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Ecclesiastes

Introduction

Title

The English title of this book is Ecclesiastes and the meaning in the Greek is “Preacher.” The Hebrew translation means “one who calls or gathers” the people. Both these translations speak of the one who addresses the Assembly which is the preacher.

Author and Date

There is no question that Solomon was the author of the book of Ecclesiastes. He titles himself as the preacher and the son of David in the first verse of the book. Also in verse 12 he states that he is the King over Israel. (1:12) This moral odyssey is a record of the observation of Solomon’s (1 Kings 1-11) life and the one who taught his people knowledge and who had written many proverbs. Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes in the later years of his life probably in 931 BC. Solomon was warning his people to not walk through life on their own human wisdom. Solomon exhorted the people to live by the revealed wisdom of God. (12:9-14)

Background and Setting

Solomon was a man who possessed extraordinary wisdom which is revealed in his book of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. His father David recognized the wisdom that his son had acquired, (1 Kings 2:6, 9) even before God had given Solomon an additional portion. After the Lord had given Solomon a wise and discerning heart,” (1 Kings 3:7-12) Solomon gained renown for his insightful decisions. (1 Kings 3:16-28) All the kings of the earth were drawn into his courts to hear his wisdom. (1 Kings 4:34) Along with his proverbs like his father David Solomon wrote songs. (1 Kings 4:32) Solomon’s wisdom as Job’s wealth surpassed all “of the sons of the east.” (1 Kings 4:30; Job 1:3)

The book of Ecclesiastes is profitable to all who will listen, not in the experiences of Solomon, but in the principles that he expressed as a result. The aim of Solomon is to answer some of life’s most challenging questions. Especially where they seem to be contrary to Solomon’s expectations. Some have, unwisely, taken the book to be filled with skepticism. In spite of Solomon’s behavior he never lost his faith in God. (12:13, 14)

Theme and Message

A life that is not centered on God is purposeless and meaningless. Without God nothing can satisfy. (2:25) With God at the center of life along with His good gifts are to be greatly received and used and enjoyed to the fullest. (2:26; 11:8) The book of Ecclesiastes contains philosophical and theological reflections of an old man whose life was meaningless because he had not relied upon God.

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Chapter 1

The Futility of all Endeavor

Verses 1-3 What can people achieve during their lives?

In these verses we learn the main subject of Ecclesiastes. What a person really achieves with all his hard labor in life. Jesus asked a similar question in Matthew. ***“For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”*** (Matthew 16:26) The teaching of Jesus was that there is no profit if man does not have a right relationship with God. Without God at the center of our life all accomplishment is meaningless in the end. Even in the wealth that one may acquire in life it is meaningless as it does not follow him to eternity. At death nothing will matter except a right relationship with God the Father.

Solomon's life is the example that the book of Ecclesiastes uses to teach that lesson. Solomon was Israel's greatest King and the nation prospered under his rule. Solomon was extremely wise and was famous among the kings of the earth.

Solomon achieved many great things in his life time and he worked hard and was very successful. (2:4-9) Many in the world are wealthy and successful but without God at their center they have achieved nothing. The book of Ecclesiastes tells us the truth of Solomon's life and it expresses God's opinion of Solomon's greatness.

Solomon had a close relationship with God in his younger days but towards the end of his life he was not loyal to God. Towards the end of his life Solomon had begun to serve false gods. (1 Kings 11:7-10) After Solomon had died the great things that he had done did not last. War came upon the nation of Israel and the country lost much of its wealth. The new king that followed Solomon lost much of his authority.

Even a King as great as Solomon cannot achieve things that can last. To the people Solomon was a very powerful King but in the eyes of God he was weak. In the end Solomon was just a man and all people must die.

In verse 2 vanity is repeated five times to emphasize it in the strongest manner. Vanity is translated as vain and means without purpose. This is Solomon's description of the labors of man, that all he accomplishes is without purpose. Other translations use the word as meaning breath. A man's labor is as weak as his breath because all men die. The word breath then becomes a picture of the weakness of people. On the other hand God's work is compared to a great wind or a powerful storm. (Psalm 29; John 3:8; Acts 2:2) When we compare our breath to the power of a storm we realize the weakness of our breath. Even the power of a great King is weak when we think of the power of God

Ecclesiastes does not say much about God's work in people's life. The subject of the book is what people can achieve without a right relationship with God. In the beginning of the book we are reminded of a person that did have a right relationship with God. The person was King David Solomon's father, (1:1)

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David did not gain that relationship with God because of his own works. (Romans 4:4-8) David had that relationship with God because he truly loved God. (1 Kings 11:4) This is the desire of God that as He loves us He wants us to love Him. (Mark 12:29-30) The people who love God do the work of God and not their own, and they do it under the power of the Holy Spirit. (Galatians 6:8; Ephesians 6:10-11)

Verses 4-7 Who can change the world?

