by his neighbor - Ec 4:4
2. While it is foolish to fold one's hands and do nothing, acquiring too much is not worth the effort, for it really does not satisfy - Ec 4:5-6
3. What is best is to have little with quietness and contentment - cf. Pro 15:16

B. ESPECIALLY IF ONE IS ALL ALONE...

1. The Preacher saw one with no companion, neither son nor brother - Ec 4:7-8
 - a. Who is never satisfied (indeed he can't be, cf. Ec 5:10)
 - b. And doesn't think for whom he is laboring - cf. Ec 2:18-19
2. It is much better to have friends - Ec 4:9-12
 - a. Who can help each other in their labor
 - b. Who can help each other when they fall
 - c. Who can help each other withstand forces of opposition

C. POPULARITY IS SUCH A FLEETING THING...

1. It is better to be a poor and wise youth, than an old foolish king - Ec 4:13
2. For despite rising from poverty and prison to become king, the people will eventually prefer another much younger than he - Ec 4:14-16

CONCLUSION

1. The Preacher's observations about the vanity of life, along with wisdom for living "under the sun," will continue in succeeding chapters
2. But we have seen in this study...
 - a. Why he reached his conclusions about the vanity of life
 - 1) The inexplicable purposes of God
 - 2) The injustice and oppression of men
 - 3) The vanity of skillful and selfish toil
 - b. What wisdom he offers for living "under the sun"
 - 1) It is best to rejoice, do good, and enjoy the good of one's labor, realizing that such is a gift of God to those who please Him
 - 2) To appreciate the value of friends who can help us in times of work and need
3. As Christians today, we may be perplexed at times concerning the workings of God...
 - a. But we have the assurance that all things work for good for them who love God and are called according to His purpose - Ro 8:28
 - b. We have the family of God to help us in our labor and in time of need - cf. 1 Th 5:11

And of course, there is no greater friend, than the One who is the ultimate end of all God's purposes in this world: Jesus Christ! cf. 2 Tim 1:9 . Through Him we can "obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." He 4:15-16 .

Are you a friend of Jesus? If so, remember what He said:

"You are My friends if you do whatever I command you." - Jn 15:14

Let Jesus be your friend by obeying His will! - cf. Mt 28:19-20

"THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES"

The Preacher's Observations - II (Eccl Chapters 5 & 6)

INTRODUCTION

1. The Preacher has been explaining WHY he reached his conclusion that life "under the sun" is vanity...
 - a. Based upon his personal experience - Chapters 1 & 2
 - b. Based upon his personal observations - Chapters 3 thru 6
2. In chapters 3 and 4, we saw where he discussed...
 - a. The inexplicable purpose of God
 - b. The injustice and oppression of men
 - c. The vanity of skillful and selfish work
3. Even so, he offered wisdom for living "under the sun":
 - a. It is best to rejoice, do good, and enjoy the good of one's labor, realizing that such is a gift of God to those who please Him - Ec 3:12-13
 - b. So we may appreciate the value of friends who can help us in time of work and need - Ec 4:9-10

[In chapters 5 and 6, he offers more wisdom as he continues to share his wisdom for living "under the sun". Notice his...]

I. COUNSEL REGARDING WORSHIP

A. WHY PROPER WORSHIP IS IMPORTANT...

1. Remember, the ability to enjoy the good of one's labor is a gift from God - Ec 2:24-26; Ec 3:12-14;
2. It is imperative that we please Him in our worship
 - a. There is "vain worship", you know - cf. Mt 15:7-9
 - b. Therefore not all worship is acceptable to God

B. HOW TO WORSHIP GOD...

1. Walk prudently - Ec 5:1a
 - a. Both the NIV and NASB say "Guard your steps"
 - b. When one worships...
 - 1) He should give thought to what he will do
 - 2) He should be careful what he will do
2. Draw near to hear - Ec 5:1b
 - a. We should be concerned with learning what God has revealed
 - b. Our attitude should be like that of...
 - 1) Young Samuel ("Speak, LORD, for Your servant hears.") - 1 Sam 3:9-10
 - 2) The Bereans ("they received the word with all readiness") - Ac 17:11
3. Do not offer the sacrifice of fools - Ec 5:1c
 - a. Again, not all worship is acceptable
 - b. There is that kind of worship...
 - 1) That is an abomination to God - Pr 28:9
 - 2) That the Lord will not accept - cf. Lk 6:46
4. Don't be rash with your vows (promises) - Ec 5:2-3

- a. Be careful what you say; remember...
 - 1) Jephthah's foolish vow - Judges 11:30-35
 - 2) Herod's foolish promise - Mk 6:23-26
- b. Give thought to what you say in prayer and song
 - 1) Do you consider the vows of commitment that are often made?
 - 2) Do you intend to keep them?
- 5. Keep the vows you make - Ec 5:4-7
 - a. God has no pleasure in fools
 - 1) Such as those who make vows and do not fulfill them
 - 2) Therefore it is better not to vow, than to vow and not pay
 - b. Don't let your mouth cause you to sin
 - 1) Why make God angry, and destroy the work of your hands?
 - 2) Many words lead to vanity and sin - cf. Pro 10:19; Mt 12:36-37

[The key thought in proper worship is to "fear God", that is, to approach Him with the deepest respect and reverence. Worship Him as He directs, not as you might wish. "Swift to hear, slow to speak" Ja 1:19 should be our attitude in worship if we wish to please God!

In the next two verses of our text, we see a word of...]

