

OVERVIEW OF BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

This book of **Ecclesiastes** is one of my favorites. I have had opportunity to preach through it at one church; to teach a 12 week adult SS class at another church and now to teach a one session overview lesson here at Grace Bible Baptist. I also have published a 265 page commentary on my website. So this is familiar territory. The obvious question is **Why so many churches?** But that is way outside the scope of what I can handle this morning. Hopefully this is my last landing spot in terms of churches.

Opening Verse:

1:1 *“The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.”*

Let's begin with the **Identity of This Preacher:**

There are a limited number of *sons of David* who were king in Jerusalem ... so the traditional view that King Solomon wrote this book is the one that I maintain. After the advent of higher criticism, many biblical scholars have argued for a later date for the book – either during the days of King Hezekiah or even a post-exilic date. They feel that some of the literary style does not fit the earlier period.

But I think you can find both Internal and External Support for Solomon being the author – even if there may have been some minor editing at a later date.

Internal Support:

- Solomon was the best qualified descendant of David to write this book; **1:16; 1 Kings 4:29-30**
- Description of Qoholeth's pursuit of pleasure (**2:1-3**), impressive accomplishments (**2:4-6**) and unparalleled wealth (**2:7-10**) fulfilled only by King Solomon
- Proverbs in this book similar to those in book of Proverbs
- Thus you have **Proverbs**, **Ecclesiastes** and the **Song of Solomon** all primarily attributed to Solomon
 - o Proverbs – probably written in the middle of his life
 - o Ecclesiastes – at the end of his life after all of his investigations and pursuits
 - o Song of Solomon – when he was a young man

External Support:

- Jewish tradition
- Solomon accepted by Christian commentators without much dissent – at least until fairly recently

Derivation of the Title: Ecclesiastes --

From the Greek word *ekklesia* translated *assembly* – refers to one who addresses the assembly of people, hence the Preacher – *Qoholeth* – Hebrew term

The Quest of the Preacher:

He is clearly looking for meaning and significance in this life.

The Perspective of the Preacher:

Many people are put off by the book and find it extremely **perplexing** because of the number of statements that clearly are at odds with the rest of divinely revealed truth. How can we put any stock in a book that makes observations such as the following:

- 1) **Ecc. 2:24** “*There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen, that it is from the hand of God.*” **3:12-13; 8:15**
True, We need to enjoy life but with God at the center, not apart from God as a **hedonistic end to itself**.
- 2) **Ecc. 3:19-20** “*For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same. As one dies so dies the other; indeed, they all have the same breath and there is no advantage for man over beast, for all is vanity.*”²⁰ *All go to the same place. All came from the dust and all return to the dust.*”
The book’s teaching on **death** clearly is at odds with Scripture. The Preacher states that there is no awareness or consciousness after death
(**9:5-6**) – “*the dead do not know anything*”
He states that there is no distinction between the life of humans and that of animals. But we know that humans are made in the image of God and have unique dignity and accountability before God.
He states that there is no life after the grave.
- 3) **Ecc. 4:4** “*And I have seen that every labor and every skill which is done is the result of rivalry between a man and his neighbor. This too is vanity and striving after wind.*”
The Preacher impugns the motives of all of man’s accomplishments. We can work to the glory of God.

The key to the Preacher’s perspective in the book is the repeated phrase: “*under the sun*” – Solomon is examining life from the perspective of the natural man without the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

Ecclesiastes is a book that often speaks from the **perspective of life “under the sun”** — that is, from the **limited, human, earthly viewpoint** without reference to divine revelation or eternity. As such, some statements in Ecclesiastes **reflect a fallen, frustrated outlook** and seem to contradict the fuller truth revealed in the rest of Scripture.

The Conclusion of the Preacher:

A. His “under the sun” Conclusion:

The Preacher does not leave us waiting for his conclusion – **1:2**

“*Vanity of vanities! All is vanity*” = Heb. Word *hebel* = vapor, vanity, fleeting, elusive – elusive — like smoke, hard to grasp and quickly fading – cf. image of *chasing the wind*
Therefore, meaningless, empty, without substance or significance --
the futile emptiness of trying to be happy apart from God --
Life under the sun appears to be futile and perplexing

B. His “in light of eternity” Conclusion:

We can turn to the last verses in the book for a God-focused conclusion – **12:13-14**

“The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. ¹⁴ For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.

