

THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

By Mike Glover

INTRODUCTION

The most famous examples of ‘wisdom literature’ are found in the Bible. The following Biblical books are classified as wisdom literature: the Book of Job, Psalms, the Book of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs.

AUTHOR

The author of the Book of Ecclesiastes is Solomon, and it’s a book filled with failures and pessimism. We might even call it ‘the book of pessimism’. It furnishes us with some of the most pessimistic literature to be found in the Bible.

David’s life had been hard and difficult, and he was constantly on the run from Saul. With the death of Saul, David still did not have complete control of all of the kingdom of Israel.

It would take seven more hard years before he was finally accepted as the king over all of Israel. Yet he could write a book like Psalms and write about joy and praise, **Psalm 118:24**.

There is a stark contrast between David and his son Solomon. Solomon seemed to be just the opposite in character from his father. With the coming of David’s death, it had already been decreed that his son Solomon would become the next king.

Solomon swings into action. The period of his reign, forty years, proved to be the most peaceful time in Israel’s history. Immediately, he gives every indication that he was going to make a good king to rule over Israel.

He became the most powerful and richest ruler in the world. In his early life, he had asked God to give him wisdom to rule his father’s kingdom. God’s answer is found in **1 Kings 3:11-13**.

How could he change so dramatically in his personal outlook on life? He had everything he could possibly want from worldly things. How could he end up being such a pessimistic and disappointed man, considering what all he had when he started out as the king of Israel and with all the blessings God gave him?

At the close of his life, his observation of life was, ‘The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem, **Ecclesiastes 1:1**. He presents himself as a ‘Teacher’ or a ‘Preacher’ who is revealing the delusion of finding happiness in this life with just earthly things. One of the wisest and humblest prayers ever uttered is that of the young man Solomon, **1 Kings 3:9-10**.

When we read through Ecclesiastes, we can’t help but ask, how on earth could a man as wise as Solomon become so foolish? How could a man so high, yet so humble, become so foolish? How could a man so rich become so poor? How could a man who asked for the right thing become so wrong?

In Ecclesiastes, we read of Solomon’s experiments in the laboratory of life. He never found the satisfaction he was looking for. He ends up with his priorities all in the wrong places.

He forgot the very God who had blessed him so richly and turned to detestable heathen gods who could do absolutely nothing for him. His harem led to his downfall.

Ecclesiastes is a very ancient book in many respects, but it is more up-to-date than tomorrow’s newspaper. This is because its theme is age-old and unchanging. Its age speaks to our age in a most relevant way.

The problems considered in this book are the same problems that modern-day Britain faces every day. Customs, lifestyles, and pleasures remain the same as they were in Solomon's age.

And so, the message applies as much to us as it did to those who lived in Solomon's age. Human nature has always remained the same at every age and will continue to repeat these mistakes in life.

He was searching for what he considered the supreme good. What would give him the most pleasure in his life? What would give him the most excitement? He turned inward.

What will satisfy me the most, rather than what will bring the greatest amount of glory to God? It was the trap so many fall into today. It's all about me with no room left for a gracious and loving God.

He was searching for what is worldly supreme. This search has been conducted by countless thousands. He sought everything he could lay his hands upon. He yielded to every fleshly and sensual impulse.

If happiness could be found in earthly things, then it would not elude him; he tried everything he thought would bring him great satisfaction and happiness in his life.

DATE

Ecclesiastes was written during his reign between approximately 970 and 931 BC. Given its descriptions of hedonism, materialism, and frustration, it would have been penned near the end of Solomon's life.

THINGS SOLOMON FOUND TO BE MEANINGLESS

Wisdom. Ecclesiastes 1
 Pleasure. Ecclesiastes 2
 Power And Prestige. Ecclesiastes 3
 Fleshly Indulgence. Ecclesiastes 4-5
 Riches And Wealth. Ecclesiastes 6
 Reputation. Ecclesiastes 7

If we look closely, we will probably see ourselves somewhere in this list of things Solomon sought so hard to find happiness in. Yet all resulted in failing to give him the pleasure and satisfaction he wanted so badly. Solomon was searching for supreme pleasure.

This search has been conducted by countless thousands. Few have been able to pursue it as thoroughly as did Solomon. Being king and the richest man alive, he was in a position to experiment with anything he chose to do.

Few have been able to pursue it as thoroughly as did Solomon. He revelled in everything he could lay his hands on. Each thing he tried, he tried to the fullest extent. He revelled in everything he could lay his hands upon.

He yielded to every fleshly and sensual impulse. If happiness could be found in earthly things, then it would have eluded him; he tried everything that human wisdom said would bring happiness.

His actions in searching for the supreme good remind us of acts in a play where we are permitted to watch as he goes from one thing to another, only to be disappointed.

It never gives him the happiness he thought it would bring. Instead, he concludes, ‘Meaningless! Meaningless!’ says the Teacher. ‘Everything is meaningless!’ **Ecclesiastes 12:8**.

This sentence becomes the theme of his book and is repeated more than a dozen and a half times. Solomon was seeking in the wrong places. He should have been seeking the joy that can be found in the Lord.

IMPORTANT NOTE BEFORE WE GET TO THE TEXT

Please remember, as we go through this book, that Solomon is nearing the end of his life, he is focusing a lot on death, but he, along with most people of the Old Testament, had no real concept of the afterlife.

We should remember that, even if he was the wisest man of his day, Solomon was not omniscient. There were things which even he didn’t know because God hadn’t yet revealed them.

In other words, when he writes later, ‘or the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing,’ **Ecclesiastes 9:5**, Solomon was merely expressing the view of death commonly held among his people in his day.

But, when we examine the Old Testament Scriptures, it becomes clear that, even among God’s ancient chosen people, Israel, there was no clear understanding of, or belief in, life after death.

The Covenant enacted at Sinai related to their manner of life in an earthly ‘Promised Land’, **Exodus 20:12**. This instruction, with its promise, is also repeated in the Psalms. See **Psalms 37**, for example, and look particularly at the following verses: **Psalms 37:3 / Psalms 37:9 / Psalms 37:11 / Psalms 37:22 / Psalms 37:28 / Psalms 37:34**.

A fact that we are inclined to overlook is that, in the Covenant, which God made with His people at Sinai, there is no mention of blessings in a life hereafter and certainly no mention of Heaven.

The blessings promised to those who kept the Covenant were related to this present life, namely longevity and posterity. A long life in the earthly ‘homeland’, Palestine, and someone to carry the family name forward.

Consequently, the Old Testament reveals that God’s people of that period had a very simple, one might almost say simplistic, view of life, with a philosophy which declared, ‘do good, and God will bless you with prosperity and longevity in the Land which He has promised to His people. But do evil, and you will be punished.’

The effect of this belief was that when a person experienced hardship or adversity in his life, people believed that he was being punished by God because of some wickedness in his life.

On the other hand, when one prospered, his prosperity was taken as proof of divine approval and blessing. Well, of course, it would be fine if life were that simple. But we know, and they also were forced to recognise, that it doesn’t always work out that way!

Often, the wicked seem to prosper in this life, even to the extent of seeming to escape punishment for their wickedness, whilst those who try to live good lives often have to face severe hardship. This is what comes out very clearly in **Psalms 73**, where the writer struggles with this very dilemma.

Therefore, gradually it was revealed to the Hebrews that, because the wicked often escape being called to account for their wickedness in this life, there will be a time and a place where the balance will be redressed, and justice will be done. Because God is the Righteous God, the wicked must, and will, be punished, and the righteous will be vindicated, if not in this life but certainly in the afterlife.

And yet, as the New Testament scriptures reveal, even in the days of the Lord Jesus, the puzzling question of death and what lies beyond hadn't been completely resolved and was still fiercely debated among the various religious parties.

The Pharisees firmly believed in both a future life and a judgment, whilst the Sadducees rejected both. It was the Lord Jesus Himself who 'brought life and immortality to light, through the Gospel,' 2 Timothy 1:10.

He brought it to light; He drove away the mists and doubts which had engulfed it for so long. And He did it, both by His teaching and His own resurrection from the dead.

It is in 1 Kings where we first read of Solomon's great wisdom and understanding. It's said he 'excelled' above all men. Everyone wanted to visit him and hear him speak.

Seemingly, he welcomed those who would come to hear him speak. Knowledge is a wonderful thing. But many fall into intellectual pride. All education is nothing without a knowledge of God's Word, 1 Kings 4:29-34 / Ecclesiastes 1:17-18.

OUTLINE

Everything is meaningless. Ecclesiastes 1:1-11
 Life Under the Sun. Ecclesiastes 1:12-6:12
 Life Under God. Ecclesiastes 7:1-12:8
 Conclusion. Ecclesiastes 12:9-14

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

'The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem: 'Meaningless! Meaningless!' says the Teacher. 'Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.' What do people gain from all their labours at which they toil under the sun? Generations come, and generations go, but the earth remains forever. The sun rises, and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises. The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course. All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again.'

Ecclesiastes 1:1-7

EVERYTHING IS MEANINGLESS

Solomon begins by telling us that he is the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem, [Ecclesiastes 1:1](#). The word ‘teacher’, in Hebrew is the word, ‘qohleth’, which means a gatherer of wisdom. This word comes from the other Hebrew word, ‘qahal’, which means to assemble. In other words, this is a person who assembles people for learning. Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Along with the priests and prophets, the teachers were those through whom God communicated His Word to His people, [Ecclesiastes 12:9](#) / [Jeremiah 18:18](#) / [Ezekiel 7:26](#).’

The theme for the entire book is found in the word ‘meaningless’, [Ecclesiastes 1:2](#) / [Ecclesiastes 12:8](#). The Hebrew word used is the word ‘habel’, which means emptiness. Solomon says that everything concerning life is empty, [Ecclesiastes 1:2](#), that is, life without God is entirely a waste of time and has no purpose.

Shank, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The phrase ‘is vanity’ is the most popular one in Ecclesiastes, [Ecclesiastes 1:14](#) / [Ecclesiastes 2:1](#) / [Ecclesiastes 2:11](#) / [Ecclesiastes 2:15](#) / [Ecclesiastes 2:17](#) / [Ecclesiastes 2:19](#) / [Ecclesiastes 2:21](#) / [Ecclesiastes 2:23](#) / [Ecclesiastes 2:26](#) / [Ecclesiastes 3:19](#) / [Ecclesiastes 4:4](#) / [Ecclesiastes 4:7-8](#) / [Ecclesiastes 4:16](#) / [Ecclesiastes 5:7](#) / [Ecclesiastes 5:10](#) / [Ecclesiastes 6:2](#) / [Ecclesiastes 6:4](#) / [Ecclesiastes 6:9](#) / [Ecclesiastes 6:11-12](#) / [Ecclesiastes 7:6](#) / [Ecclesiastes 7:15](#) / [Ecclesiastes 8:10](#) / [Ecclesiastes 8:14](#) / [Ecclesiastes 9:9](#) / [Ecclesiastes 11:8](#) / [Ecclesiastes 11:10](#) / [Ecclesiastes 12:8](#).’

What a way to start a book! Solomon begins with doom and gloom and will continue with this doom and gloom throughout the entire book until the final chapter. Why is he doing this? The aged Solomon, as his reign as king is drawing to an end, reflects upon his life and the lives of others.

He is looking back at everything, and he’s seen everything happening around him. He wants us to learn from the consequences of giving God second place in our lives. He asks the question, ‘What do people gain from all their labours at which they toil under the sun?’ [Ecclesiastes 1:3](#). The answer is simply nothing!

Wright, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Under the sun,’ used 29 times in Ecclesiastes and nowhere else in the Old Testament, simply means ‘on the earth,’ that is, in terms of human existence, [Ecclesiastes 1:9](#) / [Ecclesiastes 1:14](#) / [Ecclesiastes 2:11](#) / [Ecclesiastes 2:17-20](#) / [Ecclesiastes 2:22](#) / [Ecclesiastes 3:16](#) / [Ecclesiastes 4:1](#) / [Ecclesiastes 4:3](#) / [Ecclesiastes 4:7](#) / [Ecclesiastes 4:15](#) / [Ecclesiastes 5:13](#) / [Ecclesiastes 5:18](#) / [Ecclesiastes 6:1](#) / [Ecclesiastes 6:5](#) / [Ecclesiastes 6:12](#) / [Ecclesiastes 8:9](#) / [Ecclesiastes 8:15](#) / [Ecclesiastes 8:17](#) / [Ecclesiastes 9:3](#) / [Ecclesiastes 9:6](#) / [Ecclesiastes 9:9](#) / [Ecclesiastes 9:11](#) / [Ecclesiastes 9:13](#) / [Ecclesiastes 10:5](#) / [Ecclesiastes 1:13](#) / [Ecclesiastes 2:3](#) / [Ecclesiastes 3:1](#). The phrase shows that the writer’s perspective was universal, not limited to his own people and land.’

Hubbard, in his commentary, says the following.

‘You think you have all the dishes washed, and from a bedroom or a bathroom, there appears, as from a ghost, another dirty glass. And even when all the dishes are washed, it is only a few hours until they demand washing again. So much of our work is cyclical, and so much of it futile.’

If our lives are focused on fulfilling our own pleasures and trying to become famous, then when we get older, we will look back and come to the realisation that this was meaningless, it was a waste of time. It’s meaningless because we realise that pleasure and fame don’t give us hope for the afterlife.

Notice he says that ‘generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever,’ [Ecclesiastes 1:4](#). This passage, and especially the phrase ‘remain forever’, has puzzled many a person over the years. If we are to understand this expression, it’s important that we read the entire verse. Does it mean that the Earth will never be destroyed?

THE CONTRAST BETWEEN MAN AND HIS PLANET

When Ecclesiastes 1:4 is dragged in to support the present-day ‘watchtower’, the interpretation of this verse, the clear and simple significance of the verse is missed.

In it, the Biblical writer declares that life on the earth is transient and full of change. Even in the world of nature, there is constant movement and constant change, but there is no lasting progress.

As for man, although he labours constantly, neither he nor his works endure. But whilst one human generation follows another, such as the brevity of man’s existence, the earth itself remains.

And it remains, ‘forever’! But the word ‘olam’ does not mean eternally; it means ‘age-lasting’. The earth will continue until the role designed for it in the plan of God has been fulfilled, Exodus 21:6.

The existence of the present earth also will continue for just as long as the will and purpose of God decrees, and the scriptures make it abundantly plain that this means it will continue until Christ returns, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 / 2 Peter 3:10 / 2 Peter 3:13. These verses describe the end of this present age and this present earth.

Solomon says when we eventually get old and look back upon our lives, if God isn’t number one place in our lives, or if God isn’t involved in any way in our lives, then life would be meaningless, it would have no purpose, no point.

A life without God is monotonous, whilst the sun continues to rise each day and sets at the end of the day, Ecclesiastes 1:5, as the wind blows south and then turns north, Ecclesiastes 1:6, as the streams go back and forth into and from the sea, Ecclesiastes 1:7, such is life.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘People’s work is similar to the aspects of nature cited in these verses. In nature, there are many things that recur in a cyclical pattern. They are never complete. For example, we never have a rainstorm that makes it unnecessary to have any more rainstorms, Job 36:27-28. Our work is never complete in the sense that we never finally arrive at a condition in which no more work is necessary. There is always the need to do more work. Any homeowner can testify to this!’

Even when people die, all these natural things continue. If a person enjoys their pleasure and becomes famous, the natural world continues, but all the riches and wealth we have acquired simply get passed on to someone else. Anyone who doesn’t have God in their life is just like this, whereas the Christian has riches in heaven, Matthew 6:19-21, along with eternal life, Matthew 19:16-22.

‘All things are wearisome; more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing.

What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one can say, ‘Look! This is something new’? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time. No one remembers the former generations, and even those yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow them.’ Ecclesiastes 1:8-11

Solomon says that while life is boring and mundane for us, while it never changes for us, wonderful things continue to go on in the physical world, Ecclesiastes 1:8. He’s telling us that our perception of this physical life leads us to think that the things happening in the physical world won’t bring us any peace of mind.