II. COMFORT REGARDING OPPRESSION

A. OPPRESSION DOES OCCUR...

- 1. As the Preacher observed in Ec 3:16
- 2. And again in Ec 4:1

B. YET THE PREACHER SAYS DO NOT MARVEL...

- 1. Even when there is oppression of the poor and perversion of justice - Ec 5:8a
- 2. For even high officials answer to someone else - Ec 5:8b; cf. Ro 13:1
 - a. Often in this life they are brought to justice
 - b. But even if not, then there is the Day of Judgment!
- 3. The profit taken in oppression usually comes back to all - Ec 5:9
 - a. Those who oppress others to gain much rarely consume it all
 - b. What profit from the land they gain "trickles down" eventually

[Of course, oppression of the poor and perversion of justice is often motivated by the desire to be rich. So we should not be surprised to find the Preacher returning to the vanity of riches as he offers words of...]

III. CAUTION REGARDING RICHES

A. RICHES ARE VANITY...

- 1. Because they are unable to truly satisfy - Ec 5:10-12
 - a. Lovers of silver and abundance will never be satiated
 - b. As they increase, so their desire for more will increase
- 2. Because those obsessed with riches are hurt by them - Ec 5:13-17
 - a. Riches can hurt those who possess them
 - 1) While a laboring man enjoys sweet sleep...

- 2) ...the abundance of the rich provides too much turmoil for restful sleep!
- b. Through misfortune, or eventually through death, one loses their riches
 - What value then are riches, if in the acquisition of them one must endure much sorrow, sickness, and anger? - cf. Pro 15:16-17; Pro 17:1

B. THE PREACHER'S OBSERVATIONS CONCERNING RICHES...

1. It is good to enjoy the good of one's labor - Ec 5:18
2. But it is God who give one the power to truly enjoy them - Ec 5:19-20
3. A sad situation is where God gives one the ability to acquire riches, but not to enjoy them!-Ec 6:1-2
4. It matters little if one lives long and has a hundred children...
 - a. Unless one is able to be satisfied (a gift which God gives), he is worse off than a still-born child! - Ec 6:3-5
 - b. Even if he lives two thousand years! - Ec 6:6
5. Riches in of themselves cannot satisfy the soul - Ec 6:7-9
 - a. His body might be filled, but that is not what fills the soul
 - b. It is better to be content with what you see, than to wander after for what you desire
6. Riches really can't change things - Ec 6:10-11
 - a. He is still "man", and cannot contend with God
 - b. They are not the things that truly make man better; they only increase vanity
7. The answers to life's questions can't be found in striving for riches - Ec 5:13-14

CONCLUSION

1. In asking questions like...
 - a. "For who knows what is good for man in life, all the days of his vain life which he passes like a shadow?" - Ec 6:12a
 - b. "Who can tell a man what will happen after him under the sun?" - Ec 6:12b ...the Preacher illustrates the vanity of looking to riches for the answers
2. Indeed, the answers are to be found by turning to God, not riches, which is why:
 - a. We need to be careful in our worship of God!
 - b. We should draw near to hear what God has revealed through His Word!

It is particularly through "The Word" (Jesus, Jn 1:1) that we learn the ultimate answers to the questions that challenged the Preacher. For Jesus has "abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." (2 Ti 1:10).

Ecclesiastes tells us that the answers to life are not found in the things of this life. Are we willing to accept the teaching of Him who is both the Creator of life and the light of men? - Jn 1:2-4

"THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES"

Counsel For Better Living Ec 7:1-14

INTRODUCTION

1. In the first six chapters the Preacher has shared with us...
 - a. His search for meaning - in Chapters 1 & 2.
 - b. His observations during the course of his search - in Chapters 3 thru 6.
2. He has repeated his conclusions time and again...
 - a. Life "under the sun" is vanity - Ec 1:2; Ec 1:14; Ec 2:11
 - b. Yet there is good that one can do, provided one is blessed by God - Ec 2:24-26; Ec 5:18-20
3. In relating the experiences of his search and observations, he shared counsel for living life "under the sun"; for example...
 - a. The value of friendship - Ec 4:9-12
 - b. The proper way to approach God in worship - Ec 5:1
4. In the remaining six chapters the Preacher continues to share his counsel...
 - a. Through a mixture of proverbs and narration
 - 1) Imparting wisdom designed to make the most of life "under the sun"
 - 2) I.e., while life under the sun is "vanity", how then should we live?
 - b. There is a wealth of wisdom found in these chapters
 - 1) Too much to cover in detail in this series
 - 2) We will simply survey the Preacher's counsel as we make our way through the book

[With that in mind, let's take a look at Ec 7:1-14, in which we find a series of comparisons (note the frequent use of "better"). For example, the Preacher would have us understand that...]

I. HONOR IS BETTER THAN LUXURY (Ec 7:1a)

A. "A GOOD NAME IS BETTER THAN PRECIOUS OINTMENT"

1. Here the Preacher is extolling the value of a good reputation - cf. Pro 22:1
2. The precious ointment is representative of luxury

B. WHY THIS IS SO...

1. We have already seen the vanity of wealth
 - a. We may leave it for someone who is foolish - Ec 2:18-19
 - b. Unless God gives us the ability to enjoy it, it is all for naught - Ec 6:1-2
2. A good reputation finds honor before God and men, and benefits us after death!
 - a. Just as it did with the "elders" of the Old Testament - He 11:2; He 11:39-40
 - b. Especially if our "names" are written in heaven! - Lk 10:20; Ph 4:3

[So in what time we have in this life, it is better spent making a good name for ourselves, than accumulating wealth! Next, the Preacher shares what may be a shocking revelation to some...]