We have to supplement this conclusion with some earlier insights scattered throughout the book:

- 1) Regarding viewing eating and drinking (the pleasures of life) and work as gifts from God to be pursued – but not apart from God

John MacArthur: A proper balance of the prominent “enjoy life” theme with that of “divine judgment” tethers the reader to Solomon’s God with the sure chord of faith. For a time, Solomon suffered from the imbalance of trying to enjoy life without regard for the fear of Yahweh’s judgment holding him on the path of obedience. In the end, he came to grasp the importance of obedience.

- 2) Insights regarding eternity –
 - a. **3:11** “*He has also set eternity in their heart*” – **Longing for meaning that transcends this life**
 - This verse suggests both **dignity** (we sense the eternal) and **limitation** (we can’t grasp it without revelation).
Implication: Human beings are created to **long for more than what this life offers** — which prepares us for the fuller revelation in Christ.
 - b. **12:14** “*For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.*”
(cf. **3:17** – “*God will judge the righteous and the wicked...*”)
Eternal Judgment Awaits All
This is the clearest affirmation of **eternal accountability** in the book.
Despite the apparent injustices of life, **no deed escapes God’s notice**.
There is a final, moral order beyond the chaos of this life.
Implication: The **fear of God (Eccl. 12:13)** is not just about reverence now but about preparing for **eternal judgment**.
 - c. **12:7** “*And the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.*” At death, the **body decays**, but the **spirit endures** and returns to God.

Big Idea: **Apart From The Fear Of God And An Eternal Perspective, Life Is A Futile Exercise Of Chasing The Wind**

Use of this book of Ecclesiastes as a **Pre-Evangelistic Tool**:

- What do I mean by Pre-evangelism?
- Cf. commentary by **Chuck Swindoll** – *Living on the Ragged Edge*
- Helps to buy a couple of copies and have ready to give out in strategic situations

Structure: **1:1-11** Brief Prologue – Everything is Meaningless – Quest begins
 12:9-14 Epilogue / Conclusion of the Quest

Main part of the book is **one long monologue**

Bill McRae (Dr. Scroggie)

- I. (1:2-11) **Problem Stated** – Everything is Monotonous and Wearisome and Empty
- II. (1:12 – 12:7) **Problem Studied** –
- III. (12:8-14) **Problem Solved** --
- His Conclusion: **Fear God and Keep His Commandments**

Ken Boa:

- 1:1-11 The Thesis that all is vanity**
1:12 – 6:12 The Proof that all is vanity
7:1 – 12:14 The Counsel for living with vanity

Overview:

Solomon the Preacher brings all of his worldly experience and wisdom to bear in this commentary of life lived under the sun. Apart from fellowship with the Eternal God, man chases the wind and wastes his life in a **cycle of futility**. The world in its wisdom needs to be pushed to the logical precipice of the foolishness of its presuppositions. That's what makes this wisdom literature ideal as a pre-evangelism tool for those who need to be confronted with the reality of life apart from submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. But believers also need to be reminded of the contradiction of living as if there is no ultimate accountability.

How should we truly live in light of eternity? How can we avoid the emptiness and meaninglessness of life from just a human perspective – despite its pleasures for the moment? When are material pursuits satisfying and when do they distract us from our true calling? What is the purpose of work and what should be our perspective towards it? Solomon points us to the simple formula of **fearing God and keeping His commandments** while pursuing the perspective of eternity that He has placed in our hearts. This book will be gloomy and dismal apart from the light of God's presence and favor in union with our Lord Jesus Christ. The perspective of life under the sun, apart from God, is repeated over and over by the Preacher.

(1:2-11) THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE PREACHER: MONOTONOUSLY BORED BY THE CYCLE OF EARTHBOUND FUTILITY

- A.(1:2) Simple Thesis – No Satisfaction in this life – just emptiness and futility

"Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity."