There are noble people who are in the world, or who have been in the world, that have wanted to change the world to what they think would make it a better place. They lived their lives in hard labor to bring about the changes that they desired. In their efforts they brought change and along the way they helped many people. In their efforts they still did not achieve satisfaction for what they had done. They found that there were many more things they could do but were not able to accomplish them. And there were many more people that could not help. The improvements that they did accomplish were not permanent and they passed away. They had tried so hard to change the world but in the end all remained the same.

The forces in this world are much greater than the powers of men and women. The sun itself produces more heat and light than all the fuels of the earth. The winds of the earth are stronger than the armies of the earth. Water can change the earth far more than any king or ruler. These powerful forces were operating in the world long before any man lived. And they will continue long after a man has lived.

But these earthly forces cannot change the world as they follow the laws established by God from the very beginning. Day after day they repeat the same actions and they complete a cycle ordained by God. The sun circles the earth and the winds blow back and forward across the earth. Clouds form over the seas and bring its rain to the earth watering the rivers that return it to the sea.

God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1) and only God can change it. (Romans 8:19-21) In the future God will make a new heaven and a new earth and only then will the troubles of the earth come to a permanent end. (Revelation 21:1-4)

Verses 8-11 Can our Desires Ever Satisfy Us

The fathers and mothers, the movers and the shakers, desire to achieve something good in their life time. They work to make life better for the ones who follow after them. We too may have the same desires but the task becomes much too hard for us to achieve. Even though we work hard we cannot even satisfy our own immediate desires. Even when we do something that will make the future people's lives better they will not appreciate the sacrifice we have made. In time they will forget that we even existed.

Our desires are an expression of the best things that we can hope for. In our imaginations we desire to find the solution to all the world's problems. But, there is something very wrong about our desires. Our desires have become wrong and evil and have become the problem to the world instead of a solution. (Galatians 5:19-21) We find that we are weak

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and cannot control our own desires and often find that our evil desires control us. (Romans 7:17-20)

When the solutions that we have tried have failed we fall into a desperate state. We find that our own efforts cannot save us and we find ourselves in a state of slavery as this is the way of the world. (Galatians 4:3) We search for new solutions but there are none to be found, as we are caught in the cycle of the world and nothing can rescue us.

There is hope, with God all things are possible. (Mark 9:23) God is an infinite God and can do things that are new. (2 Corinthians 5:17) God can make people who are trapped in sin into His children. (Galatians 4:3-7) God can free us from the bondage of sin. (Romans 8:1-2) God can change the desire of our heart and lift us up in the power of His Holy Spirit. (Galatians 5:22-23)

Verses 12-15 Why is Life so Hard

King Solomon was known across the world for his wisdom. He had studied hard to become wise and now he wanted to use his wisdom to help other people. He had seen how hard the people had struggled and often because of their foolish decisions. He believed that he would be able to help his people.

Solomon soon realized that he had given himself to a very hard task. The task was so hard and difficult that he knew that he would never be able to complete it. The problems of the people were more numerous than he could count. He learned that it would be impossible for him to right every wrong.

The greatest thing that is wrong in this world is the state of people's hearts. Their attitudes and desires, and their thoughts were not in line with God's Word. (Romans 3:9-20) The heart of a person is what governs their deeds. (Mark 7:20-23)

It is the sinful nature of men that God ruled that people must work hard for their whole lives. (Genesis 3:17-19) It is not God's plan that people should not have rest. (Exodus 20:8-10) Even so for many people life seems to be a constant struggle. (Psalm 90:7-10) The labor of the people is to provide for their families and it is hard to do what seems right and necessary. It was hard for Solomon to even think of all these matters of the people.

Jesus made an impressive offer in Matthew. (Matthew 11:28-30) Jesus invited the people to serve Him and learn His wisdom. Jesus would not give them things to do that were to difficult for them. Jesus offered them comfort and rest from their labors.