II. YOUR DEATHDAY IS BETTER THAN YOUR BIRTHDAY (Ec 7:1b)

A. "THE DAY OF DEATH THAN THE DAY OF ONE'S BIRTH"

1. The day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth
2. Of course, this assumes one has first made a good name for himself!

B. HOW THIS IS SO...

1. The day of one's birth is the beginning of many sorrows
 - a. As Job observed, and even cursed the day of his birth - cf. Job 14:1; Ec 6:3
 - b. As did Jeremiah - Jer 20:14-18
2. But for the righteous, the day of one's death is the beginning of eternal bliss!
 - a. They enter into peace and rest - Isa 57:1-2
 - b. They go to be with the Lord - Ph 1:21-22
 - c. They are blessed to be at rest from their labors - Re 14:13

[Speaking of the day of one's death leads naturally to the next bit of counsel from the Preacher...]

III. A FUNERAL IS BETTER THAN A PARTY Ec 7:2-6

A. "BETTER TO GO TO THE HOUSE OF MOURNING THAN TO GO TO THE HOUSE OF FEASTING"

1. Everybody loves a party, but everybody needs to attend a funeral!
2. Why? The Preacher tells us why...
 - a. "For that is the end of all men"
 - 1) Life "under the sun" is not forever
 - 2) We must all die and face what follows next - cf. He 9:27
 - b. "And the living will take it to heart"
 - 1) A funeral reminds us of the brevity of life and the eventuality of death
 - 2) A funeral forces us to face reality and encourages us to prepare for it

B. "SORROW IS BETTER THAN LAUGHTER"

1. The Preacher explains further why it is good to attend a funeral
2. Laughter may have its place, but sorrow is superior for making the heart better - cf. He 12:11
 - a. Laughter provides a temporary reprieve from the burdens of life
 - b. But sorrow, especially at a funeral, encourages us to make positive changes
3. For this reason, the wise person will be found often in the funeral parlor, while the fool would rather spend time at a party

C. "IT IS BETTER TO HEAR THE REBUKE OF THE WISE THAN...TO HEAR THE SONG OF FOOLS"

1. At a funeral, one is likely to hear the rebuke of the wise; at a party, the song of fools
2. But the laughter of fools is like the crackling of thorns in a fire, and is vanity
 - a. Thorns make a lot of noise
 - b. But they burn quickly, provide little heat, and are therefore of little value -- So also is the laughter and songs of the foolish

IV. THE END IS BETTER THAN THE BEGINNING Ec 7:8

A. THIS IS SIMILAR TO WHAT WE HAVE ALREADY SEEN...

1. That the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth - Ec 7:1
2. But the principle has application to more than just one's overall life

B. HOW THIS IS SO...

1. Many projects start with good intentions, but are not completed; it is when they are finished that we can truly look back with satisfaction
2. Many things begin with grief and difficulty, only to end in joy and peace- cf. Psa 126:5-6

[Our primary concern should be how things will turn out in the end, rather than how they may look at the beginning. To help us keep focused on the end, it is good to remember that...]

V. PATIENCE IS BETTER THAN PRIDE Ec 7:8-9

A. "THE PATIENT IN SPIRIT IS BETTER THAN THE PROUD IN SPIRIT"

1. Pride is evil, and is of the world - cf. Mk 7:21-23; 1 Jn 2:16
2. Patience is a virtue to be pursued by the man of God - cf. 1 Ti 6:11; Ti 2:2

B. WHY PATIENCE IS BETTER THAN PRIDE...

1. Pride leads to contention and destruction - Pro 13:10; Prov 16:18
2. Pride leads to anger, which resides in the heart of the foolish - Ec 7:9
3. Patience, on the other hand, is indicative of wisdom and necessary to salvation - Pro 14:29; Ro 2:7; He 10:36

[Another gem of wisdom that leads to better living is understanding that...]

VI. THE PRESENT IS BETTER THAN THE PAST Ec 7:10

A. WE ARE NOT TO SAY "WHY WERE THE FORMER DAYS BETTER?"

1. People often reminisce about "the good old days"
2. They often bemoan that things were better then than now

B. ONE IS NOT WISE IN THINKING THIS BECAUSE...

1. Memory has a way of forgetting bad things in the past
2. Even if one experiences trials in the present, there is cause for rejoicing - Ja 1:2-4
3. We may neglect opportunities for much good in the present by dwelling on the past

[Speaking of wisdom itself, the Preacher tells us that...]

VII. WISDOM IS BETTER THAN WEALTH Ec 7:11-12

A. WEALTH HAS ITS ADVANTAGES...

1. Money can serve as a defense in life - Ec 7:12; Pro 10:15
2. Money can attract many friends - Pro 14:20

B. HOW WISDOM IS BETTER...

1. Riches do not profit one in the day of wrath - Pro 11:4
 - a. The presence of wealth often makes things worse
 - b. As when marriages and business partners fight over who gets the money
2. Wisdom gives life to those who have it - Ec 7:12
 - a. Wisdom will make the best use of one's wealth as a defense
 - b. Wisdom will help one weather the storms of wrath

[Finally, the Preacher gives the following counsel for a better life...]