- B.(1:3) Fundamental Question** – Why do we do what we do?? What is the point??

“What advantage does man have in all his work Which he does under the sun?”

- ### C. (1:4-7) Universal Illustration of the Meaningless Cycle of Nature

1. (:4) Generations don't make a Difference
2. (:5) Each Day is a Meaningless Repetition
3. (:6) The Wind Cycles Around – Accomplishing Nothing
4. (:7) The Cycle of Rivers Flowing into the Sea Makes no Sense

D. (1:8-11) Frustrating Conclusion – One Man Cannot Make a Difference, an Impact

1. (:8) No Satisfaction or Fulfillment for Man

“All things are wearisome; Man is not able to tell it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, Nor is the ear filled with hearing.”

2. (:9-10) Nothing New under the Sun

“That which has been is that which will be, And that which has been done is that which will be done. So, there is nothing new under the sun. ¹⁰ Is there anything of which one might say, “See this, it is new”? Already it has existed for ages Which were before us.”

3. (:11) No Legacy or Memorials

“There is no remembrance of earlier things; And also of the later things which will occur, There will be for them no remembrance Among those who will come later still.”

(1:12-18) THE PURSUIT OF THE PREACHER: DISCOURAGED AS HE DISCOVERS THE FUTILITY OF HUMAN EXISTENCE – EXAMINING BOTH WORKS AND WISDOM

A. (1:12-15) Examination of Works

1. (1:12) Supremely Qualified Detective

“I, the Preacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.”

- a. Preeminent Insight
- b. Preeminent Dominion
- c. Preeminent Location

2. (1:13) Mission Impossible – Discover the Secret of Life

“And I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom concerning all that has been done under heaven. It is a grievous task which God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with.”

- a. Supremely Focused Pursuit
 - (1). Analytical and Logical Pursuit
 - (2). Comprehensive Pursuit

(3). Gifted Pursuit – “by wisdom”

(4). Unconstrained Pursuit

b. Supremely Frustrating Mission

3. (1:14-15) Theory of Futility Substantiated

“I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind. ¹⁵ What is crooked cannot be straightened, and what is lacking cannot be counted.”

a. Comprehensive Investigation

b. Consistent Conclusion = Thesis of the Book Repeated

c. Confirmed Inevitability

B. (1:16-18) Examination of Wisdom

“I said to myself, ‘Behold, I have magnified and increased wisdom more than all who were over Jerusalem before me; and my mind has observed a wealth of wisdom and knowledge.’ ¹⁷ And I set my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly; I realized that this also is striving after wind. ¹⁸ Because in much wisdom there is much grief, and increasing knowledge results in increasing pain.”

1. (1:16) Supremely Qualified Detective

2. (1:17) Mission Impossible

3. (1:18) Theory of Futility Substantiated

I. (2:1-3) THE FUTILITY OF PLEASURE: PARTY ANIMALS WILL HAVE TO WAKE UP SOMETIME AND FACE THE PAIN OF REALITY --TRYING TO MAXIMIZE FUN

A. (:1) Sneak Preview Summary

*“I said to myself, ‘Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself.’
And behold, it too was futility.”*

B. (:2) Escapism Fails to Satisfy -- Ducking Reality

“I said of laughter, ‘It is madness,’ and of pleasure, ‘What does it accomplish?’”

C. (:3) Indulgence Fails to Satisfy -- Feeding Frenzy

“I explored with my mind how to stimulate my body with wine while my mind was guiding me wisely, and how to take hold of folly, until I could see what good there is for the sons of men to do under heaven the few years of their lives.”