We are blessed in what we see and hear around us in the physical world, Ecclesiastes 1:8 / Psalms 19:1-4, but because we hear and see the same old thing, time after time, we come to the conclusion that the physical world won’t give us any emotional or spiritual satisfaction. This brings frustration to us because we conclude that when we die, the world goes on as before.

There is nothing new, [Ecclesiastes 1:9](#); our lives are short, [James 4:14](#), and all we experience is what many others have experienced before us. We may think we've discovered something new, but the reality is that it may be new to us, but it's certainly not new for those who lived before us; it's old for them, [Ecclesiastes 1:10](#). In other words, the human spirit remains unchanged throughout time.

Solomon has just argued that life is meaningless because there is nothing new, and now, he argues that life is meaningless because nothing is remembered, [Ecclesiastes 1:11](#).

Throughout the world, there are many monuments, books and places which help us remember because we are prone to forget things. Solomon doesn't want us to forget the legacy of his life, which was that if we don't put God first in our lives, then life itself will be meaningless.

Throughout the Old Testament, people were reminded of who God was and what He had done for them, [Genesis 50:24](#) / [Exodus 22:3](#). One of the reasons we partake in the Lord's Supper is to remember, [Luke 22:19-20](#).

We are prone to forget, the good news is that God never forgets, [Psalm 56:8](#). He knows His people, and He knows what they do, [2 Corinthians 5:10](#). Most people try to work FOR their salvation, whilst those who are saved, work BECAUSE of their salvation and as a result, the work they do isn't meaningless, [1 Corinthians 15:59](#) / [Revelation 14:13](#).

WISDOM IS MEANINGLESS

'I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. I applied my mind to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under the heavens. What a heavy burden God has laid on mankind! I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind. What is crooked cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted. I said to myself, 'Look, I have increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me; I have experienced much of wisdom and knowledge.' Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom, and also of madness and folly, but I learned that this, too, is a chasing after the wind. For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief.' [Ecclesiastes 1:12-18](#)

Solomon always applied his mind to study and applied wisdom to what he did, [Ecclesiastes 1:12-13](#) / [1 Kings 4:33](#), but then he says if that is all our main goal is in life, we will be left frustrated, it's like chasing after the wind, [Ecclesiastes 1:14](#). In other words, it's a pointless exercise.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

'While Solomon was faithful to his God, he diligently cultivated his mind. His giving himself to the study of natural history, philosophy, and poetry is sufficient proof of it. He had no intuitive knowledge from God, but he had a capacity to obtain every kind of knowledge useful to man.'

Solomon says, 'what is crooked cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted,' [Ecclesiastes 1:15](#). In other words, he's saying the more we search, the more we discover and the more we discover makes us come to the conclusion that the world we're living in is far from perfect.

In Solomon's case, as a king, he used all that study and wisdom to make himself successful, [Ecclesiastes 1:16](#). However, when he was looking to the world to find satisfaction and happiness, he didn't find them; he says that it's like chasing after the wind, [Ecclesiastes 1:17](#).

If the wisest and richest man who ever lived found study and wisdom meaningless, what makes us think we will be any different? In other words, there's no way we can understand all things and for some, that leaves them annoyed because they don't know all the answers to all the questions, [Ecclesiastes 8:16-17](#) / [Psalm 147:5](#).

God created us with great imaginations. He created us to learn and discover new things, but there's always more to learn, there's always more to discover, even when we're on our deathbed, we find ourselves thinking about something that still needs to be learned.

Solomon appears to know wisdom from two different perspectives, that is 'sorrow' and 'grief', Ecclesiastes 1:18. The idea here is that he tried to live in the world of sorrow and the world of grief to try and help him understand the wisdom of life, but this again only left him irritated with life, it was like chasing after the wind.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

'The more we know of ourselves, the less satisfied shall we be with our own hearts; and the more we know of mankind the less willing shall we be to trust them, and the less shall we admire them.'

Those of us who've been around for a while will know that the more we think we know, the more we realise just how much we don't really know. Knowledge here leads to sorrow and grief, that's because knowledge can sometimes make people come across as arrogant, 1 Corinthians 8:1, but humility helps us understand that we can never know everything, Isaiah 55:8-9.

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION

Solomon failed to find ultimate pleasure and happiness up to the end of his life. Such things as wealth, prestige, power, wisdom, and knowledge failed. He isn't looking for just ordinary things that can bring happiness, but he wants to find the ultimate pleasure.

Actually, he was surrounded by many things that could have brought him all the pleasure and joy anyone could ask for. Unfortunately, he could find pleasure in spiritual activities.

Moving on, he thought surely there must be some pleasure he was missing in his life. So, the search continued seeking out what he could find that would give him ultimate pleasure and happiness.

PLEASURE IS MEANINGLESS

'I said to myself, 'Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good.' But that also proved to be meaningless. 'Laughter,' I said, 'is madness. And what does pleasure accomplish?' I tried cheering myself with wine and embracing folly—my mind still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was good for people to do under the heavens during the few days of their lives. I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired male and female singers, and a harem as well—the delights of a man's heart.' Ecclesiastes 2:1-8

Wiersbe, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Solomon decided to test his own heart to see how he would respond to two very common experiences of life, enjoyment, Ecclesiastes 2:1-3, and employment, Ecclesiastes 2:4-11.’

Solomon says pleasure is meaningless, Ecclesiastes 2:1, and laughter is madness, Ecclesiastes 2:2. We live in a society that likes to party; sadly, many of them involve alcohol.

The main reason people get drunk is simply to forget about their problems for a moment; it doesn’t bring real happiness, in fact, it just heightens their unhappiness.

Solomon tried to cheer himself with wine and embraced folly, but this proved to be meaningless, Ecclesiastes 2:3.

Scripture also declares that ‘wine makes for a merry heart,’ Psalms 104:15. The wine was a common drink among the Jews, but it was dangerous.

At weddings and other public affairs, it was mixed with water to bring down the content of alcohol. This no doubt was the situation at the wedding feast that Jesus and his disciples attended in Galilee, John 2:1-11. Jesus wouldn’t have produced intoxicating wine.

There are many warnings given in the Old Testament about the abuse and misuse of wine. Some would add stronger drinks to wine to make it stronger. They had alcohol in those days, just as we have today. Some Bible characters, like Noah, Genesis 9:21, and Lot, Genesis 19:30-38, became drunk on wine, which left them stupefied.

Too much alcohol and one becomes intoxicated. Once intoxicated, one is incapable of thinking rationally. The result is that a person does senseless things and can be a threat to others around him, including his family.

In the last two weeks, news carried by local TV and the newspaper tells of car wrecks where alcohol was found, and no one was wearing a seat belt, and when the cars swerved off the highway, occupants were killed.

In these particular incidents, the occupants were in their teens. Teenage drinking seems to have reached record-high numbers. All kinds of warnings don’t seem to stop driving under the influence. ‘Don’t drink and drive’, one motorway sign warns.

People in bars are told not to drive home but to get a ‘designated driver’ to take them home. More people die of driving under the influence of alcohol than die in warfare.

T.V. and billboard ads are directed toward the young. Unfortunately, sporting event ads seem to draw more attention than other ads. Beer ads show everyone as happy and having a great time.

Did Solomon ever get drunk? Probably so, as he was seeking the ultimate pleasure. Wine could bring a certain kind of pleasure. Since wine can make the heart merry, no doubt there is much laughter associated with it.

One thinks he will be happy until he awakes from a drunken stupor, feeling terrible. Nothing good can be said about alcohol. Evidently, the wine didn’t bring Solomon the pleasure he thought that it would, Ecclesiastes 2:10-11.

No doubt he experienced laughter and joy to some degree when he saw what was good for people to do under the heavens during the few days of their lives, Ecclesiastes 2:3, but not the kind of satisfaction he wanted for himself. There were actually many things he could have filled his days with pleasure.

He had built houses, 1 Kings 7:1 / 2 Chronicles 8:1 / 1 Kings 9:10, and planted vineyards, Ecclesiastes 2:4. He had gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them, Ecclesiastes 2:5.

He made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees, Ecclesiastes 2:6. He bought male and female slaves and had other slaves, and he owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before him, Ecclesiastes 2:7.

Solomon tells us of something else which temporarily takes our minds off the problems of life, and that's work. Solomon himself had been down this road, but accumulating a great vast of wealth from anyone who came to visit him, Ecclesiastes 2:8 / 1 Kings 10:1-2 / 1 Kings 10:10.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following concerning how Solomon gathered his wealth.

1. The taxes levied on his subjects.
2. The tribute given by the neighbouring potentates. Both these make the 'peculiar treasure of kings' taxes and tribute.

He had singers to entertain him, Ecclesiastes 2:8, and he had sumptuous dinners in his banquet hall, and he would have served the best of wines. He was involved in everything you could think of, spending time with the rich and famous to help him be happier. He invested time in wine, parties, and work, but they all came to an end, and he still didn't find any real lasting happiness.

‘I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this, my wisdom stayed with me. I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my labour, and this was the reward for all my toil. Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.’ Ecclesiastes 2:9-11

He became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before him and in all this his wisdom stayed with him, Ecclesiastes 2:9. Solomon as a king, had the resources, contacts and wealth to try everything in life to find real lasting happiness, Ecclesiastes 2:10.

But he still came to the conclusion that it was all meaningless, Ecclesiastes 2:11. It was a chasing after the wind, a waste of time because they didn't bring him real happiness.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Some of this experimentation involved sin, Ecclesiastes 2:8 / Numbers 15:39 / Psalms 131:1. Solomon did not say he experienced no pleasure; he did. Nevertheless, his final evaluation was that pleasure does not yield long-term profit, i.e., real significance in this life, Ecclesiastes 2:11.’

There's no doubt that having the resources, contacts and wealth will bring us some kind of happiness, but Solomon realised that real happiness only comes when God is number one in our lives, Colossians 3:1-2.

We can almost read his frustration when he realises that everything he's worked so hard for to help him find happiness actually made him unhappier. If we want to have real happiness in this life, then we should put others first and put our own selfish desires last, John 13:17 / Philippians 2:1-4.

WISDOM AND FOLLY ARE MEANINGLESS

‘Then I turned my thoughts to consider wisdom, and also madness and folly. What more can the king's successor do than what has already been done? I saw that wisdom is better than folly, just as light is better than darkness. The wise have eyes in their heads, while the fool walks in the darkness; but I came to realise that the same fate overtakes them both. Then I said to myself, ‘The fate of the fool will overtake me also. What then do I gain by being wise?’ I said to myself, ‘This too is meaningless.’ For the wise, like the fool, will not be long remembered; the days have already come when both have been forgotten. Like the fool, the wise too must die!’ Ecclesiastes 2:12-16

When one thing fails to bring us happiness, then move on to something else to find it. Here Solomon now tries wisdom and knowledge to find happiness, Ecclesiastes 2:12.

Wisdom in itself won't stop any of us from getting involved in stupid things, but someone who puts wisdom into practice will certainly know to stay away from those very same stupid things.

However, whether we use wisdom correctly or not, both the wise and foolish end up in the grave, [Ecclesiastes 2:13-14](#). The point is that we must learn to focus on things above, not on things here on Earth, [Colossians 3:1-2](#), if we want to be happy in life.

The wise and the foolish won't be remembered by the living when they die, [Ecclesiastes 2:15-16](#). In other words, knowledge doesn't guarantee that anyone will be remembered. Often at memorial ceremonies, people will remember the great act of courage a person has done, but they actually don't know their names.

TOIL IS MEANINGLESS

'So, I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. And who knows whether that person will be wise or foolish? Yet they will have control over all the fruit of my toil into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless. So, my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labour under the sun. For a person may labour with wisdom, knowledge, and skill, and then they must leave all they own to another who has not toiled for it. This, too, is meaningless and a great misfortune. What do people get for all the toil and anxious striving with which they labour under the sun? All their days, their work is grief and pain; even at night, their minds do not rest. This too is meaningless.' [Ecclesiastes 2:17-23](#)

Solomon makes a shocking statement, 'he hates life!' [Ecclesiastes 2:17](#).

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

'Also, all the stages of life, the child, the man, and the sage. There was nothing in it worth pursuing, no period worth re-living and no hope that if this were possible, I could again be more successful.'

When he examines life in general and looks at everything life has to offer, he comes to the conclusion that life doesn't provide any form of peace. This is simply because life without God is meaningless, [Ecclesiastes 2:17](#). It's a life without peace because we don't have God's peace, [Romans 15:33](#) / [Ephesians 2:14-18](#), or at peace with each other, [Hebrews 12:14](#).

Everyone knows that when we die, we leave everything behind, [Ecclesiastes 2:18](#) / [Ecclesiastes 5:15](#) / [1 Timothy 6:7](#). Everything we worked so hard for in life is left behind as an inheritance for others, that is, those who didn't work for it. Solomon wondered if the person who inherited his wealth would be wise enough not to waste it, [Ecclesiastes 2:19-21](#) / [Luke 15:13](#). He hopes that they will be wise enough to learn that real happiness comes from helping others, [Luke 6:38](#) / [Hebrews 13:16](#).

He asks what do people get for all the toil and anxious striving with which they labour under the sun? [Ecclesiastes 2:22](#). And the answer is all their days their work is grief and pain, even at night their minds do not rest, and so, this too is meaningless, [Ecclesiastes 2:23](#).

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

'What a picture of human life where the heart is not filled with the peace and love of God! All his days are sorrows; all his labours griefs, all his nights restless, for he has no portion but merely what earth can give; and that is embittered by the labour of acquisition, and the disappointment in the using.'

‘A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own toil. This, too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? To the person who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge, and happiness, but to the sinner, he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.’ Ecclesiastes 2:24-26

Solomon recognises that it’s God who does the providing, even our work, and if we remember that God is the provider, [Ecclesiastes 2:24-25](#), we can enjoy life to the full, [John 10:10](#), because we understand we’re actually working for God, [Ephesians 6:5-9](#) / [Colossians 3:22-24](#).

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This is the first of seven passages in which the writer recommended the wholehearted pursuit of enjoyment, [Ecclesiastes 2:24](#) / [Ecclesiastes 3:12](#) / [Ecclesiastes 3:22](#) / [Ecclesiastes 5:17](#) / [Ecclesiastes 8:15](#) / [Ecclesiastes 9:7-9](#) / [Ecclesiastes 11:7](#) to [Ecclesiastes 12:1](#), and they make the point with increasing intensity and solemnity.’

God gives us the wisdom to help us understand the importance and meaning of life, [Ecclesiastes 2:26](#). We’ve been made to simply glorify God and not ourselves with our lives.

He gives us the knowledge to help us comprehend the work of God in His creation, and He gives us happiness, [Ecclesiastes 2:26](#). In other words, when we remember these things, when we work, we know that they actually bring us real joy, despite what is happening around us, [Romans 8:28](#).

To the sinner, God gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God, and so, this too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind, [Ecclesiastes 2:26](#).

So many people today live to work, rather than working to live, and many people just work to build up their wealth, and their only goal in life is to get richer. We should learn to be content with what we have, that is, as long as we’re not struggling to feed our families and make ends meet, [Philippians 4:10-13](#).

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Since we cannot expect permanent changes to come out of our work, changes that will continue forever after, the best we can do is to enjoy its fruits and find some satisfaction in the work itself, [Ecclesiastes 3:12-13](#) / [Ecclesiastes 3:22](#) / [Ecclesiastes 5:18-19](#) / [Ecclesiastes 8:15](#) / [Ecclesiastes 9:7](#) / [Ecclesiastes 9:9](#).’

CHAPTER 3

INTRODUCTION

‘There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.’ Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

A TIME FOR EVERYTHING

These verses are written in Hebrew poetry, and Solomon shares his philosophy of the world. We must remember they are not written randomly, and not all of the statements are to be taken literally. They are written to let us know the divine order of things so that we can know that God is controlling all things.