VIII. RESIGNATION IS BETTER THAN INDIGNATION Ec 7:13-14

A. THERE ARE SOME THINGS WE CANNOT CHANGE...

1. God has His purpose, which we cannot change - Ec 7:13; Isa 43:13; Dan 4:35
2. His purpose allows for both days of prosperity and adversity - Ec 7:14

B. WE NEED TO DEAL WITH THIS IN THE BEST WAY...

1. Enjoy the days of prosperity
2. In days of adversity, consider what lessons might be learned
3. It does no good to get angry about things we cannot change -- As we saw earlier, there is both a time to weep and a time to laugh - Ec 3:4

CONCLUSION

1. What has the Preacher taught us? Simply that...

- a. Honor is better than luxury
- b. Your deathday is better than your birthday
- c. A funeral is better than a party
- d. The end is better than the beginning
- e. Patience is better than pride
- f. The present is better than the past
- g. Wisdom is better than wealth
- h. Resignation is better than indignation

2. If any of this sounds foreign to our thinking, bear in mind that it comes from one...

- a. Who experienced everything life has to offer
- b. Who found life "under the sun" lacking
- c. Who offers counsel from the perspective of wisdom and inspiration
- d. Who provides this counsel that we might make the best use of our time "under the sun"

Are we willing to accept his counsel and benefit from it, or will we learn the hard way, and often only too late to do much about it? "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

In our next study, we shall consider his counsel regarding "a balanced life"...

"THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES"

Counsel For Balanced Living (Ec 7:15-29)

INTRODUCTION

1. In our previous study (Ec 7:1-14), the Preacher provided counsel for a better life...

- a. Honor is better than luxury
 - b. Your deathday is better than your birthday
 - c. A funeral is better than a party
 - d. The end is better than the beginning
 - e. Patience is better than pride
 - f. The present is better than the past
 - g. Wisdom is better than wealth
 - h. Resignation is better than indignation
- Such counsel is designed to make the best out of life, especially since life "under the sun" is vanity

2. As we consider the latter half of chapter seven...

- a. There are rather challenging and difficult statements
- b. Which should be understood in their context, and the context of the Bible as a whole

[It appears the Preacher is counseling against extremism, especially in the first section, where we find advice to...]

I. DO THINGS IN MODERATION (Ec 7:15-22)

A. EXTREMES CAN CREATE PROBLEMS...

1. One of life's vanities is that the righteous don't always prosper, nor do the wicked always suffer - Ec 7:15

- a. Here the Preacher saw that which Job's friends did not
 - 1) They reasoned that the righteous never suffer, only the wicked - cf. Job 4:7-8
 - 2) Yet Job, like the Preacher, knew that this was not always the case - cf. Job 21:7-9
- b. Of course, both Job and the Preacher knew the ultimate end of the wicked
 - 1) The wicked are reserved for the day of doom and wrath - Job 21:30
 - 2) It will be well for those who fear God - Ec 8:123

2. One should avoid extremism in seeking to be righteous and wise - Ec 7:16

- a. There is a righteousness to be avoided (i.e., "self - righteousness")
 - 1) Righteousness born of pride and arrogance - e.g., Lk 18:10-14
 - 2) The Pharisees were a classic case of being "overly righteous" - cf. Mt 23:1-33
- b. There is also a wisdom to be avoided
 - 1) Wisdom of this world - cf. 1 Co 3:18-20
 - 2) It too is born out of pride and arrogance

3. One should also avoid extremism in wickedness and foolishness - Ec 7:17

- a. Not that "a little wickedness and folly" is ever acceptable to God!
- b. But God is longsuffering and provides opportunity for sinners to repent - 2 Pe 3:9
- c. While His anger and wrath might be moved to cut off those who arrogantly and openly despise

Him - e.g., Ac 12:21-23

B. DON'T REFRAIN FROM TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS AND WISDOM...

1. One should still fear God - Ec 7:18
 - a. Understanding the dangers of extremism is important
 - b. But the fear of God remains the key to true knowledge and pleasing God - cf. Pro 1:7; Ec 8:12
2. Wisdom does have its place - Ec 7:19
 - a. Better than ten rulers (or mighty men) of a city!
 - b. Better than strength - cf. Ec 9:13-18
3. Yet no one is perfect - Ec 7:20
 - a. Even as the Psalmist declared - Psa 14:1-3
 - b. As the apostle Paul taught - Ro 3:23

C. DON'T BELIEVE EVERYTHING PEOPLE SAY...

1. You may sometimes hear others say bad things about you - Ec 7:21
2. You have said things that were unkind about others - Ec 7:22 -- So don't take what you hear too seriously (i.e., don't be so "righteously" indignant)

[The sense of this section seems to be one of being "balanced", not over-reacting such that you overshoot your true goal, which is to please God. Along the same vein, one should also remember that as valuable as wisdom may be...]

II. WISDOM ALONE IS NOT THE ANSWER (Ec 7:23-29)

A. SOME QUESTIONS WISDOM CAN'T ANSWER...

1. The Preacher had proved some things by wisdom - Ec 7:23a
2. But others things were too deep and far off - Ec 7:23-24; cf. Isa 55:8-9

B. A WICKED WOMAN (PERSON) IS CERTAINLY TO BE AVOIDED...

1. He applied his heart to know wisdom and folly - Ec 7:25
2. What he found more bitter than death was the wicked woman (person) - Ec 7:26; cf. Pro 5:3-5

C. GOOD PEOPLE ARE HARD TO FIND...

1. Seeking for a good man, he found only one in a thousand - Ec 7:27-28a; cf. Psa 12:1
2. A good woman was even rarer - Ec 7:28b
 - a. Perhaps the Preacher (Solomon) was reflecting upon his experience with his 700 wives and 300 concubines; certainly not a good sampling! - cf. 1 Ki 11:1-3
3. Of course, the problem is not with God...
 - a. He made man upright - Ec 7:29a
 - b. But man has gone after many evil things - Ec 7:29b; cf. Jer 4:22

CONCLUSION

1. Man's pride tends to propel him to go to extremes...
 - a. Those not content to obey His Word often seek out many sinful deeds
 - b. Even those seeking righteousness can go too far (e.g., where "righteous indignation" becomes "self-righteous indignation")
2. Of course, the solution is not to refrain from righteousness and wisdom...