II. (2:4-8) THE FUTILITY OF POSSESSIONS – TRYING TO MAXIMIZE POSSESSIONS

- | | | |
|-------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| A. (:4a) | Top Dog in Architecture -- | the ultimate Achiever |
| B. (:4b-6) | Top Dog in Horticulture -- | the ultimate Arborist |
| C. (:7a) | Top Dog in Empire Building -- | the ultimate Authority |
| D. (:7b-8a) | Top Dog in Possessions and Wealth -- | the ultimate Acquirer |
| E. (:8b) | Top Dog in Entertainment -- | the ultimate Artistic Performer |
| F. (:8c) | Top Dog in Sexual Pleasures -- | the ultimate Adulterer |

III. (2:9-11) THE FUTILITY OF PRIDE AND SELFISH AMBITION – TRYING TO MAXIMIZE FAME AND POPULARITY

- A. (:9) The Pursuit of Greatness – Mr. Popularity
“Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me.”
- B. (:10a) Formula for Spiritual Disaster
“And all that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure,”
- C. (:10b) Fleeting Pleasure is the Only Reward
“for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor.”
- D. (:11) **Concluding Perspective: Bitter Disillusionment**
“Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun.”

THE 5 ROTTEN STEPS ON THE WORLD’S LADDER OF SUCCESS – Eccles. 4

I. (4:1-3) RUTHLESS OPPRESSION PROBLEM: NO COMFORT

“Then I looked again at all the acts of oppression which were being done under the sun. And behold I saw the tears of the oppressed and that they had no one to comfort them; and on the side of their oppressors was power, but they had no one to comfort them. ² So I congratulated the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still living. ³ But better off than both of them is the one who has never existed, who has never seen the evil activity that is done under the sun.”

II. (4:4-6) RATRACE RIVALRY PROBLEM: NO CALM

“And I have seen that every labor and every skill which is done is the result of rivalry between a man and his neighbor. This too is vanity and striving after wind. 5 The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh. 6 One hand full of rest is better than two fists full of labor and striving after wind.”

III. (4:7-8) RELENTLESS GREED **PROBLEM: NO CONTENTMENT**

“Then I looked again at vanity under the sun. 8 There was a certain man without a dependent, having neither a son nor a brother, yet there was no end to all his labor. Indeed, his eyes were not satisfied with riches and he never asked, ‘And for whom am I laboring and depriving myself of pleasure?’ This too is vanity and it is a grievous task.”

IV. (4:9-12) RISKY ISOLATION **PROBLEM: NO COMPANIONSHIP**

“Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. 10 For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. 11 Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? 12 And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart.”

V. (4:13-16) RECURRING INSTABILITY **PROBLEM: NO CONTINUITY**

“A poor, yet wise lad is better than an old and foolish king who no longer knows how to receive instruction. 14 For he has come out of prison to become king, even though he was born poor in his kingdom. 15 I have seen all the living under the sun throng to the side of the second lad who replaces him. 16 There is no end to all the people, to all who were before them, and even the ones who will come later will not be happy with him, for this too is vanity and striving after wind.”

THE FUTILITY OF CHASING THE GOOD LIFE – Eccles 6:1-12

**EVEN THOSE WHO APPEAR TO HAVE GRABBED HOLD OF THE GOOD LIFE
STRUGGLE WITH NO ENJOYMENT, NO SATISFACTION AND NO ANSWERS TO LIFE’S
ULTIMATE QUESTIONS**

(6:1) INTRODUCTION: CONSISTENCY OF THE GLOOMY PERSPECTIVE

“There is an evil which I have seen under the sun and it is prevalent among men – “

I. (6:2-6) NO ENJOYMENT -- THE FUTILITY OF THE GOOD LIFE

A. (:2) The Good Life Proves Elusive

“a man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor so that his soul lacks

nothing of all that he desires, but God has not empowered him to eat from them, for a foreigner enjoys them. This is vanity and a severe affliction.”

1. (:2a) Possessing the Good Life is a Gift from God – Solomon’s Blessings
2. (:2b) Enjoying the Good Life is Impossible Apart from a Gift of God as Well – Solomon’s Frustration
 - a. You Don’t Get to Enjoy Your Possessions
 - b. A Stranger Enjoys Your Possessions
3. (:2c) Conclusion: Futility and Pain Once Again

B. (:3-6) The Good Life No Better Than the Non Life – In fact more painful and frustrating

“If a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years, however many they be, but his soul is not satisfied with good things, and he does not even have a proper burial, then I say, ‘Better the miscarriage than he, ⁴ for it comes in futility and goes into obscurity; and its name is covered in obscurity. ⁵ It never sees the sun and it never knows anything; it is better off than he. ⁶ Even if the other man lives a thousand years twice and does not enjoy good things-- do not all go to one place?’”