He begins by reminding us that life consists of all we do between birth and death, [Ecclesiastes 3:1-2](#). This is the way God has designed human life, as we know no one, in our physical state, we can't live forever, [James 4:14](#).

God created seasons where we can plant our crops to sustain us with food and in addition to planting, we eagerly await the expected harvest time, [Ecclesiastes 3:3](#).

A time to kill is somewhat difficult to understand, [Ecclesiastes 3:3](#) / [Genesis 9:5-6](#). However, executions and wars have always existed. Here Solomon reminds us that justice must be served against the guilty, but there must also be a time of healing, [Ecclesiastes 3:3](#), that is a time of reconciliation and forgiveness. We all need time to heal from our wounds and sicknesses, although this can be slow and painful sometimes.

Tearing down buildings, [Ecclesiastes 3:3](#), can be dangerous; this is why we have so many warning signs. In the Bible, old buildings with mildew were to be torn down, [Leviticus 14:33](#), and replaced with a new building. In other words, the time of building was to make something better than it was before.

We will all experience times of sorrow, [Ecclesiastes 3:4](#), especially when a loved one passes away, these are the times when we need to cry to get relief but there are also times, special times when we will rejoice and be glad, [Ecclesiastes 3:4](#), those are the times when laughter is appropriate, [Romans 12:15](#). Weddings and celebrations are a time to dance, sing, eat and laugh, [Ecclesiastes 3:4](#).

Anyone who knows about land will know that in order to prepare the land for crops, they need to remove all the stones first, [Ecclesiastes 3:5](#). Some remove the stones to ensure their flocks don't get hurt by walking on them.

However, these landowners don't just throw away the stones; they reuse them to build walls around their fields to protect their animals, or they use them to build another structure elsewhere, [Ecclesiastes 3:5](#).

During special events or when we haven't seen someone in a long time, it usually results in long periods of hugs, [Ecclesiastes 3:5](#). This is perfectly natural. However, there are times when we shouldn't embrace someone with a hug, especially if the person we meet is ungodly or has alternative motives, [Ecclesiastes 3:5](#) / [Luke 22:47-53](#).

There is a time for gain, [Ecclesiastes 3:6](#), but there's also a time when we must share our riches with others, [Ecclesiastes 3:6](#). There is a modern-day proverb which says, 'don't cry over spilt milk.'

This basically means a wise person is careful to recognise what is acceptable and should be more careful in the future.

We all know someone who holds on to absolutely everything they have, [Ecclesiastes 3:6](#), but we must learn that not everything we have is worth holding on to; there are things we simply need to get rid of, [Ecclesiastes 3:6](#).

Unlike our throwaway culture today, clothing was very expensive in Bible times. People wouldn't throw those clothes away; they would use them for something else or simply fix them, [Ecclesiastes 3:7](#).

There are times when it's best to shut our mouths and times to speak up, [Ecclesiastes 3:7](#), especially in reference to truth. Words spoken at the appropriate time can be very powerful, especially if they help someone reconcile with someone else or bring comfort, [Proverbs 15:23](#). There are also times we need to learn to say nothing, especially in tense arguments with others, [James 3:2-12](#).

There's always a conflict between loving someone and hating someone, [Ecclesiastes 3:8](#), but God has blessed us so much, that we should always love, [John 3:16](#). Hatred happens but we should control our feelings otherwise this can devastate everyone involved. There are some things we should hate, [Matthew 6:24](#).

The world goes through cycles of war and peace, [Ecclesiastes 3:8](#), and as Christians, we experience peace, the Lord's peace, [Ephesians 2:11-18](#), but we're also involved in spiritual warfare, [Ephesians 6:10-18](#). After most wars, love and understanding are usually given to our former enemies.

Glenn, in his commentary, says the following.

'The fact that Solomon utilised polar opposites in multiples of seven and began his list with birth and death is highly significant. The number seven suggests the idea of completeness, and the use of polar opposites—a well-known poetic device called merism—suggests totality, [Psalms 139:2-3](#).'

'What do workers gain from their toil? I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. That each of them may eat and drink and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God. I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that people will fear him. Whatever has already been, and what will be has been before; and God will call the past to account.' [Ecclesiastes 3:9-15](#)

Solomon asks what do workers gain from their toil? And says he has seen the burden God has laid on the human race, [Ecclesiastes 3:9-10](#).

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

'Man is a sinner and because he is such, he suffers.'

When Adam and Eve messed up, God cast them out of the garden and said that work would no longer be pleasurable but hard, [Genesis 3:17-19](#). Solomon teaches us that mankind was created as spiritual beings, and it's our spirit within us that yearns to worship.

Every civilisation in the world has always wanted to worship something or someone. Solomon says that someone is God because it was God who put that desire in our hearts, [Ecclesiastes 3:11](#) / [Romans 1:18-32](#).

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'One thing that elevates us above the animal world, in addition to the God-given sense of eternity, [Ecclesiastes 3:11](#), is the desire to understand the whole. This accounts for all science, philosophy, and human knowledge, as well as theology.'

Everything that God created was good, [Genesis 1:4](#) / [Genesis 1:12](#) / [Genesis 1:18](#) / [Genesis 1:21](#) / [Genesis 1:25](#), and when He created man, He said it was very good, [Genesis 1:31](#).

Despite placing eternity in our hearts, no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end, [Ecclesiastes 3:11](#) / [Isaiah 55:8-9](#). Solomon knows that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live, [Ecclesiastes 3:12](#).

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

'Since God has so disposed the affairs of this world, that the great events of providence cannot be accelerated or retarded by human cares and anxieties, submit to God, make a proper use of what he has given: do thyself no harm and endeavour as much as possible to do others good.'

Solomon knows that each of them may eat and drink and find satisfaction in all their toil because this is the gift of God, [Ecclesiastes 3:13](#) / [John 10:10](#).

Ginsburg, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Solomon repeated his former counsel in view of this limited perspective, Ecclesiastes 2:24. ‘Do good,’ Ecclesiastes 3:12, should read ‘enjoy themselves.’ We could translate Ecclesiastes 3:13, ‘If any man eats and drinks and finds satisfaction in all his toil, it is a gift of God.’

He knows that everything God does will endure forever and nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it, Ecclesiastes 3:14. He tells us that God does it so that people will fear him, Ecclesiastes 3:15 / Ecclesiastes 12:13 / Proverbs 9:10.

He says whatever is has already been and what will be has been before and God will call the past to account, Ecclesiastes 3:15 / Ecclesiastes 12:13 / Acts 17:31 / Revelation 21:8.

We must learn that there is more to life than working, we work not only to sustain ourselves and our families but we work for the benefit of others, Ephesians 6:5-9 / Colossians 3:22-24. God isn’t a God of chaos but of order, 1 Corinthians 14:33. We see this in the creation account of Genesis 1.

‘And I saw something else under the sun: In the place of judgment—wickedness was there, in the place of justice—wickedness was there. I said to myself, ‘God will bring into judgment both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time to judge every deed.’ I also said to myself, ‘As for humans, God tests them so that they may see that they are like the animals. Surely the fate of human beings is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; humans have no advantage over animals. Everything is meaningless. All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return. Who knows if the human spirit rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?’ So, I saw that there is nothing better for a person than to enjoy their work, because that is their lot. For who can bring them to see what will happen after them?’
Ecclesiastes 3:16-22

There’s no denying that life can be very complicated at times, especially when we see the moral and immoral behaviour of people. This behaviour causes confusion because there are times when justice should have been served, but instead, wickedness flourished, and injustice was being served instead of righteousness, Ecclesiastes 3:16.

As I mentioned earlier, God created everything and said it was good; there was no evil, but now evil is everywhere, due to the sinfulness of mankind. We see a lot of evil men in the world today who love nothing more than to hurt those innocent people around them.

However, there’s a time coming when God will hold these evil people to account, they will be judged for their actions, Ecclesiastes 3:17 / Ecclesiastes 12:14 / Acts 17:31 / Revelation 21:8.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Man has his time here below, and God shall have his time above. At his throne, the judged shall be rejudged, and iniquity forever close her mouth.’

Solomon tells us that the physical status of all people is the same as the animals, Ecclesiastes 3:18, that is, they all die and return to the dust, Ecclesiastes 3:19. Remember, he’s not speaking about immortality because the idea of the afterlife and eternal life didn’t become clear until Jesus came, 2 Timothy 1:9-10.

It’s only the spirit of humans that returns to God, Ecclesiastes 12:7, because animals don’t have a soul as we do. Solomon’s point is simply this: if there is no life beyond the grave, then we simply die just like the animals do, who have no soul, Ecclesiastes 3:20-21.

Solomon saw that there is nothing better for a person than to enjoy their work, because that is their lot, for who can bring them to see what will happen after them? Ecclesiastes 3:22.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘God has, of course, enabled us to see what will occur after we die by giving us additional revelation after Solomon’s time. The alternative response to the one Solomon advocated is despair, which, reflecting on unjust oppression, causes, Ecclesiastes 4:1-3.’

DO ANIMALS GO TO HEAVEN?

I recently lost my pet springer spaniel Oscar, and a friend of mine asked this very question: Will Oscar be in heaven now? This is a good question to which I quoted Revelation 22:14-15. The text says that the ‘dogs are outside’ of God’s presence, which was a joke and not obviously to be taken literally.

It’s a good question, and although it may bring a lot of comfort to many animal lovers who have lost their pets, we need to see what the Bible actually teaches. The Bible states that both man and animals have the ‘breath of life’, that is, both man and animals are living beings, Genesis 2:7 / Genesis 1:30 / Genesis 6:17 / Genesis 7:15 / Genesis 7:22.

There’s no doubt that animals are precious in God’s eyes but the main difference between human beings and animals is that humanity is made in the image and likeness of God, while animals are not, Genesis 1:26-27.

Being made in the image and likeness of God means that human beings are like God, capable of spirituality, with the mind, emotion, and will, and they have a part of their being that continues after death.

Remembering that the Hebrew word ‘Adam’ means ‘man.’ ‘Life’, like animal life, is something which Adam shared with every other living creature created by God. But the difference between the other creatures and man lies in the fact that God said, ‘Let us make Man after our own image, after our likeness,’ Genesis 1:26.

Only with reference to man is this said, and it’s this ‘likeness to God’ which uniquely constituted man as a rational and moral being, possessing a conscience that enabled him to distinguish between good and evil, right and wrong, obedience and disobedience. It’s in this sense that man is a soul, a self, having self-awareness and self-consciousness.

Now look at Genesis 1:26, again, this shows us that man is not only superior to all other living creatures on Earth because he possesses this moral awareness. This also shows us that the gulf between man and the rest of creation was further emphasised and endorsed when God assigned dominion to him over all other living creatures, Job 32:8.

If we consider the body to be ‘Earth-conscious’, and the soul to be ‘Self-conscious’, we may think of the spirit as being ‘God-conscious’. In other words, it is that part of man’s nature which enables him to reach out to and communicate with God.

It’s the spiritual dimension in man’s character, and here again, we see the difference between man and other creatures. It’s only man who can say, ‘My soul thirsts for God, for the living God’, Psalms 42:2.

It’s only man who is encouraged to ‘seek after Him, in the hope that they might feel after Him and find Him,’ Acts 17:27. It’s only man who is given the assurance that ‘He is not far from each one of us, for in Him we live and move and have our being’, Acts 17:28.

The ‘soul’ is man’s unique self; it’s the part of his being that, because it’s rational and moral, determines the actions performed by his body, and which, therefore, renders him personally accountable for what he does.

And so, it is man’s ‘soul’ which will ultimately be either saved or lost, depending on his response to the offer of salvation which was made first possible by the coming of Christ into the world.

When an animal dies, its body is buried, and their spirit goes back to God, Ecclesiastes 12:7. Solomon says that at death, the body returns to the dust of the earth, and the spirit goes back to God who gave it.

I really miss my dog Oscar, he brought me a lot of joy and was a source of comfort at times and although it sounds nice and brings people a lot of comfort, I believe that animals don't possess a soul, and the Bible teaches us that it's only the faithful soul which will live forever with God in heaven, 2 Corinthians 5:8.

CHAPTER 4

INTRODUCTION

Solomon became a modern-day Playboy. This has to be one of the most disappointing and defeating things that he attempted to find pleasure in. A reading of 1 Kings 11:1-8 tells of this low point in his life. His foolish actions sound almost unbelievable considering how wise he was in his early life. Solomon had a complicated personality. He is difficult to understand.

It would seem in his latter days, his wives occupied much of his time. There were seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. As he grew older, he obviously spent more and more of his time with his harem. There, he could tease, flirt, and seduce his women.

Can you imagine trying to please and entertain one thousand women? What about his first wife, the one he was willing to build a beautiful palace for? The daughter of the Egyptian Pharaoh would naturally resent all this attention Solomon gave to his women.

Even among the thousand women that he had, there had to be a tremendous resentment and jealousy between them. Solomon's conduct is nothing more than that of a foolish, doting old man whose actions are ridiculous.

Notice that his heart is turned away from God to honour pagan gods just as God had predicted. Solomon had to know how God felt about marrying pagan women and how God detested their pagan gods.

God told Solomon, 'Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates,' 1 Kings 11:11.

As the end of Solomon's life approached, it must have been very disappointing to him, as it all ended in vanity. I am concerned about how fast Britain is drifting away from the moral principles it has lived by for centuries.

Those of old would be horrified to see such immoral practices. Homosexuality was something you rarely heard about, but is now being looked upon as acceptable, even flaunted. Those who oppose are persecuted for taking a stand against it.

Young people getting drunk and not wearing seat belts are dying in car wrecks every week. Almost every day, we read of people being shot and killed. Gang war is found in both small and large cities.

Theft is on a rampage. Like Solomon, much of Britain seems to have ‘forgotten God’ and His moral law. We now find ourselves surrounded by a new and evil culture which is spinning out of control. This isn’t the nation or culture we had sixty years ago. How long will the Lord allow this age to spin out of control? The Gospel is our only hope!

NO SATISFACTION IN FLESHLY INDULGENCE

‘Again, I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun: I saw the tears of the oppressed—and they have no comforter; power was on the side of their oppressors—and they have no comforter. And I declared that the dead, who had already died, are happier than the living, who are still alive. But better than both is the one who has never been born, who has not seen the evil that is done under the sun.’ Ecclesiastes 4:1-3

Solomon appears to be continuing with his thoughts from [Ecclesiastes 3:16](#), in reference to judgment and wickedness. Some people are all too familiar with the word ‘oppression’ these days, where a ruling government takes over their country, and they lose their freedom.

Solomon saw the tears of the oppressed and says they have no comforter because power was on the side of their oppressors and they have no comforter, [Ecclesiastes 4:1](#).

Solomon says those who are already dead don’t have to live under such oppression, [Ecclesiastes 4:2](#). In other words, it would be better not to have been born in the first place than to live under such an evil dictatorship, [Ecclesiastes 4:3](#).

‘And I saw that all toil and all achievement spring from one person’s envy of another. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. Fools fold their hands and ruin themselves. Better one handful with tranquillity than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind.’ Ecclesiastes 4:4-6

The world we live in today was much the same as Solomon’s world, where we have people who are envious of other people’s talents and abilities, [Ecclesiastes 4:4](#).

We see this, especially in many talent shows, where people are envious of each other. People never learn to be satisfied with their lot, and as a result, they never have peace of mind. They never think they are good enough because they measure themselves against others around them.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

‘It is not by injustice and wrong only that men suffer, but through envy also. For if a man acts uprightly and properly in the world, he soon becomes the object of his neighbour’s envy and calumny too. Therefore, the encouragement to do good, to act an upright part, is very little. This constitutes a part of the vain and empty system of human life.’

Solomon says everyone has to work because if they don’t, they will end up in poverty and end up relying on their friend and family to get by, [Ecclesiastes 4:5-6](#).

In other words, people are better off being content with what they have than having lots of wealth, which leads them to be in competition with those around them.