Verses 16-18 Does Wisdom Improve a Person's Life

People error with foolishness and stupid behavior, as it does not improve anyone's life. This is an undeniable fact as people suffer much because of foolish decisions.

Solomon decided to study the behavior of people and he paid attention to the foolish and unwise. Solomon was a man of study but this study brought him no pleasure. He saw how the people were wasting their lives and binging trouble for themselves. Yet they did not want to change, they did not want to become wise.

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Solomon looked at his own situation and realized that he was hopeless too. His purpose was to use his wisdom to save people from their troubles but the people did not want his wisdom. Solomon was unable to convince the people that wisdom was a good thing. When Solomon had learned these things the knowledge of it made him sadder over the people and their troubles. The response of the people was to not become sad as their king because of wisdom.

Most people do not have a relationship with God and they do not even want to know God. They think that knowledge is God's word and that His laws would make them sad. They would learn what God thought of their state of being and knowing that they were guilty of disobedience would make them sad.

The Psalmist said that the study of God's word would bring them delight. (Psalm 1:2) Wisdom for the truth of God's Word is the power to change lives. (Proverbs 3:13-16) This wisdom is not the foolishness of the world's wisdom and the true wisdom comes only from the Lord. (Job 28:28; Proverbs 2:6)

Chapter 2

The Futility of Pleasure and Possessions

Verses 1-3 Is There a Worthwhile Way to Live

Solomon believed that he could find the truth by careful study and meditation in his mind. That method is very popular in this day. It is how the scientist learn of the mysteries. Then there is another opinion that people have. They should just enjoy the lives that that have. They should explore different pleasures until they find the ones that make them happy in the moment. People should not weight themselves with serious matters, such as truth, the future, and their problems. These thoughts will only make them sad. This is a foolish opinion but many people choose to live in this way. Solomon too decided to live in this manner.

Solomon knew that this was a foolish way to live and he never really thought that he would achieve anything worthwhile. Solomon was a wealthy King and he had every opportunity to enjoy himself. It was his quest to know by experience what the best way is to have a good life. In verses 4-9 we learn what Solomon did and in verse 11 he tells us what he learned. Solomon had discovered absolutely nothing and he had achieved absolutely nothing and the whole experiment was a complete waste of time.

Solomon's efforts to be a wise man had achieved nothing and his efforts to be foolish had the same effect, nothing achieved. In the end he discovered that all human effort is nothing more than hard work.

God does not reward people for their work effort. (Romans 4:5) God rewards people who trust Him. (Hebrews 11:6) This is how God wants people to live, He wants us to live with faith in Him. (Galatians 3:11)

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Verses 4-8 It Is Foolish to Please Yourself

In these verses Solomon tells us of the great things that he did for his own pleasure. This does not seem to be a list of evil things that he did. And it seems not to be a list of things he did that did not accomplish anything. To determine if the actions were good or evil we must determine the motives of the action. And to determine if an action achieved anything we must look to the result of the action.

The first great action that Solomon accomplished during his reign was to build the Temple as a house for the Lord. God had said that Solomon should do that, his father David had wanted to but God said that it would be Solomon who should build the Temple. (2 Samuel 7:12-13) It is clear that this was an important purpose for Solomon to complete. Solomon was careful not to include this in his list of things he pursued to please himself.

It was after he built the Temple that Solomon built his palaces, gardens and pools. At the beginning Solomon may not have realized that he was doing anything wrong. Solomon was just doing what any other rich king would have done. But in fact he was behaving as a fool. He was serving himself instead of God. This wrong desire and selfish ambition had taken control of Solomon's life. (James 3:14-17)

Solomon collected silver and gold, he collected wives, horses and slaves. Then the people thought that he was really a great king. But this is not what God thought about his behavior. (1 Kings 11:9) At the end of Solomon's social experiment he even chose to worship false gods. (1 Kings 11:4-6)

Verses 9-11 Why Do Our Feelings of Satisfaction Not Last

Whatever Solomon saw with his eyes he desired with his heart. When he had satisfied his heart's desire he had a sense of pride for all that he had done. Solomon had felt that he had carried out his work well as he had achieved all the things that he wanted to do. Solomon was greatly satisfied with the work that he had done. Because of his pride and satisfaction it all seemed right to him.

At the completion of each task Solomon found that he desired something else. So his work was never finished. His heart's desire was for things that no one had ever seen. (2 Chronicles 9:17-19) Solomon had to work much harder to achieve the things that he wanted and the satisfaction seemed greater with each task.