1. Possible Mitigating Factors
 - a. Larger Family
 - b. Longer/Healthier Life
2. Same Problem: No Enjoyment or Satisfaction
3. Worse State Than Non Existence

II. (6:7-9) NO SATISFACTION (FILLING UP) -- THE FUTILITY OF ONE’S LABOR IN LIGHT OF THE INSATIABLE NATURE OF THE HUMAN APPETITE

A. (:7) Laboring . . . Eating . . . Emptiness

“All a man’s labor is for his mouth and yet the appetite is not satisfied.”

B. (:8) What’s the Point? 2 Piercing Questions:

“For what advantage does the wise man have over the fool? What advantage does the poor man have, knowing how to walk before the living?”

1. No Difference – Wise Man or Fool
2. No Difference – Rich Man or Poor

C. (:9a) Mini-Insight – Focus on What You Have

“What the eyes see is better than what the soul desires.”

D. (:9b) Same Old Conclusion = Futility Under the Sun

“This too is futility and a striving after wind.”

III. (6:10-12) NO MAKING SENSE OF ONE’S SHORT LIFE ON EARTH -- THE INABILITY TO DETERMINE YOUR OWN DESTINY OR EVEN UNDERSTAND WHAT LIFE IS ALL ABOUT

A. (:10-11) The Futility of Trying to Determine Your Own Destiny – 3 Don’ts:

“Whatever exists has already been named, and it is known what man is; for he cannot dispute with him who is stronger than he is. ¹¹ For there are many words which increase futility. What then is the advantage to a man?”

1. The Finality of the Sovereignty of God – since your course has been determined

Don’t Think that You Can Change Your Future

2. The Frustration of Any Human Speculation or Debate – since God is wiser and more powerful -- **Don’t Debate with God**

3. The Pointlessness of Life Under the Sun – since God trumps man at every turn

Don’t Try to Beat God at His Own Game = Controlling Life

B. (:12) The Futility of Even Understanding Your Lot in Life – 3 Who Knows:

“For who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime, during the few years of his futile life? He will spend them like a shadow. For who can tell a man what will be after him under the sun?”

1. The Uncertainty and Moral Relativism of Agnosticism -- **Who Knows What is Best?**
2. The Brevity and Futility of This Life on Earth –

Who Knows Whether You Will Be Around Tomorrow?

3. The Mystery and Dread of the Future -- **Who Knows What the Future Holds?**

So we have seen the Preacher pronounce that Everything is meaningless – “*All is Vanity.*” Then he preceded to show us what he meant by “*Everything.*” [**Mark Dever**]

- A. Some things **obviously have no substance or significance** –
5:7; 6:9 roving appetite; **7:6** laughter of fools

- B. But he did investigate **more substantial things**
Meaningless of serious injustices – **8:10** – seeing the wicked praised even up until their death and burial; **8:14**; God’s justice is sorely hidden in many situations

- C. Then he looked at things which to us are **less obviously empty** –
2:1ff – searching out pleasure -- We are living in a pleasure addicted age.

4:13ff – Re popularity and public approval – the public is fickle; their affection is not to be overly sought or valued; popularity is passing; public approval can be a demanding master over our lives just as it is fleeting; popularity is not the final reality; this too is meaningless

- D. Judgment of **everything** as meaningless extends even to **good things** – these are the passages that disturb us most

11:10 – youth and vigor are meaningless – this is news –

2:4ff -- Work and the wealth and achievements coming from it – unmasked as meaningless

My heart took delight in all my work and this was the reward for my labor – everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind – **2:17 image of pointlessness**

5:10 – Wealth creation or accumulation not ultimately fulfilling

- Lack of a family member to leave it to
- Lack of time to enjoy it ourselves

Most shocking thing of all – what he says about wisdom – **1:17; 2:15** – reaches the bottom of despair