Kidner, in his commentary, says the following.

‘He (the drop-out) is the picture of complacency and unwitting self-destruction, for this comment on him points out a deeper damage than the wasting of his capital. His idleness eats away not only what he has but what he is, eroding his self-control, his grasp of reality, his capacity for care and, in the end, his self-respect.’

‘Again, I saw something meaningless under the sun: There was a man all alone; he had neither son nor brother. There was no end to his toil, yet his eyes were not content with his wealth. ‘For whom am I toiling,’ he asked, ‘and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?’ This too is meaningless—a miserable business!’ Ecclesiastes 4:7-8

Loneliness can be a terrible feeling, but there are times people bring it about by their own selfish actions, Ecclesiastes 4:7-8. One of those times is when they are working for themselves without a care for others. Working with others creates friendships and companionship and therefore brings about satisfaction, Acts 20:34.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The man who is the centre of his own existence has neither wife, child, nor legal heir; and yet is as intent on getting money as if he had the largest family to provide for; nor does he only labour with intense application, but he even refuses himself the comforts of life out of his own gains! This is not only vanity, the excess of foolishness, but it is also sore travail.’

‘Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labour: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm.

But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.’ Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

The opposite of working on our own is working together with others, Ecclesiastes 4:9. This gives us more power as a team, but we must be willing to make the effort to seek those we want to work with.

Working with others not only helps us, but it helps those we are working with, Ecclesiastes 4:10. Some of the most selfish people in the world are those who are the loneliest people in the world. If you go out for a hike and twist your ankle, it makes such a difference if someone else is there to support you and help you back home, Ecclesiastes 4:10. At the moment your life may be great with no clouds upon the horizon, but if your life is going to be like that of most of us, then you’ll also have your fair share of difficulties along the way.

The time may come, especially with married couples, when one or the other finds difficulty in getting or keeping a job. Or the health of one or the other may break down, or some other crisis may develop.

And what then? At those times, you’ll be glad you have one another because you will be able to help one another, Ecclesiastes 4:10. Two people together, especially married couples, don’t need hot-water bottles because they have one another, Ecclesiastes 4:11. When life is hard and tough and when perhaps hopes do not materialise, couples can encourage one another, they can also warm one another’s spirits.

By and large, muggers don’t attack people when they are together; they attack people on their own. But if they do, then a couple are more likely to ward off the attacker than if they were on their own, Ecclesiastes 4:12.

There is strength in togetherness. And this is true of life in general. When difficulties press in, a couple are able to stand where individuals might fall. There are times, however, when a twosome is not enough. The writer of Ecclesiastes refers to the fact that a piece of wool by itself has little strength.

Two strands of wool, however, have more strength, and three-ply wool is much stronger still, Ecclesiastes 4:12. And what is true of wool is true of other materials too. Ropes which have to take a heavy strain normally have at least three strands.

But what else has the writer in mind? Some have suggested that he is saying, ‘Have a baby and make it a threesome!’ I prefer to see a reference to God. God is the third strand in the relationship. God is saying to married people, ‘include me in’. A marriage is so much stronger when God is included. Amidst the storms of life, such a marriage can hold.

ADVANCEMENT IS MEANINGLESS

‘Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to heed a warning. The youth may have come from prison to the kingship, or he may have been born in poverty within his kingdom. I saw that all who lived and walked under the sun followed the youth, the king’s successor. There was no end to all the people who were before them. But those who came later were not pleased with the successor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.’ Ecclesiastes 4:13-16

Solomon here, maybe referring to Jeroboam, who, if you remember, fled into Egyptian exile but later became the king of the northern kingdom of Israel, [1 Kings 11:26-43](#) / [1 Kings 12:1-33](#). Jeroboam wasn’t born of royal blood but was given the position of king over the ten northern tribes of Israel.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The Jewish Targum applies [Ecclesiastes 4:13-14](#), to Abraham and says the following. ‘Abraham was a poor child of only three years of age, but he had the spirit of prophecy, and he refused to worship the idols which the old foolish king, Nimrod, had set up; therefore Nimrod cast him into a furnace of fire. But the Lord worked a miracle and delivered him. Yet here was no knowledge in Nimrod, and he would not be admonished. Then Abraham left the country of the idolaters, where he had been imprisoned, and came and reigned over the land of Canaan and Nimrod became poor in this world. This is the fact to which the ancient rabbis supposed Solomon to allude.’

Josephus, in his writing, says the following concerning [Ecclesiastes 4:16](#).

‘The Targum applies this to the case of Jeroboam and Rehoboam. History affords many instances of mean persons raised to sovereign authority and of kings being reduced to the meanest offices and to a morsel of bread. Agrippa himself ascended the throne of Israel after having been long in prison.’

Not many people think of the youth in our society as being wise, [Ecclesiastes 4:13](#), but Solomon here says that many may admire and envy the power and position a king has, [Ecclesiastes 4:14-15](#), but in reality, it’s better to be as wise as the youth, simply because the youth are more likely to listen to and take advice from others.

Solomon says there was no end to all the people who were before them, but those who came later were not pleased with the successor, [Ecclesiastes 4:16](#). He says this, too, is meaningless, a chasing after the wind, [Ecclesiastes 4:16](#).

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘He has reached a pinnacle of human glory, only to be stranded there.’

CHAPTER 5

INTRODUCTION

‘Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven, and you are on earth, so let your words be few. A dream comes when there are many cares, and many words mark the speech of a fool.’ Ecclesiastes 5:1-3

FULFIL YOUR VOW TO GOD

We must be careful when we're in the presence of God, and our behaviour in His presence must be respectful, [Ecclesiastes 5:1](#) / [Isaiah 6:5](#) / [Romans 12:1-2](#). We must always be careful to listen to what God has to say and then do it, [Ecclesiastes 5:1](#) / [1 Samuel 15:22](#) / [James 1:22-25](#). The Bible is God's Word, and we should study to hear what God has to say to us, [Acts 17:11](#).

Fools don't understand that the way they live their lives is contrary to the way God says we should live our lives, [Ecclesiastes 5:1](#). Even in the religious world, traditions can easily become more important than what God actually requires, [Mark 7:1-9](#).

Beware of anyone who speaks too much, [Ecclesiastes 5:2](#) / [James 1:19](#) / [James 1:26](#) / [James 2:1-10](#). They often end up speaking about things they don't know anything about, telling lies and making promises they cannot keep, [Ecclesiastes 5:2](#). There's nothing wrong with having dreams and ambitions, [Ecclesiastes 5:3](#), but we must be willing to work hard to achieve them.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

'As dreams are generally the effect of the business in which we have been engaged during the day, so a multitude of words evidence the feeble workings of the foolish heart.'

'When you make a vow to God, do not delay to fulfil it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfil your vow. It is better not to make a vow than to make one and not fulfil it. Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the temple messenger, 'My vow was a mistake.' Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands? Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore, fear God.' [Ecclesiastes 5:4-7](#)

Whenever anyone made a voluntary vow to God, it was a self-imposed vow that, according to the law, could not be broken, [Ecclesiastes 5:4](#) / [Deuteronomy 23:21-23](#). If anyone didn't keep that vow, it was a sin, simply because they promised to keep it but didn't fulfil it, [Ecclesiastes 5:4-5](#).

Making vows to God is serious, and they can be helpful for setting our own personal spiritual goals, as long as the result is glorifying God. We must be careful that our mouths don't lead us into sin. In other words, if we make a vow to God but have no intention of fulfilling that vow, this is sinful, [Deuteronomy 23:21-23](#).

The reference to the 'messenger', [Ecclesiastes 5:6](#), is probably a reference to the priest, [Leviticus 5:4-5](#) / [Malachi 2:7](#). The KJV uses the word 'angel', which means messenger. And so, when anyone makes a vow to anyone who represents God, they must keep that vow; otherwise, God will become angry with them, [Ecclesiastes 5:6](#).

Causing God to become angry with us is a serious sin because anyone who makes a vow to God and doesn't fulfil that vow is basically making a mockery out of God, [Galatians 6:7](#) / [James 4:4](#). Solomon says much dreaming and many words are meaningless; therefore, fear God. [Ecclesiastes 5:7](#).

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following concerning fearing God.

'Fear neither the dream nor its interpretation, God will take care of and protect thee. Most certainly, he that fears God need fear nothing else.'

RICHES ARE MEANINGLESS

‘If you see the poor oppressed in a district, and justice and rights denied, do not be surprised at such things; for one official is eyed by a higher one, and over them both are others higher still. The increase from the land is taken by all; the king himself profits from the fields.’ Ecclesiastes 5:8-9

Even in today’s world, there is a lot of corruption by those who choose to oppress the people. This corruption usually begins at the top and filters down to others, Ecclesiastes 5:8. All of them will have to give an account to God for their actions, Romans 14:12.

Everyone is dependent upon farmers and the produce they harvest from the land and it should be in everyone’s interest not to oppress the farmers, Ecclesiastes 5:9. The result of doing so is that everyone will eventually suffer because of it. Eaton, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The point of these verses seems to be that the fruits of one’s work can also disappear as a result of taxes and unfair oppression by political rulers. A hierarchy of officials is in view. By legal and illegal means, rulers squeeze money out of the populace. Even so, it is better to have government than not have it, Romans 13:1-7. One translation of Ecclesiastes 5:9 is, ‘But an advantage to a land for everyone is a king over cultivated land.’

‘Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income. This too is meaningless. As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owners except to feast their eyes on them? The sleep of a labourer is sweet, whether they eat little or much, but as for the rich, their abundance permits them no sleep.’ Ecclesiastes 5:10-12

The more wealth people have, the more they want. Although there is nothing wrong with being wealthy, the problem comes when they are never satisfied and continually want more, Ecclesiastes 5:10 / Luke 12:15 / 1 Timothy 6:9-10. The whole purpose of being wealthy should be to help others who are less fortunate than ourselves, Acts 20:34, because with much wealth comes much responsibility.

When people are so focused on their wealth, Ecclesiastes 5:11, they aren’t focused on God and they often forget about those around them who have nothing, 1 Timothy 6:6-10 / 1 Timothy 6:17.

Notice also that one other problem with being rich is that they often have to rely on other people to take care of their wealth, and the wealth of those around them, hence they have a lack of sleep, Ecclesiastes 5:12.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

‘An increase of property always brings an increase of expense, by a multitude of servants; and the owner really possesses no more, and probably enjoys much less, than he did when every day provided its own bread, and could lay up no store for the next. But if he has more enjoyment, his cares are multiplied, and he has no kind of profit. This also is vanity.’

‘I have seen a grievous evil under the sun: wealth hoarded to the harm of its owners, or wealth lost through some misfortune, so that when they have children, there is nothing left for them to inherit. Everyone comes naked from their mother’s womb, and as everyone comes, so they depart. They take nothing from their toil that they can carry in their hands. This too is a grievous evil: As everyone comes, so they depart, and what do they gain, since they toil for the wind? All their days they eat in darkness, with great frustration, affliction, and anger.’ Ecclesiastes 5:13-17

Solomon tells us about those who are only interested in hoarding things for themselves, in order for them to get wealthier. We need to be careful that in doing so, we don’t neglect others in the process, Luke 12:13-21 / Acts 20:34. Hoarding is a problem for some people; they just keep everything and can’t bear the thought of letting anything go, even though they don’t need it, Ecclesiastes 2:21 / Ecclesiastes 3:16 / Ecclesiastes 4:13.

Hoarders are unfortunate because they often make bad business decisions, and instead of gaining more, they lose it all, and what was left was given to their son, Ecclesiastes 5:13-14.

Hoarding is foolish because it gives the idea that everyone should work for themselves. In this case, the son wouldn't have any right to his inheritance; he is responsible for his own livelihood.

We are reminded of an important truth, which is that we came into this world with nothing and we will leave this world with nothing, [Ecclesiastes 5:15-16](#). Solomon says all their days they eat in darkness, with great frustration, affliction, and anger, [Ecclesiastes 5:17](#).

The point is that anyone who has a lot, should use this to bless others because they can't take it with them when they die, [John 13:17](#). We all know that God is a giver and if we claim to be like God, we should do likewise, [James 1:27](#).

'This is what I have observed to be good: that it is appropriate for a person to eat, to drink and to find satisfaction in their toilsome labour under the sun during the few days of life God has given them, for this is their lot. Moreover, when God gives someone wealth and possessions, and the ability to enjoy them, to accept their lot and be happy in their toil—this is a gift of God. They seldom reflect on the days of their life, because God keeps them occupied with gladness of heart.'

Ecclesiastes 5:18-20

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'Again Solomon urged the enjoyment of life, [Ecclesiastes 5:18](#) / [Ecclesiastes 2:24-26](#) / [Ecclesiastes 3:12-13](#) / [Ecclesiastes 3:22](#), but he warned of some obstacles to that enjoyment. Solomon was not advocating hedonism but the simple enjoyment of life day by day, [Ecclesiastes 5:18](#). In other words, he recommended that we take some time to enjoy the beautiful experiences of life as we travel down its path.'

There's something satisfying about growing your produce in your garden and then eating it, [Ecclesiastes 5:18](#). There's also a sense of achievement and enjoyment when we work hard to be able to put food on the table, [2 Thessalonians 3:6-10](#). God only promises blessings to those who are willing to take the time to work for others, [Ecclesiastes 5:19-20](#) / [John 13:17](#).

CHAPTER 6

INTRODUCTION

It can be said that Solomon spent too much of his time seeking pleasure. Of course, everyone wants to have happy moments in their lives. We don't want to go around with a sour look on our faces. We want to be in a situation where we can smile most of the time.

Solomon was looking for more than just ordinary happiness. He wanted ultimate pleasure. He built into his palace a large room called the Banquet Hall. Here, he could entertain dignitaries, even royalty, serving them the finest of wines.

Solomon had men singers, women singers, and those who could play different instruments. No doubt he could highly entertain any and all guests with music. The food would be the best that could be served.

We are amazed at how much food was required each day just to keep everyone in their own household fed. This was a great burden on his budget. I have read where Thomas Jefferson died penniless simply because he had fed so many famous people who would come to visit him. Some would stay for days before leaving.

It has been said that Solomon had to feed as many as 40,000 to 50,000 just in one day, as he had so many servants, soldiers and other important workers who served in various capacities in the palace and other locations throughout his Kingdom.

Most of us have seen a camel. It's the largest domestic animal used by the Jews. Using a camel, Jesus uses an extreme illustration to teach the improbability or difficulty of a rich man reaching heaven. He said, 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God,' Mark 10:25.

Because wealth presents so many temptations and problems, it becomes increasingly difficult, if not improbable, that a rich man can be saved. Jesus further said, 'How hard it is for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!' Mark 10:23.

Generally, most middle-class Britons are considered to be below the rich, and there is a difference. However, when we compare our middle-class citizens with the majority of the people in our world today, we are very rich by comparison.

We have to keep in mind that in the time of Jesus, the majority of the people were far from being among those who were rich. In the world at that time, there was no such thing as a 'middle-class' people.

We today who rate ourselves as being middle class need to recognise that in the eyes of most of the world, we look upon ourselves as being among the rich of the world.

We do have people we can classify as being extremely poor, but not to the same extent as the rest of the world. When visiting in the homes of the poor in the U.K., we look around, and what do we see?

We see a TV, refrigerator, electric range, plenty of beer cans, someone smoking a cigarette, a bathroom, electric lights and certainly someone talking on a cell phone.

This isn't to intimidate or ridicule these people, but to recognise we are dealing with an entirely different age, living under different and better conditions than those in the time of Jesus.

Our biggest problem is how well we are managing our wealth, we who are called 'middle class' people! We are encouraged when we look at people like Zacchaeus, the wee little man who was rich but became liberal.

Then there is Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy man who gave his own grave for the Lord to be placed in. Matthew a tax collector, was no doubt better off than the average person, but he devoted his life to serving Jesus. These men had their priorities placed in the right place.