- a. But to seek after it humbly - cf. Mt 5:3-6
- b. And to apply gentleness, patience, and humility in all things, even toward those who are opposing God! - cf. 2 Ti 2:24-25; 1 Pe 3:1-2

This is consistent with the Preacher's "Counsel For A Balanced Life", and which if followed, helps any man or woman be this "one in a thousand"...

"THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES"

Wisdom To Endure Life's Vanities - I (Ec 8 & 9)

INTRODUCTION

1. The Preacher (Solomon, Ec 1:1) has been sharing with us counsel for dealing with life...
 - a. Counsel gleaned from his own search for meaning - Ec 7:27
 - b. Counsel guided by wisdom given him by God - cf. Ec 1:16; 1 Kin 3:12
2. In previous lessons we have noted that the Preacher offered...
 - a. Counsel for better living - Ec 7:1-14
 - b. Counsel for balanced living - Ec 7:15-29-- Helpful to taking a proactive approach to improving one's sojourn "under the sun"
3. Yet no matter what we do, there are things...
 - a. We cannot change
 - b. We cannot escape-- Things which certainly add to the vanity of life "under the sun"
4. Two such things are "death and taxes"; in other words...
 - a. We cannot escape the inevitability of death
 - b. We must endure the governments of men

[Wisdom can help (Ec 8:1), however as the Preacher continues, he shares "Wisdom To Endure Life's Vanities". Beginning with...]

I. ENDURING THE GOVERNMENTS OF MEN

A. SUBMIT TO AUTHORITIES FOR GOD'S SAKE...

1. Obey the king's command - Ec 8:2-3
 2. Respect his power, and you will be unharmed - Ec 8:4-5a
 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 - Ec 8:5b-9
- Compare this counsel with that given to Christians - Ro 13:1-7; 1 Pe 2:11-17

B. ANTICIPATE WICKED RULERS...

1. There will be times when men will rule to their own detriment - Ec 8:9
2. But they will soon be forgotten after their demise - Ec 8:10
3. Why do some persist in their evil rule? Because their judgment does not occur immediately - Ec 8:11
4. Even so, it is still better to fear God - Ec 8:12-13

C. EXPECT TO BE PERPLEXED...

1. Sometimes the righteous suffer, and the wicked prosper - Ec 8:14
2. One cannot always understand why things happen the way they do (remember Job?) - Ec 8:16-17

D. ENJOY LIFE...

1. Delight in the fruits of your own labor - Ec 8:15
2. This is the advice given throughout this book - Ec 2:24-26; Ec 3:12-13; Ec 5:18-20

[There is little value in getting all worked up about the wickedness in the governments of men. As long as there are imperfect men, there will be imperfect governments. It is better to simply obey the laws, do good, trust in God, and enjoy the fruits of one's labor.

In chapter nine, we find wisdom for...]

II. ENDURING THE INEVITABILITY OF DEATH

A. DEATH HAPPENS TO ALL...

1. It happens to both the righteous and the wicked - Ec 9:1-3
 - a. While the righteous are in God's hands
 - b. The sons of men are full of evil
2. While we live, there is hope (Ec 9:4); when we die...
 - a. We are no longer concerned with the vanities of this world. - Ec 9:5-6
 - b. Others' memory of us soon fades - Ec 9:5 -- We cannot escape death

B. ENJOY LIFE...

1. While death is inevitable, we should still enjoy life - Ec 9:7-8
2. Live joyfully with the wife God has given you - Ec 9:9
3. Work diligently while you are here - Ec 9:10
- While we cannot escape death, there is no reason to give up on life!

C. EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED...

1. Time and chance happen to all - Ec 9:11
 - a. Being swift and strong does not mean you will always win
 - b. Being wise, understanding, and skillful does not always ensure that you will be fed, rich, and the recipients of good favor
2. Sometimes death will come unexpectedly, like animals caught in a trap - Ec 9:12
- Anticipating the unexpected, we are less likely to be overwhelmed when it occurs

D. APPRECIATE THE VALUE OF WISDOM...

1. The Preacher saw how wisdom saved a city - Ec 9:13-15
 - a. Even though found in a poor man
 - b. Even though the man was soon forgotten
2. Therefore he praises the value of wisdom - Ec 9:16-18
 - a. As better than strength
 - b. As better than weapons of war
- Though often despised when it comes from a poor man, wisdom spoken quietly is better than the shout of a ruler of fools

CONCLUSION

1. We may not be able to escape all of life's vanities...
 - a. There may be times we find ourselves under wicked governments
 - b. Unless the Lord returns in our lifetime, death is inevitable

2. But we can endure life's vanities with the aid of the Preacher's wisdom...

- a. Enduring the governments of men by:
 - 1) Submitting to authorities for God's sake
 - 2) Understanding that wicked rulers will occur
 - 3) Expecting to be perplexed at times
 - 4) Enjoying our life as God gives us opportunity
- b. Enduring the inevitability of death by:
 - 1) Remembering that death happens to all
 - 2) Enjoying family and work
 - 3) Expecting the unexpected
 - 4) Utilizing wisdom that is available to us

In our next study, we shall consider more from the Preacher on the value of wisdom and diligence in enduring life's vanities.