Only when Solomon had finished all his work did he realize that none of his work had useful purpose. His only reward was a sense of satisfaction. And that feeling never lasted long. Few people have had the wealth that Solomon had but his experience was not unusual. People will have similar experiences when they allow their desires to rule their lives. John wrote about such desire. (1 John 2:16-17) Solomon is warning us that the desires of the world will not last. These desires are of the world and not from God and it is wrong to follow these desires. People should do what God wants them to do for that is the way to life and that is better than living for a short time in the world chasing empty desires.

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Verses 12-16 How Does a Person Benefit if He is Wise

Solomon was a wise man but he had acted foolishly. Now Solomon compares the two ways that he had lived. He looked at the similarities.

Both James and the Apostle Paul wrote about two kinds of wisdom. (1 Corinthians 1:18-30; James 3:13-17) One kind of wisdom is a gift from God. This wisdom causes a person to respect God and to refuse to do evil things. We can read of this wisdom in the book of Proverbs and Job. (Proverbs 3:5-6; Proverbs 9:10; Job 28:28)

In the book of Ecclesiastes we seem to have a lower standard of wisdom, the wisdom that comes from the world. To be wise in the world's wisdom a person must think clearly and study carefully. Like Solomon that person must learn all that he can from the world.

A wise person understands what is happening. A wise person is like a person who carries a lamp at night so that he can see the dangers. But the foolish person will pretend that there are no dangers. Or, maybe he does not care about the dangers. Or, he is too lazy to study about such dangers. The risk and dangers are unknown to him.

A person who is wise can protect himself from some troubles but only a fool imagines that he can protect himself from all danger. The wise know that they will surely die, as he has learned from his study of the world that he will not remain here. What the wise man has gained in the world someone else will receive. And in time people will forget both the wise man and what he had learned in the world. The wisdom of the world only brings death.

But the wisdom that comes from God brings eternal life to a person. (1 John 2:17; Proverbs 8:32-36)

Verses 17-21 Can a Person's Efforts Achieve Anything that Last

Solomon had wanted to find a better way to live and he made a careful study of the world. But the world and its wisdom disappointed Solomon. Neither the study of the wise nor the foolish had brought a better way to live. All that Solomon had learned is that surely one day he would die.

Solomon does not express any fear of death but fear of the things that would happen after his death. One works hard to earn their wages and it was upsetting to Solomon that he would lose what he had labored for. By his death Solomon would lose everything that he had labored for. That would not matter all that much to Solomon if the new owner would use these things wisely. But there is no guarantee that the new owner would be a wise husbandman.

We know from the book of Kings that Solomon's son behaved in a foolish manner. (1 Kings 12:1-19) In 1 Kings 14:25-28 we see how Solomon's son lost much of his father's wealth. But what upset Solomon the most was the loss of all his effort. Solomon had worked hard as he wanted to achieve much in his life. But all the labors of Solomon's life were for the things of this world and nothing of this world will last.

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The teaching of Jesus is that there are permanent things that we can achieve in this life. But they cannot be achieved by using the wisdom of this world. Our careful study and sensible thought, along with hard effort will not achieve permanent results. Only the wisdom that comes for God by His Word will give us the eternal wisdom. The wisdom of the world will eventually disappoint but the wisdom from God will never disappoint. (Matthew 7:24-25; John 12:49-50)

Verses 22-26 Without God Can Anyone Have a Good Life

The usual tasks of a laborer is hard. People sometimes do not receive a proper reward for their labors. That is the way of the world here in this life. There is little justice and good in this life. For others life does not seem so hard their work feels pleasant and they feel content. They enjoy their lives.

God has been kind to these people and they should be grateful to Him. For all good things come from God. (James 1:17) People in this world should not think that their whole lives will be filled with happiness. When hard times come they should still be loyal to God as God deserves honor no matter what state we are in.

Job was a man who had a very pleasant life. (Job 29:1-6) In Job we read that Job was God's servant and God was protecting him. (Job 1:10) God had placed a hedge of protection around Job because he was living his life in God's righteousness. God did not open that wall of protection because Job had sinned against Him. We do not know what is going on in the spiritual realm and therefore we do not know the reasons that God allows evil things to happen. Satan had challenged God that if God removed the hedge of protection around Job he would no longer serve Him. God obliged Satan because He knew that Job was faithful. It was not just a test of Job's faith but a proof to Satan that Job served God.