What about our priorities? Once we get them lined up correctly, then money does not take over and crowd out the spiritual. It's possible for one to handle his prosperity, but the problem is that most cannot do this.

The solution isn't to go and sell all that you have and then give to the poor and then take a vow of poverty. The issue at stake is our attitude toward our many possessions, our middle-class living, and our opportunities to serve those in need.

When we observe Solomon, we don't see him giving away any gold. We don't see him concerned about the poor. There is nothing to indicate that he wanted to help people. His attitude seems to be how much can I collect for myself. It was all about me.

He isn't using his tremendous wealth to help others. It was all about me. But as he drew to the close of his life, he could only say, 'Meaningless, all is meaningless.'

It didn't bring him the happiness he may have thought it would bring. In the end, all his wealth was lost due to the division of the kingdom. His son wouldn't end up being a rich king surrounded by gold.

RICHES AND WEALTH ARE MEANINGLESS

‘I have seen another evil under the sun, and it weighs heavily on mankind: God gives some people wealth, possessions, and honour, so that they lack nothing their hearts desire, but God does not grant them the ability to enjoy them, and strangers enjoy them instead. This is meaningless, a grievous evil.’ Ecclesiastes 6:1-2

Solomon says that those who are wealthy appear to have no satisfaction with the wealth they have, Ecclesiastes 6:1. But others get more benefit than they do from their wealth, Ecclesiastes 6:2.

Later in the chapter, we will read that the wealth of the rich is squandered by those who inherit it and the wealthy lose their wealth due to some bad business decisions.

Again, we're reminded that there's nothing wrong with being wealthy as long as we don't neglect to bless those who are less fortunate than ourselves, 1 Timothy 6:9-10.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

‘A man may possess much earthly goods and yet enjoy nothing of them. Possession and fruition are not necessarily joined together, and this is also among the vanities of life. It is worthy of remark that it belongs to God as much to give the power to enjoy as it does to give the earthly blessings.’

‘A man may have a hundred children and live many years; yet no matter how long he lives, if he cannot enjoy his prosperity and does not receive proper burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he. It comes without meaning, it departs in darkness, and in darkness its name is shrouded. Though it never saw the sun or knew anything, it has more rest than does that man, even if he lives a thousand years twice over but fails to enjoy his prosperity. Do not all go to the same place?’ Ecclesiastes 6:3-6

For the Jews, being a part of a large family was a sign that God was blessing them, and this brought them a lot of joy, Ecclesiastes 6:3. However, there were those who had large families but didn't enjoy the blessings and benefits of having so, Ecclesiastes 6:3.

Eaton, in his commentary, says the following concerning the stillborn child, Ecclesiastes 6:3.

‘Better to miscarry at birth than to miscarry throughout life.’

Imagine dying without any honour at your funeral service? Ecclesiastes 6:4-5. Solomon says there's no honour in dying, if there was no reason that those who died lived honourably.

In other words, Solomon says we would be better off not being born in the first place, if our lives were empty and we felt no fulfilment in our lives. The longer life goes on, the worse it gets, and so two thousand years without God would be a meaningless existence, Ecclesiastes 6:6. Solomon asks the question, Do not all go to the same place? Ecclesiastes 6:6, to which the answer is yes, we all die, and we all end up in the grave.

‘Everyone's toil is for their mouth, yet their appetite is never satisfied. What advantage have the wise over fools? What do the poor gain by knowing how to conduct themselves before others? Better what the eye sees than the roving of the appetite. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.’ Ecclesiastes 6:7-9

Solomon says that if we work only for the fun of life, then we will spiritually starve, Ecclesiastes 6:7. All over the world, we see people indulging in many things, from good food and wine to a nice home, but spiritually they are starving because they think that this world is all there is.

Solomon asks what advantage have the wise over fools? What do the poor gain by knowing how to conduct themselves before others? Ecclesiastes 6:8-9. If anyone has the same attitude towards gaining wisdom, then they are just as bad as those who are fools, Ecclesiastes 2:12-17.

People must seriously think about their lives; they should think about the purpose of their lives, they are fools and end up in the same place as the other fools, Ecclesiastes 6:6.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This is the last of nine times the phrase ‘striving after wind’ occurs, Ecclesiastes 1:14 / Ecclesiastes 1:17 / Ecclesiastes 2:11 / Ecclesiastes 2:17 / Ecclesiastes 2:26 / Ecclesiastes 4:4 / Ecclesiastes 4:6 / Ecclesiastes 4:16. It opened and now closes the section of the book dealing with the ultimate futility of human achievement, Ecclesiastes 1:12 to Ecclesiastes 6:9.’

‘Whatever exists has already been named, and what humanity is has been known; no one can contend with someone who is stronger. The more the words, the less the meaning, and how does that profit anyone? For who knows what is good for a person in life, during the few and meaningless days they pass through like a shadow? Who can tell them what will happen under the sun after they are gone?’ Ecclesiastes 6:10-12

Solomon says whatever exists had already been named, Genesis 2:20 / Genesis 5:2, and what humanity is has been known, and no one can contend with someone who is stronger, Ecclesiastes 6:10.

The more the words, the less the meaning and how does that profit anyone? Ecclesiastes 6:11 / Ecclesiastes 1:15 / Ecclesiastes 3:11 / Ecclesiastes 3:14 / Ecclesiastes 3:22.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The phrases ‘does not know’ and ‘cannot discover’ occur frequently, Ecclesiastes 6:12 / Ecclesiastes 7:14 / Ecclesiastes 7:24 / Ecclesiastes 7:28 / Ecclesiastes 8:17 / Ecclesiastes 10:14 / Ecclesiastes 11:2 / Ecclesiastes 11:6. Also, the recurrence of ‘it is good’, Ecclesiastes 7:18, and ‘is better than’, Ecclesiastes 7:2 / Ecclesiastes 7:5 / Ecclesiastes 9:16 / Ecclesiastes 9:18, helps us realize that in this section, Solomon gave much practical advice on how to live. He did not let us forget that our understanding of God’s ways in the present, Ecclesiastes 7:13 / cf. Ecclesiastes 8:17, and in the future, Ecclesiastes 9:1 / Ecclesiastes 10:14 / Ecclesiastes 11:2, is partial. The conclusion is we should fear God, Ecclesiastes 7:18 / Ecclesiastes 8:12 / Ecclesiastes 12:13, and seek to please Him, Ecclesiastes 7:26 / Ecclesiastes 2:26.’

I’m sure you’ve come across people who are always pessimistic about their view of life. Those who are like this have a meaningless existence without God, no hope for the afterlife.

God knows all things, and He knows the future, Ecclesiastes 6:12 / 1 John 3:20, but He doesn’t predestinate things to happen in the sense of overriding people’s free will to choose. God knows exactly what we’re doing and where we’re going, but He graciously allows us to make our own personal choices in life.

Many people make decisions based on the things of this world, and as a result, it can end terribly. We must invest a lot of our time and lives in God and spiritual things, Ephesians 5:17 / Colossians 3:1-2 / 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.

CHAPTER 7

INTRODUCTION

‘A good name is better than fine perfume, and the day of death better than the day of birth. It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of everyone; the living should take this to heart.

Frustration is better than laughter because a sad face is good for the heart. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure. It is better to heed the rebuke of a wise person than to listen to the song of fools. Like the crackling of thorns under the pot, so is the laughter of fools. This too is meaningless. Extortion turns a wise person into a fool, and a bribe corrupts the heart. The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride. Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools. Do not say, ‘Why were the old days better than these?’ For it is not wise to ask such questions. Wisdom, like an inheritance, is a good thing and benefits those who see the sun. Wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter, but the advantage of knowledge is this: Wisdom preserves those who have it,’ Ecclesiastes 7:1-12

REPUTATION IS MEANINGLESS

Solomon here appears to write this chapter in the form of proverbs, each one speaks about the wisdom concerning the good things for mankind in this life. He begins by speaking about our reputation, that is, having a good reputation, Ecclesiastes 7:1.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This emphasis on the importance of living wisely continues through the rest of the book, Ecclesiastes 2:26 / Ecclesiastes 11:9 / Ecclesiastes 12:14.’

My wife likes to wear perfume from time to time, and the smell really attracts me to her. Solomon says that the wise person is like perfume; they draw other people to them, which in turn opens opportunities for them. Ecclesiastes 7:1. In other words, we’re to live such lives that are full and meaningful, rather than waste them foolishly.

I don’t know how many funerals I have presided over in the last few years, but one thing I always think about afterwards is that life is short and I should take it more seriously.

Solomon says we never live long enough to do everything we wanted to do, Ecclesiastes 7:1. There’s always one more soul to share the Gospel with, and there’s always one more person to study with.

In times of sorrow, Ecclesiastes 7:2, we often take a step back and reflect upon our lives, what we have achieved, where we are at the moment, and where we plan to go.

Crying is a God-given emotion which helps us in times of sorrow, and so anyone who is wise will always take it seriously. Solomon says frustration is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart, Ecclesiastes 7:3. He also says that the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure, Ecclesiastes 7:4.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

‘A wise man loves those occasions from which he can derive spiritual advantage; and therefore prefers visiting the sick and sympathising with those who have suffered privations by death. But the fool, the gay, thoughtless, and giddy,

prefers places and times of diversion and amusement. Here he is prevented from seriously considering either himself or his latter end. The grand fault and misfortune of youth.'

Some people just can't help but give foolish advice to others, Ecclesiastes 7:5. Solomon says they are like a quick-burning bush, Ecclesiastes 7:6. In other words, it looks good at first, but it doesn't last long enough to cook any food. If anyone gives in to extortion or oppression, they become foolish, Ecclesiastes 7:7. They become foolish simply because they have offered a bribe to someone in a high position in order to distort judgment, Exodus 23:8 / Proverbs 17:23.

There are two types of people in the world, the proud and the humble, Ecclesiastes 7:8, whilst the proud like to hear how wonderful they are, the humble person will listen and take on advice.

Many preachers are told they are great preachers; sadly, some of those who tell them aren't being completely truthful with them. The humble preacher will listen but give glory to God.

Decision-making should be taken seriously, especially big decisions in life; these are things which shouldn't be rushed. When making any decision, we should consider the final goal and not just make a decision on the spur of the moment.

A few people make the mistake of making a big decision whilst they are angry, Ecclesiastes 7:9. Sadly, those decisions can lead us and take us into really bad situations which we didn't really need to be in, in the first place.

We all know people who do nothing but moan and groan about the past, Ecclesiastes 7:10. There's nothing wrong with looking at our past as long as we learn from it, Romans 15:4.

However, when a person is constantly looking back, constantly thinking about all the mistakes they have made, but never learned anything from them, the chances are, they will make bad decisions in the present, Philippians 3:13.

When it comes to inheritance, most children think about money, cars, houses, etc., Ecclesiastes 7:11, but the wise parent will actually leave their child with the greatest inheritance gift of all, that is, wisdom, Ecclesiastes 7:12.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'Prosperity can also be a good thing, especially if the prosperous person behaves wisely. Note that the wise normally live longer than the foolish, Ecclesiastes 7:12 / Exodus 20:12 / Ephesians 6:1-3.'

A few people believe that if they just do enough good deeds, give so much money every week to charity, etc., they will be able to buy a relationship with God. Solomon says that wealth and riches can't buy a relationship with God, Ecclesiastes 7:12.

That relationship with God comes from wisdom because wisdom teaches us to submit to God and His ways; it's only then that we can have life and have it to the full, John 10:10.

'Consider what God has done: Who can straighten what he has made crooked? When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider this: God has made the one as well as the other. Therefore, no one can discover anything about their future.' Ecclesiastes 7:13-14

Only God can straighten what he has made crooked? Ecclesiastes 7:13. Those who believe and trust in God will not only rejoice when things are going well, but they will rejoice when things are really tough, Ecclesiastes 7:14 / James 1:1-2. The reason for this is simple: those who believe and trust in God recognise that their wealth isn't the foundation for their relationship with God. The reason we live is to live for God.

We recognise this is His world and accept that there will be times when life is going great and other times when life gets a little tougher. We don't know our future Ecclesiastes 7:14, but God knows everything, Revelation 21:6.

Wright, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The phrase ‘man cannot discover’ or the equivalent, is another structural marker in Ecclesiastes that indicates the end of a subsection in chapters 7 and 8, Ecclesiastes 7:14 / Ecclesiastes 7:24 / Ecclesiastes 7:28, twice / Ecclesiastes 8:17, thrice. Other key structural markers are the phrases ‘vanity and striving after wind’, Ecclesiastes 1:14, and ‘man does not know’, Ecclesiastes 9:1.’

‘In this meaningless life of mine, I have seen both of these: the righteous perishing in their righteousness, and the wicked living long in their wickedness. Do not be overrighteous, neither be overwise—why destroy yourself? Do not be overwicked, and do not be a fool—why die before your time? It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other. Whoever fears God will avoid all extremes. Wisdom makes one wise person more powerful than ten rulers in a city. Indeed, there is no one on earth who is righteous, no one who does what is right and never sins.’ Ecclesiastes 7:15-20

It’s all too easy for religious people to become self-righteous, in an effort to avoid becoming wicked, Ecclesiastes 7:15. Solomon appears to be contrasting legal righteousness with immoral living, Ecclesiastes 7:15-17.

It’s certainly possible to be overly righteous, Ecclesiastes 7:16; these are usually the people who refuse to look at themselves and judge everyone by their own standards, Matthew 7:5.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

‘In other words, and in modern language, ‘There is no need of all this watching, fasting, praying, self-denial, you carry things to extremes. Why should you wish to be reputed singular and precise?’ To this, the man of God answers.’

It’s also possible to be overwicked, Ecclesiastes 7:17; these are the foolish who live for wickedness. We must remember that the rewards or the consequences that we experience in this life aren’t enough to determine the course of our lives, Ecclesiastes 7:18.

We will reap what we sow, Proverbs 11:18 / Galatians 6:8, however, the real reward for our behaviour in this life will be given on Judgement Day, Matthew 25:46 / 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9.

It’s certainly possible to be overly wise, Ecclesiastes 7:19. These are the people who are foolish because they have become conceited in their own wisdom; they have little or no time for anyone else, 1 Corinthians 8:1. We must be aware that we can’t deliberately keep on sinning, Ecclesiastes 7:20 / Hebrews 10:26.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following concerning Ecclesiastes 7:20.

‘The text does not say, the just man does commit sin, but simply that he may sin and so our translators have rendered it in 1 Samuel 2:25, twice in 1 Kings 8:31 / 1 Kings 8:46, and 2 Chronicles 6:36, and the reader is requested to consult the note on 1 Kings 8:46, where the proper construction of this word may be found, and the doctrine in question is fully considered.’

One way to prevent sin from entering our lives is to remember that we’re to fear God, Ecclesiastes 7:18. We do this by obeying His commands. The balance here is for the righteous to remember that they, too, are sinners, Romans 3:9-10 / Romans 3:23.

‘Do not pay attention to every word people say, or you may hear your servant cursing you—for you know in your heart that many times you yourself have cursed others.’ Ecclesiastes 7:21-22

I know a few people who just can’t handle criticism, and when they receive any, they usually go off on one and get really angry, Ecclesiastes 7:21. It’s only when we admit that we too have criticised others in the past that we will accept good constructive criticism from others, Ecclesiastes 7:22.

‘All this I tested by wisdom, and I said, ‘I am determined to be wise’—but this was beyond me. Whatever exists is far off and most profound—who can discover it? So, I turned my mind to understand, to investigate and to search out wisdom and the scheme of things and to understand the stupidity of wickedness and the madness of folly. I find more

bitter than death the woman who is a snare, whose heart is a trap and whose hands are chains. The man who pleases God will escape her, but the sinner she will ensnare.’ Ecclesiastes 7:23-26

Solomon says that he thought he had become wise, but he acknowledges that wisdom was way out of reach, Ecclesiastes 7:23. This is because having knowledge and the reality of all things was way beyond the reach of any human, Ecclesiastes 7:24 / Ecclesiastes 8:16-17 / Job 11:7-8. He’s simply saying that no one can have all wisdom because there is so much that it’s beyond our grasp.