In the meantime, let's not forget that we have another "Preacher" who has established the perfect kingdom, and delivered us from the fear of death: Jesus Christ!

"THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES"

Wisdom To Endure Life's Vanities - II (Ec 10:1 to Ec 11:8)

INTRODUCTION

1. As mentioned in the previous lesson, there are things in life that we cannot avoid...
 - a. Such as the inevitability of death
 - b. The governments of men -- Both of which can contribute much to the "vanity" of "life under the sun"
2. But with the right kind of wisdom...
 - a. We can endure the imperfect and often wicked governments of men
 - b. We can live joyful lives despite the certainty of death

[...and so the Preacher (Solomon) continues with "Wisdom To Endure Life's Vanities" in chapters ten and eleven. As we look now at chapter ten, we find him expounding upon...]

I. THE HARM OF FOLLY

A. FOLLY DEPLORED...

1. Folly mars the finest of reputations - Ec 10:1
2. Folly constitutes an unsafe guide (the heart of a fool is not in the right place) - Ec 10:2
3. Folly will invariably betray its own stupidity - Ec 10:3
-- In contrast, the wise person will be patient, steadfast, and conciliatory, even when opposed by those in authority - Ec 10:4

B. FOLLY OFTEN MANIFESTS ITSELF IN GOVERNMENT...

1. An evil observed by the Preacher - Ec 10:5-7
 - 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 - Ec 10:8-10
 - 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 - Ec 10:11-15
 - 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 - Ec 10:16-19
 - a. Woe to the land whose leaders are childish and feast in the morning, their laziness resulting in broken down buildings
 - b. Blessed is the land whose leaders feast at the proper time, whose successful rule provides for true happiness and meeting every need

C. MEANWHILE, BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU SAY...

1. Do not curse the king - Ec 10:20a
2. Do not curse the rich - Ec 10:20b
-- For what you say will likely reach their ears - Ec 10:20c

[As in chapter nine, much of what the Preacher says in chapter ten pertains to how to endure the vanity of living under governments often ruled by wicked men. As he continues in chapter eleven, we find him describing...]

II. THE VALUE OF BENEVOLENCE

A. AN EXHORTATION TO BENEVOLENCE...

1. Verses 1 and 2 are parallel, encouraging kindness and hospitality - Ec 11:1-2
2. The benefits of such benevolence:
 - a. It provides blessings for the future
 - b. It provides blessings for when days are evil-- Similar benefits of a benevolent spirit are described throughout the Bible - Psa 41:1-2; Pro 19:17; Lk 6:38; Lk 12:33; Ga 6:9; 1 Ti 6:18-19

B. FURTHER REASONS TO EXERCISE BENEVOLENCE...

1. Calamities (like rain and wind storms) will come...
 - a. We cannot stop the clouds full of rain from falling
 - b. Trees will lie wherever they fall ...if we spend our time just watching and not doing, we will not sow and reap - Ec 11:3-4
2. There are things we cannot comprehend...
 - a. Like the way of the wind (or spirit)
 - b. Like the development of the child in the womb ...so we cannot comprehend God's working; therefore do not restrict your charity - Ec 11:5-6
3. There will be days of darkness...
 - a. It is great to be alive when one is well
 - b. But even if one lives many joyful days, he should know that evil days will come - Ec 11:7-8

CONCLUSION

1. We may not be able to escape the days of darkness in this life...
 - a. Evil days often brought on by the governments of men
 - b. Evil days that occur for which we have no explanation
2. But thanks to the Preacher, we know how best to endure life's vanities...
 - a. Avoid making things worse through our own folly
 - b. Sow the seeds of benevolence that can help us later when the days are evil
3. Of course, besides the Preacher (Solomon), we also have the Good Shepherd (Jesus)...
 - a. Who has given His life that we might have an abundant life - Jn 10:10-11
 - b. Who provides true peace although we may live in a world of tribulation - Jn 16:33

Are we following the Shepherd who leads His sheep to life eternal? - Jn 10:27-28

"THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES"

The Preacher's Advice To The Young (Ec 11:9 to 12:7)

INTRODUCTION

1. As a result of his search for meaning in life "under the sun"...
 - a. The Preacher has concluded that "all is vanity" - e.g., Ec 1:2; Ec 1:14; Ec 2:1; Ec 2:11
 - b. Even one who lives many joyful years can still anticipate days of darkness - Ec 11:8
2. While life "under the sun" (viewed purely from an earthly perspective) is vanity...
 - a. That does not mean one should simply give up in despair
 - b. Throughout, the Preacher has counseled his readers to enjoy what good God has given one - e.g., Ec 2:24; Ec 3:12; Ec 3:13; Ec 3:22; Ec 5:18-20; Ec 7:14; Ec 9:7-10
3. The lessons gleaned through the Preacher's own experience need to be learned by everyone, especially the young, otherwise they may...
 - a. Waste years running after things that really don't satisfy
 - b. Miss out on the true enjoyment of life available to them in their youth

[To make sure that young people do not miss the lessons he has learned, the Preacher directs his attention toward them as he prepares to draw his book to a close. From Ec 11:9 to Ec 12:7, we find "The Preacher's Advice To The Young", the first of which is...]

I. REJOICE IN YOUR YOUTH (Ec 11:9)

A. GOD WANTS YOU TO HAVE A GOOD TIME...

1. He wants you to be joyful, to do things that are pleasing
2. Just as the Preacher had counseled earlier - Ec 9:7-10 -- Therefore take advantage of the youthful capacity to enjoy life!