SECRETS TO A PRODUCTIVE AND ENJOYABLE LIFE – *Ecclesiastes 11*

BIG IDEA:

BY OPPORTUNISTIC FAITH AND JOYFUL CONTENTMENT WE CAN LIVE BOTH A PRODUCTIVE AND ENJOYABLE LIFE

I. (11:1-6) FIVE SECRETS TO A PRODUCTIVE LIFE – EXERCISING OPPORTUNISTIC FAITH

A. (:1) Aggressively Invest Your Resources for the Widest Possible Blessing

“Cast your bread on the surface of the waters, for you will find it after many days.”

1. Counsel: Strategically Bless as Many People as Possible
2. Promise: Patiently Look for God to Bear the Fruit

B. (:2) Wisely Allocate Your Resources Across Different Ventures

“Divide your portion to seven, or even to eight, for you do not know what misfortune may occur on the earth.”

1. Counsel: Strategically Spread Your Resources
2. Caution: Misfortune May Hit Where You Least Expect It

C. (:3-4) Take Reasonable Risks – Not waiting for ideal circumstances

(Chiastic Structure: A B B A)

“If the clouds are full, they pour out rain upon the earth; and whether a tree falls toward the south or toward the north, wherever the tree falls, there it lies. ⁴ He who watches the wind will not sow and he who looks at the clouds will not reap.”

1. Certain Obstacles are Inevitable – Deal with Them
 - a. Expected Cause and Effect Relationships
 - b. Isolated and Unpredicted Events – Wind knocks down trees
2. Don’t Let Future Uncertainties Rob You of Present Productivity
 - b. Sow while there is opportunity
 - a. Reap while there is opportunity

D. (:5) Don’t Try to Unscrew the Inscrutable

“Just as you do not know the path of the wind and how bones are formed in the womb of the pregnant woman, so you do not know the activity of God who makes all things.”

E. (:6) Seize Every Opportunity for Productive Living

“Sow your seed in the morning, and do not be idle in the evening, for you do not know whether morning or evening sowing will succeed, or whether both of them alike will be good.”

II. (11:7-10) FOUR SECRETS TO AN ENJOYABLE LIFE – PRACTICING JOYFUL CONTENTMENT SEASON BY SEASON

A. (:7) Appreciate Every Day You are Alive

“The light is pleasant, and it is good for the eyes to see the sun.”

B. (:8) Prepare for Death -- by Counting Your Blessings Every Day

“Indeed, if a man should live many years, let him rejoice in them all, and let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many. Everything that is to come will be futility.”

C. (:9) Pursue Your Dreams -- Take Advantage of Each Season of Life –

Yet with Balance Guarding Against Indulgence

“Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood. And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes. Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things.”

D. (:10) Practice Contentment -- Try to Mitigate Emotional and Physical Distractions

“So, remove vexation from your heart and put away pain from your body, because childhood and the prime of life are fleeting.”

THE POINT OF IT ALL -- *Ecclesiastes 12*

THIS LIFE HAS MEANING WHEN WE RISE ABOVE THE FUTILITY OF MAN'S WISDOM TO EMBRACE GOD'S WISDOM =

FEAR GOD AND OBEY HIM BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE BECAUSE WE ALL WILL BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE

I. (12:1-7) THE URGENCY OF EMBRACING GOD'S WISDOM: FIGURE LIFE OUT SOONER... RATHER THAN LATER... OLD AGE IS FAST APPROACHING

A. (:1a) It is Never Too Soon to Submit to the Lordship of Your Creator

“Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth,”

1. Remember God by Submitting to His Lordship
2. Respond to God as your Creator
3. Recognize the Brevity of Life – Youth = Opportunity

B. (:1b-7) Graphical Description of the Decay Involved in the Aging Process

1. (:1b-2) General Description of Old Age – Trouble / Distress / Darkness and Gloominess

“before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, “I have no delight in them”; ² before the sun, the light, the moon, and the stars are darkened, and clouds return after the rain;”