Solomon says he was determined to be wise, which is good advice for us all because wisdom and knowledge will certainly help us live right for God and prevent us from following the madness of folly Ecclesiastes 7:25. It will certainly help us in this life and help us prepare for the life to come.

Wright, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Wisdom is not the knowledge of accumulated facts but the inner strength that comes from a God-instructed conscience.’

Solomon discovered something worse than death; he discovered that a woman who used her sexual charms to enslave the foolish, Ecclesiastes 7:26 / Revelation 2:20. He says the man who pleases God will escape her, but the sinner she will ensnare, Ecclesiastes 7:26.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The man who walks with God, and he alone, shall escape this sore evil: and even he that fears God, if he get with an artful woman, may be soon robbed of his strength, and become like other men. A bad or artful woman is represented as a company of hunters, with nets, gins, to catch their prey.’

‘Look,’ says the Teacher, ‘this is what I have discovered: ‘Adding one thing to another to discover the scheme of things—while I was still searching but not finding—I found one upright man among a thousand, but not one upright woman among them all. This only have I found: God created mankind upright, but they have gone in search of many schemes.’ Ecclesiastes 7:27-29

The good news is that not all women would go out of their way to ensnare a man to commit sexual immorality, the bad news is that there were other women who would go out of their way to set a trap to ensnare the unwise, Ecclesiastes 7:27 / Ecclesiastes 7:26.

Anyone who seeks to sin can easily do so with these women, even though they were upright, they didn’t know it was a trap all along, Ecclesiastes 7:28. We all have a tendency to be disobedient at times, rather than submitting to obedience to God. All too often, we take our eyes away from God, and our minds begin to desire evil things, James 1:13-15.

Sin is an ever-present danger in our lives, and we give in to schemes of evil, Ecclesiastes 7:29. We can be sure we will fall into all kinds of wickedness, 1 Corinthians 10:12.

The Targum considers Ecclesiastes 7:29 as speaking of Adam and Eve and says the following.

‘This have I found out, that the Lord made the first man upright before him, and innocent: but the serpent and Eve seduced him to eat of the fruit of the tree, which gave the power to those who ate of it to discern between good and evil and was the cause that death came upon him, and all the inhabitants of the earth and they sought that they might find out many stratagems to bring this evil upon all the inhabitants of the world.’

CHAPTER 8

INTRODUCTION

It seems that from the time that Zadok the priest anointed Solomon as king, 1 Kings 1:29, he began to hear the people say, 'Long live King Solomon.' In his first trial, where he rendered just judgment as to which woman the baby would be given, 1 Kings 3:16-28.

His fame began to spread, and people talked about his great wisdom. Both power and prestige became a part of his life. He heard praise and honour from faraway places.

The Queen of Sheba said 'but I did not believe these things until I came and saw with my own eyes. Indeed, not even half was told me; in wisdom and wealth you have far exceeded the report I heard,' 1 Kings 10:7.

Power and prestige often cause the downfall of men of God, even in the Lord's church. Power is like a devastating pestilence as it pollutes, poisons, and profanes those whose convictions are not true to the Almighty.

The desire for power can turn men into 'Diotrephes', 3 John 9-10. Prestige, popularity, and power are three dangerous words. They can lead one to lose sight of who they really are. They begin to think more highly of themselves than they should.

POWER AND PRESTIGE ARE MEANINGLESS

'Who is like the wise? Who knows the explanation of things? A person's wisdom brightens their face and changes its hard appearance. Obey the king's command, I say, because you took an oath before God. Do not be in a hurry to leave the king's presence. Do not stand up for a bad cause, for he will do whatever he pleases. Since a king's word is supreme, who can say to him, 'What are you doing?' Whoever obeys his command will come to no harm, and the wise heart will know the proper time and procedure. For there is a proper time and procedure for every matter, though a person may be weighed down by misery. Since no one knows the future, who can tell someone else what is to come? As no one has power over the wind to contain it, so no one has power over the time of their death. As no one is discharged in time of war, so wickedness will not release those who practice it. All this I saw, as I applied my mind to everything done under the sun. There is a time when a man lords it over others to his own hurt.' Ecclesiastes 8:1-9

Solomon begins by asking who is like the wise? Who knows the explanation of things? Ecclesiastes 8:1. He then says a person's wisdom brightens their face and changes its hard appearance, Ecclesiastes 8:1.

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

'The possessor of wisdom excels other people; it imparts serenity to his countenance and removes the expression of gloom or fierceness.'

Solomon then addresses those who reign but are unjust, and we can also apply this to anyone who is living under a corrupt government, Romans 13:1-5. If anyone gave an oath of obedience to a king, then they must fulfil that oath because the oath was made in the presence of God, Ecclesiastes 8:2 / 1 Chronicles 29:24.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

'It appears that the Jewish princes and chiefs took an oath of fidelity to their kings. This appears to have been done to David, 2 Samuel 5:1-3, to Joash, 2 Kings 11:17, and to Solomon, 1 Chronicles 29:24.'

They must obey the king and not leave the king's presence in a hurry or rebel against him, Ecclesiastes 8:2-3. This is about being submissive to the king, and so, we must be willing to do what he says, as it's the king who has all the authority in the land they're living in and people, his subjects, and so, no one can question him, Ecclesiastes 8:4. If they are obedient to the king, they will avoid the king's wrath, Ecclesiastes 8:5 / Ecclesiastes 3:11 / Ecclesiastes 3:17. In other words, if people want to avoid civil war, they must respect the civil laws. So often we hear about unjust kings and governments; however, the wise will know that the time will come when that unjust king or government will be judged, Ecclesiastes 8:5-6 / Ecclesiastes 6:1. None of us knows what the future holds, so we should be patient and wait for that time of judgment to come upon the king or government, Ecclesiastes 8:7. Remember, unjust kings die eventually too, Ecclesiastes 8:8 / Ecclesiastes 3:19. Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

'Though the life of the wicked may be prolonged, Ecclesiastes 7:15, yet wickedness itself has no inherent power to prolong that life.'

As it is in most cases where unjust kings or governments rule unjustly, we will always find those who rise up against them. The problem is that most people go about it the wrong way, and so they end up doing things which are just as bad as those in charge.

Solomon says anyone who uses wicked means to topple a wicked king or government will only get worse, Ecclesiastes 8:9 / Ecclesiastes 8:2. In other words, two wrongs don't make a right.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following concerning Ecclesiastes 8:9.

'This may be spoken of rulers generally, who, instead of feeding, fleece the flock; tyrants and oppressors, who come to an untimely end by their mismanagement of the offices of the state.'

'Then too, I saw the wicked buried—those who used to come and go from the holy place and receive praise in the city where they did this. This too is meaningless. When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, people's hearts are filled with schemes to do wrong. Although a wicked person who commits a hundred crimes may live a long time, I know that it will go better with those who fear God, who are reverent before him. Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them, and their days will not lengthen like a shadow.' Ecclesiastes 8:10-13

Solomon tells us that even though a king is unjust or a government is evil, they will all eventually die, and before long they will be forgotten, Ecclesiastes 8:10. It appears these wicked rulers went back and forth to the holy place to receive praise, Ecclesiastes 8:10 / Deuteronomy 19:17 / 2 Chronicles 19:6.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

'The place of the holy is the sacred office which they held, anointed either as kings or priests to God and, not having fulfilled the holy office in a holy way, have been carried to their graves without lamentation, and lie among the dead without remembrance.'

It's very easy to think that these unjust rulers will get away with their actions, Ecclesiastes 8:11, but we must remember that they will face the judgment of God when they die, Acts 17:31. Solomon says that everything will be well for the righteous, regardless of any judgment in this life on the wicked. Ecclesiastes 8:12.

It's not within the power of the wicked to prolong their lives, and so we must be patient for God to deliver us from those unjust rulers, Ecclesiastes 8:12. In other words, we must focus on God and all the blessings He pours upon us, knowing that God will eventually bring about their judgment, Revelation 6:10-11.

When I was younger, I was fascinated by my shadow, especially when the sun came out. At different times of the day, it would point in different directions and have different lengths. Solomon says the wicked can't prolong their life as a shadow becomes longer as the sun sets, [Ecclesiastes 8:13](#).

‘There is something else meaningless that occurs on earth: the righteous who get what the wicked deserve, and the wicked who get what the righteous deserve. This, too, I say, is meaningless. So, I commend the enjoyment of life, because there is nothing better for a person under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany them in their toil all the days of the life God has given them under the sun.’ [Ecclesiastes 8:14-15](#)

Like a lot of people who live, Solomon here sees the injustice between the wicked and the righteous. He sees the righteous being rewarded according to the deeds of the wicked, and he sees the wicked being rewarded according to the deeds of the righteous, and he says it's meaningless, [Ecclesiastes 8:14](#) / [Ecclesiastes 3:17](#) / [Ecclesiastes 7:16](#) / [Ecclesiastes 12:14](#).

Because of this, he says that we should just eat, drink and be glad, [Ecclesiastes 8:15](#). He says then joy will accompany them in their toil all the days of the life God has given them under the sun, [Ecclesiastes 8:15](#) / [Ecclesiastes 2:10](#).

However, this is what we would do if we didn't believe in God and follow His ways, [Ecclesiastes 3:22](#) / [Ecclesiastes 5:18](#). We must remember there's more to life than eating, drinking and being glad, there is eternal life to think about, [Colossians 3:1-2](#).

Constable, in his commentary, says the following concerning [Ecclesiastes 8:15](#).

‘Solomon again recommended the enjoyment of life, not in a pleasure-mad way but in the sense of enjoying the fruits of one's labour, [Ecclesiastes 2:24](#) / [Ecclesiastes 3:12-13](#) / [Ecclesiastes 5:18-19](#). This joy will make labour more enjoyable. We should receive each day's joys as God's good gifts and rejoice in them.’

‘When I applied my mind to know wisdom and to observe the labour that is done on earth—people getting no sleep day or night—then I saw all that God has done. No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all their efforts to search it out, no one can discover its meaning. Even if the wise claim they know, they cannot really comprehend it.’
[Ecclesiastes 8:16-17](#)

Solomon lost sleep trying to figure it out worldly things and the purpose of the world and he lost sleep trying to figure out how the world is in the mess it was in, [Ecclesiastes 8:16](#) / [Ecclesiastes 1:13](#) / [Ecclesiastes 3:10](#).

Those who focus so much on worldly things and those who focus so much on the purpose of our world, will often become irritated because they can't find the answer, [Ecclesiastes 8:17](#) / [Isaiah 55:6-11](#), and as a result, they can't find anything good about life at all, they can't comprehend it, [Ecclesiastes 8:17](#) / [Ecclesiastes 7:14](#) / [Ecclesiastes 7:28](#) / [Ecclesiastes 6:10](#) / [Matthew 9:34](#).

WHY IS THERE SO MUCH SUFFERING IN THE WORLD?

People often ask why there is so much suffering in the world. The only way to answer that question is by reminding them that there is a God who has a purpose for each of us, and it's people's sin that causes all the suffering in the world.

Pain and suffering are a real part of most people's lives, and Christians aren't exempt. It comes at us in all kinds of ways; a mother may have lost her children due to a relentless drunk driver.

A father's son has been murdered by his next-door neighbour. There are health issues, famines, earthquakes, and wars where children and adults are slaughtered by the thousands.

As Christians, we will get asked all kinds of questions from non-Christians; some of the questions are relatively easier to answer than others. But one question which keeps being asked, even by Christians, is this: Why is there evil in the world?

Another question closely linked to that question is this: if God is good, why is there pain and suffering in the world? Or, as some may ask, how can a perfect God allow suffering and evil?

It's interesting to listen to the world's reasoning with these questions; if you listen closely, they almost blame the God they don't even believe exists in the first place.

Now I can't even begin to try to answer all these questions, and to be honest with you, I hardly know where to begin because I know that pain and suffering are real.

However, there are some Bible teachings that can help us understand a little about pain and suffering, but please know I'm not trying to diminish or put down the reality of it all. As a Christian, I believe that the Bible has some important things to say on the subject at hand.

1. The very fact that people even talk about 'evil' or 'suffering' should tell us that there's something wrong in the world.

Asking the question, why is there evil and suffering in the world? assumes that something is wrong or disordered, something is different from what it should be!

Where would we ever even get such an idea or standard if there were no God? Romans 2:15 speaks about God's law being written on our hearts. We judge things to be unjust based on a standard that is outside of ourselves.

2. The reality is that most suffering and pain are caused by people.

Think about! There are wars, famine, poverty, murder, and most of the pain that exists in the world is evil perpetrated by people on other people. In the fall of humanity, Genesis 3, we see the introduction of enmity between people, creation, and God.

Our own experience of death, suffering, evil, sickness, and calamity can all be traced to a hostility of people from God and the curse that lies over all of creation due to sin, Genesis 3:17 / Romans 8:20-23. Sin often directly results in pain and suffering; it also can result in judgment from God that brings pain and suffering, Amos 3:6.

3. Don't forget, no matter how tough life gets, God works even in the midst of pain and suffering.

Nobody wants pain of any kind to come into their lives, but the reality is, there are times we just can't avoid it. As Christians, we need to remember that God's work of redemption in Christ through the cross shows that suffering can lead to life and hope, Romans 5:3-8 / James 1:2-4.

There is something predominantly redemptive about the suffering of the righteous when fully understood. 1 Peter 2-3. Sigmund Freud called religion an illusion that humans invent to satisfy their security needs.

To him, a benevolent, all-powerful God seemed unrelated to natural disasters and human evil. It's always easy to blame others rather than take a long, serious look at ourselves.

God, even though He is all-powerful, blessed mankind with freedom, a freedom which gives us a choice as to whether to follow Him or to disobey Him. This doesn't answer all our questions but suggests that the problem of evil isn't as great an intellectual obstacle to belief as some imagine.

Remember, God sometimes does intervene to prevent evil. Pain's emotional barrier to belief, however, remains formidable. Jesus understands suffering. He was scorned, beaten, and cruelly executed, carrying the guilt of our rebellion against God, Isaiah 53:10.

CONCLUSION

Do you remember the very first murder and family feud recorded in the Bible? Remember what Cain did to Abel?

Originally, Cain was angry at God, so why did he turn his anger at God onto his brother? Genesis 4:8.

Worldly people can't stand to be reminded that their lives aren't lined up with the will of God. Abel is telling us that devout people should expect this kind of question and hostility from an ungodly world, 1 John 3:11.

In the New Testament, we find that when Jesus was talking to the Pharisees, Jesus says, 'you know, you guys, you kill prophets and then your kids make monuments to them', he says, 'you've been doing that ever since the days of Abel,' Luke 11:51.

So, Jesus says Abel was a prophet, so perhaps not only did Abel's own righteous life rebuke Cain, but perhaps Abel even preached to Cain. Perhaps Abel tries to say to his brother, 'Brother Cain, you need to listen to God, you should not go your own way, you should not rebel against God, you need to do what God says, and you need to honour God.'

Jesus knew something; He knew that the murder of Abel was really the work of the serpent, John 8:44. Jesus knew who was behind the murder of Abel. Jesus knew the offspring of the serpent would always be at enmity with the offspring of the woman, Genesis 3:15.

Paul said to his dear young friend Timothy. 'Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.' 2 Timothy 3:12. We can just count on that; there's not going to be any peace talks.

There is only one way we can avoid hostility from the world, and that's to compromise and look so much like the world that they can't recognise their own actions as evil as they are; that's the only way.

There is going to be enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman as long as this world turns, Genesis 3:15. It is going to be with us until Jesus comes back.

If you accept a standard that is different from the world. There are going to be clashes. If you pursue loyalties that are above earthly loyalties, you're going to be opposed.

When God said, 'from this woman's seed there's going to be a head crusher', Genesis 3:15, Satan made up his mind that he was going to attack every godly seed that comes from this woman.