B. DON'T LOSE SIGHT OF THE JUDGMENT...

1. You will have to give an account for what you do
2. God will judge both the righteous and the wicked - cf. Ec 3:17; Ec 12:14
-- Therefore be selective in what you do to have fun!

[God has created man with the energy to enjoy life, especially when we are young. As long as that energy is directed in the right channels, youth is to be a time of great joy! Along the same vein, the Preacher advises the young to...]

II. REMOVE SORROW AND EVIL FROM YOUR YOUTH (Ec 11:10)

A. REMOVE SORROW FROM YOUR HEART...

1. Sorrow deprives one of the joy he should have in his youth
2. Enough sorrow comes without our help...make sure that we do not add to it through youthful indiscretions (which leads to the next point)

B. REMOVE EVIL FROM YOUR FLESH...

1. Youthful indiscretions contribute to much sorrow

- a. Such as the wrong kind of companions - e.g., Pro 1:10-19
 - b. Such as succumbing to the enticements of the wicked - e.g., Pro 5:1-14
2. Childhood and youth are fleeting...don't waste them on things that only bring much grief and sorrow in life

[Youth, while short, can be a wonderful time of life. The key is to heed the next admonition, which has already been alluded to in references concerning the judgment, and that is to...]

III. REMEMBER GOD IN YOUR YOUTH (Ec 12:1)

A. SERVING GOD IS NOT JUST FOR THE ELDERLY...

- 1. Great men of God served Him from their youth (e.g., Joseph, Samuel, David, Solomon, Josiah, Daniel)
- 2. Jesus provided the proper example as well - Lk 2:41-52
- 3. Timothy, who had known the Scriptures from childhood, was to be an example to others - cf. 2 Ti 3:15 ; 1 Ti 4:12

B. SERVING GOD WILL HELP YOU MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICES...

- 1. As it helped Joseph - e.g., Gen 39:7-12
- 2. As it helped Daniel - e.g., Dan 1:8

[Serving God in your youth will help avoid many of the things that bring sorrow, and it will prepare you for the "days of darkness" (Ec 11:8) that will come. This leads us to the final point in "The Preacher's Advice To The Young"....]

IV. REFLECT UPON WHAT IS COMING (Ec 12:1-7)

A. DIFFICULT DAYS ARE AHEAD...

- 1. Presuming you live long enough
- 2. As already stated, these days will be many - Ec 11:8
 - a. They will be days in which little pleasure will be found - Ec 12:1
 - b. The darkening of the lights of heaven denoting a time of affliction and sadness (Barnes) - Ec 12:2

B. A TIME WHERE AGE AND DEATH CATCH UP TO US...

- 1. The Preacher uses various figures to depict the body in old age and death - Ec 12:3-7
- 2. What the figures of verses 3-6 possibly represent:
 - 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 produce music)
 - i. They are afraid of height (their 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. For man goes to his eternal home, And the mourners go about the streets (an obvious reference to death)
- o. The remaining figures, alluding to decay of the body
 - 1) Before the silver cord (the spinal cord) is loosed
 - 2) The golden bowl (the skull) is broken
 - 3) The pitcher (the heart) shattered at the fountain
 - 4) The wheel (the pelvis) broken at the well
- 3. Finally, the body returns to the dust, and the spirit returns to God - Ec 12:7
 - The purpose of such a description is not to depress the young, but to instill the proper degree of sobriety (seriousness), a trait becoming the young - cf. Ti 2:6

CONCLUSION

1. The challenges our youth face are great...
 - a. The temptations before them are many
 - b. The allurements of the world promise much, but deliver little
 - c. The young are very susceptible to depression and despair -- In a world in which life "under the sun" is vanity, they need all the help they can get
2. There is much in life that can be enjoyed, provided one heeds the Preacher's admonition:
 - a. Rejoice in your youth
 - b. Remove sorrow and evil
 - c. Remember God in your youth
 - d. Reflect upon the days ahead

As the apostle Paul wrote to Christians in Galatia, which certainly applies to the young:

"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart." (Ga 6:7-9)

Do we wish to reap everlasting life? Then let us sow to the Spirit by walking after the Spirit (cf. Ga 5:16-23) and allowing the fruit of the Spirit in our lives to produce the good things that we shall reap!

"THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES"

Epilogue & Conclusion (Ec 12:8-14)

INTRODUCTION

1. With advice given to the young in Ec 11:9 thru Ec 12:7, The Book of Ecclesiastes (The "Preacher") then draws to a close - Ec 12:8-14
2. The book has often been misunderstood and abused...
 - a. By taking passages out of context
 - b. By drawing conclusions which ignore the author's own conclusion
3. But in the last seven verses, we find...
 - a. A restatement of the result of the Preacher's search for meaning - Ec 12:8
 - b. An epilogue that describes the Preacher's continuing work, the value of wisdom, and a warning against the wrong kind of study - Ec 12:9-12
 - c. The grand conclusion drawn from the Preacher's search for meaning and purpose in life - Ec 12:13-14

[With the "Epilogue And Conclusion" before us, we can guard against the misapplications some have made of this book. Therefore let's begin with...]