2. (:3-5a) Specific Signs of Deterioration and Decay

“in the day that the watchmen of the house tremble, and mighty men stoop, the grinding ones stand idle because they are few, and those who look through windows grow dim; ⁴ and the doors on the street are shut as the sound of the grinding mill is low, and one will arise at the sound of the bird, and all the daughters of song will sing softly. ⁵ Furthermore, men are afraid of a high place and of terrors on the road;”

- a. Loss of Strength
- b. Loss of Essential Functions of the Body
- c. Loss of Virility – Increasing Fears

3. (:5b-7) Ultimate Pictures of Departure and Devastation and Death

“the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags himself along, and the caperberry is ineffective. For man goes to his eternal home while mourners go about in the street. ⁶ Remember Him before the silver cord is broken and the

golden bowl is crushed, the pitcher by the well is shattered and the wheel at the cistern is crushed; ⁷ then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it."

- a. **Departure** from This Life
- b. Two Pictures of **Devastation** of the Physical Body
- c. **Death** = Separation of Body and Spirit

II. (12:8) THE NEED FOR GOD'S WISDOM = THE FUTILITY OF LIFE UNDER THE SUN: APART FROM GOD . . . ALL IS VANITY

"'Vanity of vanities,' says the Preacher, 'all is vanity!'"

III. (12:9-14) THE COMMUNICATION OF GOD'S WISDOM: THE PREACHER FAITHFULLY DRIVES HOME THE MESSAGE OF TRUTH

A. (:9-10) The Expository Role of the Preacher: Communicating God's Truth Accurately and Effectively

"In addition to being a wise man, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge; and he pondered, searched out and arranged many proverbs. ¹⁰ The Preacher sought to find delightful words and to write words of truth correctly."

- 1. Prerequisite: Preacher Must be a Wise, Godly Man
- 2. Goal of Edification – Systematic, Thorough Teaching
- 3. Dedication to His Craft – can be a tedious process involving much discipline
- 4. Choice of the Best Possible Words – for Accuracy and Effectiveness

B. (:11-12) The Productive Impact of the Preacher: Applying God's Wisdom to Stir People to Action and to Drive Home God's Truth

"The words of wise men are like goads, and masters of these collections are like well-driven nails; they are given by one Shepherd. ¹² But beyond this, my son, be warned: the writing of many books is endless, and excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body"

- 1. 2 Illustrations: Goads / Stakes
- 2. Unity and Authority of God's Wisdom -- Sourced from One Shepherd
- 3. Contrasted with Weariness of Book Learning – Accumulating Man's Wisdom

C. (:13-14) The Main Message of the Preacher: Fear God and Obey His Commandments Since You Will Be Held Accountable

"The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments,

because this applies to every person. ¹⁴ For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.”

1. Summary Lesson – The Point of it All
 2. Simple Secrets to Purposeful Living – Fear God / Obey God
 3. Scope of Solomon’s Counsel
 4. Supreme and Total Accountability
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BasicTheology.com: The same themes that at first glance may appear incongruent, such as vanity and enjoyment of simple pleasures, meaninglessness and wisdom, the hopelessness of death and purpose in life, upon careful, contextualized investigation work together to serve the author’s purpose of directing the reader to God for ultimate meaning in life. Ecclesiastes takes the reader through the highs and lows of life on this earth, from hedonism to nihilism, finally arriving at a conclusion that is perfectly at home within Old Testament theology: fear God and keep His commandments.

Charles Ryrie: The message of the book may be stated in the form of three propositions:

- (1) When you look at life with its seemingly aimless cycles (**1:4ff.**) and inexplicable paradoxes (**4:1; 7:15; 8:8**), you might conclude that all is futile, since it is impossible to discern any purpose in the ordering of events.
- (2) Nevertheless, life is to be enjoyed to the fullest, realizing that it is the gift of God (**3:12-13; 3:22; 5:18-19; 8:15; 9:7-9**).
- (3) The wise man will live his life in obedience to God, recognizing that God will eventually judge all men (**3:16-17; 12:14**).