He did it to Abel, he did it to every prophet who came after Abel, and he's still doing it today. Don't deceive yourselves that someday there is going to be great harmony and there is going to be great peace between the people of God and the people of the world. There's never going to be peace because Satan doesn't want peace.

What I'm saying is that Christians need to feel good that we are on the serpent's enemy list, and when he comes after us, and he attacks us, and he sends the Cains of this world to attack and oppress and confront and ridicule us, we need to feel good that we're on the serpent's enemy list. Because this thing is going to keep going until the world stops.

People of the world are always going to ask these questions because they don't know and don't understand God and His ways. But please know that if you're a Christian and are suffering in any shape or form, you're not alone. God had blessed you with a spiritual family to help you get through these times, Galatians 6:2.

We all have difficult questions, and not many of us have the answers to these questions. Why does divorce hurt so much? Why have I got this terminal disease? Why did my child have to die so young? Why are there famines, wars, and earthquakes?

Why? Why? Why? I don't know, I can try and settle the questions in my mind, but deep down, I don't really know. But one thing I do know as a Christian, because of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, I have seen enough to trust Him, Romans 8:28.

CHAPTER 9

INTRODUCTION

‘So, I reflected on all this and concluded that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God's hands, but no one knows whether love or hate awaits them. All share a common destiny—the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not. As it is with the good, so with the sinful; as it is with those who take oaths, so with those who are afraid to take them. This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun: The same destiny overtakes all. The hearts of people, moreover, are full of evil, and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead.’ Ecclesiastes 9:1-3

A COMMON DESTINY FOR ALL

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This is a continuation of the preceding subject; and here the wise man draws a conclusion from what he had seen, and from the well-known character of God, that the righteous, the wise, and their conduct, were all in the hand of God, protected by his power, and safe in his approbation but we cannot judge from the occurrences which take place in life who are the objects of God's love or displeasure.’

Solomon is once again reflecting on life and comes to the conclusion that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God's hands, but no one knows whether love or hate awaits them, Ecclesiastes 9:1 / Proverbs 21:1.

Solomon appears to be saying that no one has any advantage over anyone else when they are born when it comes to faith, however, he's really saying that everyone who is ever born is born equal, Ecclesiastes 9:2.

Note that the reference to the word ‘clean’ refers to ritually clean. We don't understand God's purposes for this world at times, but we must continue to work until we die, Ecclesiastes 9:3.

‘Anyone who is among the living has hope—even a live dog is better off than a dead lion! For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even their name is forgotten. Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun.’
Ecclesiastes 9:4-6

We all know that when someone dies, they have no more influence in the world they leave behind, However, when they are alive they still have hope and they can enjoy the blessings from this life, Ecclesiastes 9:4 / Matthew 5:45.

He says even a live dog is better off than a dead lion, Ecclesiastes 9:4. In other words, the only advantage the dead have is that they don't have to suffer any longer from the things of this world.

In Solomon's time, they thought that death was the end and there was no reward or punishment afterwards, Ecclesiastes 9:5-6 / Ecclesiastes 8:12 / Ecclesiastes 8:14 / Acts 17:31 / Matthew 25:31-46.

Remember that Solomon and the other Old Testament people didn't know anything about the afterlife and immortality; this came when Christ revealed it in His Gospel, 2 Timothy 1:10. As far as they were concerned, death was the end.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'The dead do not know anything' does not mean they are insensible. Later revelation indicates that the dead are aware of their feelings, the past, other people, and other things, Matthew 25:46 / Luke 16:19-31. In the context, this clause means the dead have no capacity to enjoy life as the living can.'

'Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for God has already approved what you do. Always be clothed in white and always anoint your head with oil. Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun—all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labour under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the realm of the dead, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.' Ecclesiastes 9:7-10

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'Again Solomon recommended the present enjoyment of the good things God allows us to experience in life, Ecclesiastes 2:24-26 / Ecclesiastes 3:12-13 / Ecclesiastes 3:22 / Ecclesiastes 5:18-19.'

For most people who don't believe in God, their motto in life is drink and be glad, Ecclesiastes 9:7 / Ecclesiastes 2:24 / Ecclesiastes 3:12 / Ecclesiastes 3:22 / Ecclesiastes 5:18 / Ecclesiastes 8:15.

Life for them is all about self and not about others, this is simply because they don't believe in the afterlife. Solomon says that 'God has approved what you do', Ecclesiastes 9:7. What he means is that since many believe they can't really know God's ways, then this gives them the excuse to make the most of life anyway.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following concerning Ecclesiastes 9:8.

'The Jews wore white garments on festal occasions, as emblems of joy and innocence. Be always pure, and always happy.'

The Targum says the following, concerning Ecclesiastes 9:8.

'At all times let thy garments be washed and pure from the stain of sin. Acquire a good name, which is likened to the oil of anointing, that blessings may be called down upon thy head, and goodness not forsake thee.'

If there's no afterlife, they thought they could just take advantage of what God had to offer anyway, Ecclesiastes 9:8. In other words, if this life is all there is, including all the suffering which goes on, then it wouldn't be worth living in the first place, Ecclesiastes 9:9.

If we want to enjoy the benefits of this life, we must be willing to work because this has always been God's plan for us, John 9:4. Most people work for the here and now, but we work because of the promise of eternal life, Ecclesiastes 9:10 / 1 Corinthians 15:58 / Revelation 14:13.

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The works which we carry on here with the combined energies of body and soul come to an end in the hour of death, when the soul enters a new sphere of existence, and body and soul cease to act together, John 9:4.’

‘I have seen something else under the sun: The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favour to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all. Moreover, no one knows when their hour will come: As fish are caught in a cruel net, or birds are taken in a snare, so people are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly upon them.’ Ecclesiastes 9:11-12

No matter how much we try, we can’t stop time, we can’t stop the fact that we will all die, despite the difficulties we have in this life, Ecclesiastes 9:11. Those of us who have been around for a while know that none of us knows when our time to leave this planet will come, Ecclesiastes 9:12.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Wisdom does not guarantee a good job or a prosperous future. Likewise, sometimes the fastest runner does not win a foot race, and the stronger army does not win a battle. Usually, the best succeed, but not always. The reason for this is that everyone is subject to misfortune that we cannot anticipate or control, Ecclesiastes 9:12.’

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Man acts so heedlessly, notwithstanding all his wisdom, and all his warnings, that he is often taken, as a fish is, by the baited hook and the bird by the baited snare. And thus, an evil time, like the snare, gin, trap, hook, falleth suddenly upon them; and they are taken in a moment and have no means of escaping. How frequently do we see these comparisons illustrated!’

We can accomplish great things in this life, but the reality is we can only accomplish so much. As humans, we have our limitations because we are mortal beings, but God has plans for the world, which aren’t affected by anything we do. Therefore, we must figure out God’s plans for our existence and then live according to His will, not ours, Ephesians 5:10 / Romans 12:1-2.

WISDOM BETTER THAN FOLLY

‘I also saw under the sun this example of wisdom that greatly impressed me: There was once a small city with only a few people in it. And a powerful king came against it, surrounded it, and built huge siege works against it. Now there lived in that city a man, poor but wise, and he saved the city by his wisdom. But nobody remembered that poor man. So, I said, ‘Wisdom is better than strength.’ But the poor man’s wisdom is despised, and his words are no longer heeded. The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouts of a ruler of fools. Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.’ Ecclesiastes 9:13-18

Solomon tells us a story about how the humblest in our societies can actually have the power of wisdom to deliver a whole city. The problem was that once that city had been delivered, Ecclesiastes 9:13-15, they forgot all about the humble person who helped them be delivered in the first place, Ecclesiastes 9:15.

Notice, they forgot about this poor man but didn’t forget that the city had been delivered. Solomon is making the point that wisdom will be remembered, whilst those who possess wisdom will be forgotten, Ecclesiastes 9:16-18.

There are some commentators who suggest that this story speaks of the little city being the church, the few men being the apostles, and the great king being the devil and the poor, wise man being Jesus. I personally believe this is reading into the text something which Solomon never intended for us to read into.

The Targum says the following.

‘The little city is the human body; few men in it, few good affections to work righteousness, the great king, evil concupiscence, which, like a strong and powerful king, enters into the body to oppress it, and besieges the heart so as to cause it to err, built great bulwarks against it – evil concupiscence builds his throne in it wheresoever he wills, and causes it to decline from the ways that are right before God, that it may be taken in the greatest nets of hell, that he may burn it seven times, because of its sins. But there is found in it a poor, wise man, a good, wise, and holy affection, which prevails over the evil principle, and snatches the body from the judgment of hell, by the strength of its wisdom. Yet, after this deliverance, the man did not remember what the good principle had done for him but said in his heart, I am innocent.’

CHAPTER 10

INTRODUCTION

‘As dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honour. The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left. Even as fools walk along the road, they lack sense and show everyone how stupid they are. If a ruler’s anger rises against you, do not leave your post; calmness can lay great offences to rest.’

Ecclesiastes 10:1-4

As we begin this chapter, we see that it is a continuing thought from Ecclesiastes 9:18. Solomon begins by saying as dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honour, Ecclesiastes 10:1.

In other words, anyone can build a great reputation for themselves, but it only takes one sin to destroy that whole reputation. We must always remember that people are watching us, and if we act in such a way which doesn’t reflect that we belong to God, then everything we’ve done up until that point is worthless.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Any putrefaction spoils perfume, and so a foolish act ruins the character of him who has the reputation of being wise and good. Alas! Alas! in an unguarded moment, how many have tarnished the reputation which they were many years in acquiring!’

The NIV say, ‘the heart of the wise inclines to the right but the heart of the fool to the left’, Ecclesiastes 10:2. The KJV has the words, ‘a wise man’s heart at his right hand but a fool’s heart at his left’.

The right hand usually speaks about power and authority, Acts 7:55-56 / Romans 8:34 / Ephesians 1:20 / Colossians 3:1; however, here it’s used to distinguish right from wrong, Ecclesiastes 10:2. The right hand represents the good way, and the left hand represents the wrong way, Psalms 16:8 / Psalms 110:5 / Psalms 121:5.

We must be careful to gather all the facts before we make any judgments about others, otherwise, we will be foolish, Ecclesiastes 10:3. If we speak too much, we can end up speaking lies and come to the conclusion that we know more than we actually do, this too is foolishness, Ecclesiastes 10:3. If anyone is too quick to resign from any position, despite having charges against them, is also a fool, Ecclesiastes 10:4.

Hubbard, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The lesson is that the self-controlled person who has less rank is really more powerful than the out-of-control supposed superior.’

‘There is an evil I have seen under the sun, the sort of error that arises from a ruler: Fools are put in many high positions, while the rich occupy the low ones. I have seen slaves on horseback, while princes go on foot like slaves.’ Ecclesiastes 10:5-7

Solomon here is dealing with fools who have been appointed into positions of power and influence, Ecclesiastes 10:5. However, in doing so, they neglect the wise, Ecclesiastes 10:6-7 / Proverbs 19:10 / Proverbs 30:21-22. In other words, the wise must be included in governments; if not, the nation will come to ruin.

‘Whoever digs a pit may fall into it; whoever breaks through a wall may be bitten by a snake. Whoever quarries stones may be injured by them; whoever splits logs may be endangered by them. If the axe is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed, but skill will bring success. If a snake bites before it is charmed, the charmer receives no fee.’ Ecclesiastes 10:8-11

Life has its dangers, even for those who are extra careful, so we need wisdom every day of our lives. Solomon says, someone might dig a pit and fall into it, or someone might break through a wall and might be bitten by a snake, Ecclesiastes 10:8.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

‘While spoiling his neighbour’s property, he himself may come to greater mischief while pulling out the sticks, he may be bit by a serpent, who has his nest there.’

Someone might quarry stones and might be injured by them, or someone might split logs and be endangered by them, Ecclesiastes 10:9.

Delitzsch, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The sum of these four clauses in Ecclesiastes 10:8-9, is certainly not merely that he who undertakes a dangerous matter exposes himself to danger; the author means to say, in this series of proverbs which treat of the distinction between wisdom and folly, that the wise man is everywhere conscious of his danger, and guards against it.’

If the axe is dull and its edge unsharpened, then more strength is needed, but skill will bring success, Ecclesiastes 10:10. In other words, wisdom says it’s better to sharpen an axe before use, so that it will do the job better.

If a snake bites before it is charmed, the charmer receives no fee, Ecclesiastes 10:11. In other words, wisdom says that a person has to charm the snake first in order that he doesn’t get bitten; no one will pay him for his snake charming. Someone once said that ‘common sense isn’t all that common’; this is true of the fool; wisdom must be used before and throughout we plan to do anything in life.

‘Words from the mouth of the wise are gracious, but fools are consumed by their own lips. At the beginning their words are folly; at the end they are wicked madness—and fools multiply words. No one knows what is coming—who can tell someone else what will happen after them? The toil of fools wearies them; they do not know the way to town.’ Ecclesiastes 10:12-15

There are times when we have no one to blame for what happens to us but ourselves. Many people come to ruin because of their own words and actions, Ecclesiastes 10:12. We need to learn to think before we speak because there are those who speak so much that they reveal just how insecure they really are, Ecclesiastes 10:13-14.

These are the people who don't understand what's happening here and now, never mind what's going to happen in the future, Ecclesiastes 10:14. In all truthfulness, even those who are wise can't know what the future will bring by looking at their present situation.

These fools speak so much, but they can't teach us anything because they don't even know the way to town, Ecclesiastes 10:15. We see this happening in the political world, where politicians promise the earth and deliver nothing. We have politicians who speak about things they have no clue about, and the general public can tell that this, too, will bring about their ruin.

‘Woe to the land whose king was a servant and whose princes feast in the morning. Blessed is the land whose king is of noble birth and whose princes eat at a proper time—for strength and not for drunkenness. Through laziness, the rafters sag; because of idle hands, the house leaks. A feast is made for laughter, wine makes life merry, and money is the answer for everything. Do not revile the king even in your thoughts, or curse the rich in your bedroom, because a bird in the sky may carry your words, and a bird on the wing may report what you say.’ Ecclesiastes 10:16-20

The king here and his so-called officials were busy feasting in the morning, Ecclesiastes 10:16. Any country that doesn't have experienced leaders in place will not last very long.

However, if the king has been raised by a father who continually reminded him about the importance of government, then that same country will have wise leadership.

It's then that the leaders of those countries will set up feasts at the right time, Ecclesiastes 10:17, that is, when they don't have those drunken officials beside them, twisting their judgments, Isaiah 5:8-23 / Jeremiah 50:27 / Hosea 7:13 / Amos 6:1.

The country simply falls into ruin, Ecclesiastes 10:18, while the officials indulge themselves with food and drink and look out for their own selfish needs, Ecclesiastes 10:19.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This is remarkably the case in some countries. Houses are not repaired till they almost fall about the ears of the inhabitants. We have an adage that applies to all such cases, ‘a stitch in time saves nine.’

Solomon says do not revile the king even in your thoughts, or curse the rich in your bedroom, because a bird in the sky may carry your words, and a bird on the wing may report what you say, Ecclesiastes 10:19.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘These proverbs show what bad effects can come from unqualified, irresponsible leadership, Isaiah 5:11 / Acts 2:15. Ecclesiastes 10:19, reflects the bad attitudes of the profligate leaders.’

We must remember, though, that we're not to curse the king. The reason for this is simple: it prevents chaos in the country, Romans 12:1-7. The idea of government is God's idea, and he wants all people to be governed, Ecclesiastes 8:15.

Eaton, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Everything that has been said about wisdom and folly points again to the main lesson of Ecclesiastes: the need to face life as it really is and take our life day by day from the hand of a sovereign God.’