I. THE THEME RESTATED (Ec 12:8)

A. A THEME REPEATED THROUGHOUT THE BOOK...

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

B. WHICH MUST BE REMEMBERED IN ITS CONTEXT...

1. He is referring to the vanity of life "under the sun"
 - a. As stated in the prologue - Ec 1:3; Ec 1:9; Ec 1:14

- b. In describing the vanity of his labor - Ec 2:11; Ec 17-20; Ec 17:22
- c. In relating the evil that he saw - Ec 3:16; Ec 4:1; Ec 12:3; Ec 5:13; Ec 8:9; Ec 9:3; Ec 10:5; Ec 12:6;
- d. In giving his counsel - Ec 5:18; Ec 6:12; Ec 8:15; Ec 8:17; Ec 9:9; Ec 9:13
- 2. I.e., when life is viewed solely from an earthly perspective
 - a. Examining life solely on its own merits
 - b. When God and the afterlife are not taken into the equation
- 3. When viewed from this perspective...
 - a. There is no advantage of wisdom over folly - Ec 2:15-16
 - b. Man is no different than animals - Ec 3:19-21
 - c. The dead know nothing and they have no more reward - Ec 9:5-6
 - But it would be a misapplication to use these passages to deny life after death, or that there is no value in seeking after true wisdom

[If life "under the sun" is all there is, then truly, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." But we have seen throughout the book that the Preacher gave wise counsel for dealing with the vanity of life. That he continued such work is evident from the next four verses...]

II. THE EPILOGUE (Ec 12:9-12)

A. THE PREACHER'S ONGOING WORK...

- 1. He continued to teach others, and to seek for knowledge, truth and righteousness - Ec 12:9-10
- 2. This certainly sounds like Solomon - 1 Kings 4:30-34; cf. Ec 1:1; Ec 1:12; Ec 1:16; Ec 2:9
 - Note that his conclusion about life's vanity did not lead him to despair or inactivity!

B. THE VALUE OF THE RIGHT KIND OF STUDY...

- 1. The words of the wise are of great value - Ec 12:11-12a
 - a. They are like "goads", prodding our thinking, moving us along in the right direction
 - b. They are like "nails", that which can provide stability and steadfastness in our lives
 - Especially those "given by One Shepherd" (i.e., inspired by God)
- 2. But not all knowledge is beneficial - Ec 12:12b
 - a. There is no end to the making of books (with the printing press and the Internet, this is even more so!)
 - b. Much study is wearisome to the flesh (cf. Ec 1:18)
 - Since one can't study every book, one must be selective as to which "shepherd(s)" he will follow!

[Since life "under the sun" is filled with so much vanity, we are admonished by the Preacher by both example and instruction to seek out the right kind of wisdom to guide our short sojourn here on earth. That leads us finally to...]

III. THE GRAND CONCLUSION (Ec 12:13-14)

A. FEAR GOD AND KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS...

- 1. This is "the whole duty of man" (KJV, RSV) - Ec 12:13
 - a. This summarizes the answer to his own question - cf. Ec 2:3
 - b. This is man's reason for being, his "prime directive" for his existence
- 2. To "fear God"
 - a. That is, to revere God, to hold Him in awe
 - b. This is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge - Pr 1:7; Pr 9:10
 - c. This reverence will help prolong life, and protect one from much evil - Pr 10:27; Pr 14:26-27

3. To "keep His commandments"
 - a. A charge given to the nation of Israel - Deu 13:4; Deu 30:16
 - b. A charge given to the disciples of Jesus - Jn 14:15
 - c. The basis by which we know that we know and love God - 1 Jn 2:3-4; 1 Jn 5:3-- To reverently obey God, "walking in the fear of the Lord" Ac 9:31, this is the purpose of life and the key to true happiness! - Pro 22:4

B. THE BASIS FOR THIS CONCLUSION...

1. Having taken "everything" into consideration
 - a. Not just from what may be observed in life "under the sun"
 - b. But from wisdom given by revelation as well cf. Ecc 2:3; Ecc 2:9; 1 Kin 4:29-- I.e., the conclusion of the "whole" matter!
2. In view of the coming Judgment - cf. Ec 3:17; 11:9; Ac 17:30-31
 - a. In which every work will be judged - Ro 2:16
 - b. Whether it be good or evil - 2 Co 5:10

CONCLUSION

1. People have often searched for the meaning of life...
 - a. From philosopher to the common man
 - b. Asking questions like:
 - 1) "Why am I here?"
 - 2) "What is my purpose for life?"-- Many have concluded that there is no purpose, and they have fallen into despair
2. But a search that begins with the wrong assumptions invariably leads to the wrong conclusion...
 - a. Such as assuming that there is no God, nor life after death
 - b. If what we see in this life is all there is, then truly "vanity of vanities, all is vanity!"
3. The Preacher with his own experiences, and his God-given wisdom...
 - a. Has demonstrated that, yes, life from an earthly perspective alone is truly vanity!
 - b. Has taught us that by fearing God and keeping His commandments, one can endure the vanities and perplexities of life, while enjoying the good things in life!
 - c. As penned by the Psalmist:

PSALM 112

The Blessed State of the Righteous

Praise the LORD! Blessed is the man who fears the LORD,
Who delights greatly in His commandments.

His descendants will be mighty on earth;
The generation of the upright will be blessed.

Wealth and riches will be in his house,
And his righteousness endures forever.

Unto the upright there arises light in the darkness;
He is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous.

A good man deals graciously and lends;
He will guide his affairs with discretion.

Surely he will never be shaken;
The righteous will be in everlasting remembrance.

He will not be afraid of evil tidings;
His heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD.

His heart is established;
He will not be afraid,
Until he sees his desire upon his enemies.

He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor;
His righteousness endures forever;
His horn will be exalted with honor.

The wicked will see it and be grieved;
He will gnash his teeth and melt away;
The desire of the wicked shall perish.

May we be like the Preacher, then, and continue to seek out "acceptable words", "words of truth" Ec 12:10, especially those from the words of Jesus:

"in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."
Col 2:3