CHAPTER 11

INTRODUCTION

‘Ship your grain across the sea; after many days, you may receive a return. Invest in seven ventures, yes, in eight; you do not know what disaster may come upon the land. If clouds are full of water, they pour rain on the earth. Whether a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where it falls, there it will lie. Whoever watches the wind will not plant; whoever looks at the clouds will not reap. As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother’s womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things. Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let your hands not be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well.’ Ecclesiastes 11:1-6

INVEST IN MANY VENTURES

I don’t know about you, but I’m glad there are another two chapters to this book; otherwise, it would end with doom and gloom. Solomon now begins to be a bit more optimistic about life, and again, he uses the form of proverbs to do so.

He says that we should live our lives with others in mind, we should give generously to anyone who has a need, [Ecclesiastes 11:1](#). We will reap what we sow, [2 Corinthians 9:6](#) / [Galatians 6:7-9](#). The KJV uses the word ‘bread’ instead of ‘grain’.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Casting one’s bread on the water probably refers to commercial transactions involving the transportation of commodities by ship, not to charitable acts.’

Delitzsch, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Eastern bread has for the most part the form of cakes and is thin, especially as it is prepared hastily for guests, [Genesis 18:6](#), so that when thrown into the water, it remains on the surface, like a chip of wood, [Hosea 10:7](#), and is carried away by the stream.’

When we give to others, that is, invest in others, we may not get anything back in return, [Ecclesiastes 11:2](#), and we shouldn’t expect anything back in return, [Matthew 5:44-45](#) / [Luke 16:9](#) / [John 13:17](#).

Ellicott, in his commentary, says the following, concerning seven ventures, yes, in eight, [Ecclesiastes 11:2](#).

‘Quite similar forms of expression occur in [Job 5:19](#) / [Proverbs 30:21](#) / [Amos 1:3](#) / [Micah 5:4](#). The numbers seven and eight are used indefinitely in the advice to multiply our modes of exertion, ignorant as we are, which may miscarry.’

Does a tree make a noise in the middle of a forest when it falls? [Ecclesiastes 11:3](#). Solomon says our life is governed by what we do, [Proverbs 23:7](#). We may want to wait for the wind to calm down before we plant our seeds, [Ecclesiastes 11:4-5](#).

The problem is that the wind may blow for many days in a row, hence we won’t get any planting done. How does the body form in a mother’s womb? [Psalms 139:13-18](#). We don’t know because we cannot understand the work of God, [Ecclesiastes 11:6](#), the Maker of all things.

Wright, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Few parents understand precisely how a baby is formed, but most follow the rules of common sense for the welfare of the mother and the unborn child. This is exactly the application that the Teacher makes here to the plan of God. Indeed,

it illustrates the whole theme of the book. We cannot understand all the ways God works to fulfil his plan, but we can follow God's rules for daily living and thus help bring God's purpose to birth.'

Solomon says concerning sowing your seed, Ecclesiastes 11:6, if we do nothing, then we will produce nothing. We must decide to keep moving forward, despite any setbacks we may have along the way, Ecclesiastes 11:6. In other words, life is full of uncertainties; therefore, we must live by each day by faith, Romans 1:17 / 2 Corinthians 5:7.

REMEMBER YOUR CREATOR WHILE YOUNG

'Light is sweet, and it pleases the eyes to see the sun. However, many years anyone may live, let them enjoy them all. But let them remember the days of darkness, for there will be many. Everything to come is meaningless.' Ecclesiastes 11:7-8

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'Solomon had already advocated the enjoyment of life and responsible living in several of the preceding sections, Ecclesiastes 2:24-26 / Ecclesiastes 3:12-13 / Ecclesiastes 3:22 / Ecclesiastes 5:18-19 / Ecclesiastes 8:15 / Ecclesiastes 9:7-10.'

Solomon is basically saying that anyone who lives for others will live a life worth living, Ecclesiastes 11:7.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

'Life is dear to every man as the light of the sun is to the eye. A man would give all that he has for his life, and it is particularly dear to him when he is in ease and affluence, but let each remember that.'

Even when life becomes dark, there are always times of joy. One day may be filled with difficulties, but the joy can return in the morning, even in the darkness of death, we can still enjoy life, Ecclesiastes 11:8 / Ecclesiastes 12:2 / Psalms 23:1-6.

If you remember, Solomon says back in Ecclesiastes 4:2-4 that life is better than death, but when we remember that those who lived in the Old Testament had no real concept of immortality, 2 Timothy 1:10, we understand that Solomon is saying that life without God is meaningless, Ecclesiastes 9:4.

'You who are young, be happy while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment. So then, banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body, for youth and vigour are meaningless.' Ecclesiastes 11:9-10

Most people remember the days of their youth, and for most, it was a real joyous period of our lives, Ecclesiastes 11:9. However, if we're honest with ourselves, most of us wasted our youth doing stupid things. The problem is we get older and our bodies can't or won't do the things they once did when we were younger.

Solomon says we should live our lives in such a way that we remind ourselves that we will give an account to God for our actions, Ecclesiastes 11:9 / Ecclesiastes 2:24-26 / Ecclesiastes 7:17 / Hebrews 9:27.

When we live this way, it'll help us live the kind of lives that God wants us to live. Solomon tells us to banish anxiety from our hearts and cast off the troubles of our bodies, for youth and vigour are meaningless, Ecclesiastes 11:10.

Wright, in his commentary, says the following.

‘To older people, it may seem to be too risky to advise a young person to walk in the ways of his heart and the sight of his eyes. Yet the advice is coupled with a reminder of responsibility before God. This is not to take away with one hand what is given with the other because a sense of responsibility belongs to youth just as vitality does.’

CHAPTER 12

INTRODUCTION

‘Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, ‘I find no pleasure in them’—before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain; when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men stoop, when the grinders cease because they are few, and those looking through the windows grow dim; when the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades; when people rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint; when people are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets; when the almond tree blossoms and the grasshopper drags itself along and desire no longer is stirred. Then people go to their eternal home, and mourners go about the streets. Remember him—before the silver cord is severed, and the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, and the wheel broken at the well, and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. ‘Meaningless! Meaningless!’ says the Teacher. ‘Everything is meaningless!’ Ecclesiastes 12:1-8

Solomon begins this final chapter with the words, ‘Remember your Creator’, Ecclesiastes 12:1. The word ‘Creator’ is actually plural in Hebrew, and so, in relation to the Trinity, we see that this refers to multi-Personal Being.

There are other examples of this in the Scriptures, for example, we find that the Hebrew word for ‘Presence’, Exodus 33:14 / Deuteronomy 4:37, and ‘Person’, Job 13:8, are actually plural.

We also find that the Hebrew word for ‘Maker’, Job 35:10, and ‘Husband,’ Isaiah 54:5, are actually plural. All of these refer to multi-Personal Being, that is, the Godhead, the Trinity.

Solomon’s first piece of advice for life is that we learn faster while we are young. He tells us to remember our Creator in the days of our youth, Ecclesiastes 11:9-10 / Ecclesiastes 12:13 / Deuteronomy 8:18 / Psalms 119:55, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, I find no pleasure in them, Ecclesiastes 12:1.

Solomon may have been thinking of Rehoboam, his son, who at this time would need all the wisdom and knowledge he could attain to become the next king. Solomon may be thinking of the mistakes he made when he was a young man. Youth tend to disregard what their parents tell them, Colossians 3:20 / Ephesians 6:1, and as a result, they may make many foolish mistakes.

It’s the responsibility of all parents to instil in their children God and His ways from a very young age, by doing so, although it’s no guarantee, the children can look back at their lives when they are older, and see the wisdom in godly living, or if they never become Christians or they fall away, they will have something good to come back to, Proverbs 22:6.

Children need to cultivate worship now so their relationship with God will be close, Ecclesiastes 12:1. Rough days are ahead, but anyone who seeks the Lord when they are younger will be better prepared to deal with problems.

These troubled days are the days when we get older, Ecclesiastes 12:1 / 2 Samuel 19:33-35. The days will come for most of us when the body will be limited in what it can do. It will no longer care for the pleasures it had when it was young, Ecclesiastes 12:1.

Everyone knows that when we get older, we simply can't do the things we used to do when we were younger, our bodies get frailer, and we end up with all kinds of aches and pains, which is far from being enjoyable. The things we always wanted to do can't get done because of our age, and the older we get, the more we begin to think about death, Ecclesiastes 12:2.

Davis, in his commentary, says the following.

'This pericope expands the ideas Solomon introduced in Ecclesiastes 11:9-10, by focusing on advancing old age and death.'

The 'clouds' are our minds, which are not as sharp as they once were; the 'rain' is those things we cry from our past, Ecclesiastes 12:2 / Ecclesiastes 11:7-8.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'The Hebrews regarded any decline in a person's vital energy as a sign that death was beginning to set in, 1 Kings 1:1-4 / Psalms 18:4-5 / Psalms 88:3-5.

The 'keepers of the house', Ecclesiastes 12:3, are the hands which will tremble. The legs will begin to bow as they do not have the strength to support the body, Ecclesiastes 12:3.

The 'grinders', Ecclesiastes 12:3, are the teeth, which become fewer as we get older. The 'windows', Ecclesiastes 12:3, are the eyes which become dimmer with age.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

'The optic nerves, which receive impressions, through the medium of the different humours of the eye, from surrounding objects, they are darkened, the humours becoming thick, flat, and turbid; they are no longer capable of transmitting those images in that clear, distinct manner, as formerly.'

We are told that the 'doors will be shut', Ecclesiastes 12:4; these are the lips which must be shut to keep food from dropping out of the mouth. The grinding sounds from eating food will not be as loud as before.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

'Little noise is now made in eating, because the teeth are either lost, or become so infirm as not to suffer their being pressed close together, and the mouth being kept shut to hinder the food from dropping out, the sound in eating is scarcely heard.'

The least noise will disturb the sleep, and the voice will become feeble, Ecclesiastes 12:4. Then there is the fear of height, Ecclesiastes 12:5, we consider climbing to be dangerous. We're afraid to leave our house as we don't feel safe on the outside.

The 'almond tree', Ecclesiastes 12:5, refers to our hair which gets grey in old age. The reference to the 'grasshopper', Ecclesiastes 12:5, is a reference to small things becoming a burden for us to bear.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following concerning the loss of desire, Ecclesiastes 12:5.

'Both relish and appetite for food, even the most delicate, that to which they were formerly so much attached, now fail. The teeth are no longer able to masticate the food or have all dropped out; the stomach no longer able to digest anything, and, as the body is no longer capable of receiving nourishment, appetite and relish necessarily fail.'

Everyone will die and people will mourn their loss, Ecclesiastes 12:5. The 'silver cord' is cut, that is, all the nerves which lead to the brain and the 'golden bowl,' that is, the brain itself is broken, which means life is broken, Ecclesiastes 12:6.

Life is the pitcher by which water is taken from the fountain and it's the wheel by which water is lifted from the cistern, **Ecclesiastes 12:6**. This is a reference to the heart where the blood flows to.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Thus, then, the blood becomes stagnate; the lungs cease to respire; the blood is no longer oxidized; all motion, voluntary and involuntary, ceases; the body, the house of the immortal spirit, is no longer tenable, and the soul takes its flight into the eternal world. The man dies! This is expressed in the following verse.’

No one's body is designed to last forever and so, when we get older our bodies begin to break down and we will all return to the dust, **Ecclesiastes 12:7 / Genesis 2:7 / Job 34:14-15 / Psalms 104:29-30**.

Although the young don't often think about getting old or dying, Solomon says that when we get old, we realise that life in and of itself is meaningless, **Ecclesiastes 12:8 / Ecclesiastes 1:2**. Life is very short and can become very fragile.

THE CONCLUSION OF THE MATTER

‘Not only was the Teacher wise, but he also imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true. The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails—given by one shepherd. Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them. Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body.’

Ecclesiastes 12:9-12

The word ‘Ecclesiastes’ is a Greek word which can be translated as ‘teacher.’ The man, who had been so wise, yet became so foolish, proceeds to teach us about life.

In **Ecclesiastes 3**, he seems to say that life contains some pleasant things, while there are also parts of life that are very unpleasant. We must learn to live in a world of change. We must learn to adjust to the unexpected.

The conditions of our lives are all different at different stages of our lives. Our lives crisscross each other. He gives us a lengthy list of the many things that are in constant flux.

Nature pursues all kinds of situations, but we are not confronting the same things at the same time. ‘There is a time for everything,’ **Ecclesiastes 3:1-8**. The pendulum swings back and forth, from good to bad, until finally, its cycle is complete. It does this in each succeeding generation. These are out of our control.

We can find comfort and happiness only by accepting what God sends, always trusting fully, no matter what comes. God will not give us more than we can bear. He will give us the strength to bear everything that comes our way.

The preacher says multiple things will come into our lives. He lists about twenty-six natural events and emotions we will experience along life's pathway, **Ecclesiastes 3:2-8**. We will experience all of the above during our lifetime. Let God's word lead and guide us.

After all his experiences, Solomon ends his book on what brings man the ultimate pleasure, the one thing men should seek after. He has tried them all, but all have failed. What man needs the most is entirely different from what man has considered the ultimate satisfaction to be.

This is Solomon's personal conclusion to the purpose of life, and his wisdom is to share what he had personally learned from his own life so that we can learn from it, **Ecclesiastes 12:9 / Romans 15:4 / 1 Corinthians 10:11 / 2 Timothy 3:16-**

17. Solomon didn't make these things up; what he wrote were words of truth, **Ecclesiastes 12:10**, that is, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, **2 Peter 1:19-21**.

Just as a goad spurs on the ox and nails penetrate the wood for construction, **Ecclesiastes 12:11**, so the word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword, **Hebrews 4:12**.

It can spur on one and build one up, **Acts 20:32**, and it can encourage, **Hebrews 10:24-25**. The word 'shepherd', **Ecclesiastes 12:11**, is a reference to God, who is the source of all wisdom.

Libraries and gift shops are filled with books which are intended to help us understand life; sadly, many people will turn to any other book except the Bible, **Ecclesiastes 12:12**.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following concerning study, **Ecclesiastes 12:12**.

'This verse does not say that all study is tiring, though that is true. It means that the study of books, other than what God has revealed, to learn wisdom, is an endless, wearisome occupation. This is not to say we should avoid reading books other than the Bible. Nonetheless, the main place to look when you want to find true wisdom is God's Word.'

As God is the source of real wisdom and wisdom comes from Him, **James 1:5-8**, if people don't go to the Source for wisdom to understand the meaning of life, that too would be meaningless. Therefore, people won't find any meaning in life because they don't know what God's will is, **Romans 12:1-2**.

'Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.'
Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

Solomon finishes his advice by offering this concluding admonition. It's clear that he himself didn't live all the time by God's will; he didn't always fear God and keep his commandments, **Ecclesiastes 12:13 / 1 Kings 11:4-13**, and so, he writes from experience. He knew that if God isn't a part of our lives, then our lives would be meaningless.

Kaiser, in his commentary, says the following.

'What is the 'profit' of living? What does a man get for all his work? He gets the living God! And his whole profit consists of fearing Him and obeying His Word.'

Solomon also, although he may not have fully understood it, knows that God will be the Judge, **Ecclesiastes 12:14 / Hebrews 9:27**. This is why obedience is so important and why it's important to fear Him and obey His commands, **Matthew 6:33 / Mark 12:30-31**.

It took Solomon a lifetime to discover the supreme purpose of life. To a young person, this might not sound as exciting as other adventures one might follow. But Solomon says he had tried everything that appeals to man.

He tried everything that he thought would bring him supreme satisfaction, happiness, and pleasure. But in the end, he found that letting our minds dwell on the Lord and His commandments was the most important thing we can do. After all the things he had experimented with, a relationship with God was the most satisfying.

CONCLUSION

The way we have lived will follow us to the final day of judgment when we shall give an account of how we have lived before God and our relationship with him, **Hebrews 9:27 / Acts 17:30-31**. God then will render His perfect judgment as to the final state we will live in.

Too many people wait until it's too late in life to make any changes. They have left God out of their daily lives, failing in the most important thing, their relationship with God, **Mark 12:30-31 / John 10:10**.