I am not comparing Job's suffering to any other, as we each suffer that which we can bear and no more. (1 Corinthians 10:13) Job remained loyal to God and praised Him through his suffering. Job did not serve God because He was kind to him, Job served God because He is deserving of our honor. When the trial was over for Job God restored him greatly. We do not earn God's grace, it is His gift to us because God loves us.

Chapter 3

Verses 1-8 A time for everything

There are many great poems in the Bible and these next eight verses is one of the most popular. Every human activity great or small has its proper time. There is a right time and there is a wrong time for the events of life to happen. When people carry out their actions at the right time it will usually become a successful adventure.

There is a natural wisdom placed into the world by God. Plants and animals seem to understand this better than people do sometimes. (Song of Solomon 2:11-13) No one trains the plants and animals in the course of their activity they know their proper time to

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accomplish their work. They know when to mate, they know when to migrate, and they know when to hibernate.

For people to know the right time for their task they must study. The wise person will use the knowledge that he has learned from his study. The farmer knows when to sow his seed, the financial advisor knows when to invest, and the king knows when to make peace. This is how the prudent should arrange their activity.

A foolish person knows there is a right time for everything but he does not study as the wise. The foolish leave their ways to chance and when he fails he claims that it was his bad luck. Or, he may blame God, or other people, but he never places the blame upon himself. It is like myself when my wife tells me to read the directions and I think that is so unmanly.

God in His infinite wisdom has an appointed and proper time for everything. He has appointed a proper time for people to be saved. That time is now. (2 Corinthians 6:2)

Verses 9-15 Time and eternity

In the previous verses we have seen that God appoints a right time for everything as a Christians we should lean on God to direct our paths to the right time for events to happen. When things happen at the right time they are successful events. For the farmer the harvest is beautiful if the farmer gathers at the right time. A person's death can be beautiful if their life's work has been completed. (Numbers 20:22-29; Luke 2:25-32) Even a war if the time is right to save people from an oppressing enemy.

Events are beautiful when they happen at their right time. God has shown us even a more beautiful thing. It is eternity. Eternity is beyond the imagination of man but in his heart he knows that it is real. Eternity is there and is unchangeable, as God is unchangeable. (Hebrews 13:8)

All the work of God seems too wonderful for us to fully comprehend. Everything that God does is measured in eternity. The words we speak last for only a moment but the words that God speaks last forever. (Psalm 119:89) When one is saved he is saved for eternity. (John 3:16) The promises of God are true and eternal. (Luke 1:48-55) God lives in time, He is in eternity past, He is present in the now, and He lives on the borders of eternity.

The work that men do only last for a moment, the things that men achieve are never permanent. This is why the Christian should walk in the Spirit of God. (Galatians 5:16) The Holy Spirit will guide our walk in this world. (John 3:8; John 4:24) The Holy Spirit gives us understanding of the thoughts of God. (1 Corinthians 2:9-16) The Holy Spirit prepares us for our Eternal home. (Hebrews 11:13-16)

Verses 16-17 God is the Perfect Judge

There are many people in the world who lack a sense of accountability. They do not believe that there will be a final judgment of the work they have done. Solomon firmly believed that God will judge both the righteous and the wicked. He had seen evidence of that.

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God is a God of order and there is a proper time for everything including judgment of mankind's deeds. Fruit that has not ripened has a bad taste. Fruit that is old also has a bad taste. But when the fruit is perfectly ripened it has a good taste. This truth is also true for the fruits of men's labor. (3:1-8; 3:11)

If God has appointed a time for everything, then He certainly has appointed a time to justify all that has been done. God is a just God and He will bring all His creation into accountability. (Psalm 9:7-8) God is just and everything He does is good, proper, and perfect. God would not neglect a proper time for judgment. (Deuteronomy 17:8-13)

Solomon has been taken aback by the judges in the land. It is true that judges are humans and sometimes make poor decisions. But Solomon was shocked that some of these judges did not care about what was right and the proper thing for them to do. They were more concerned for their own prestige or judge according to the gifts they could receive. (Proverbs 17:23; Micah 3:11) Solomon knew that the time for judgment was still in the future. When that proper time for judgment comes God will judge in righteousness and His judgments will be perfect.

Verses 18-22 Life After Death

One of the most important things that people should think about is what happens after death. It is a difficult subject to study but one that needs consideration. If there is life after death, then the most important thing is to have a right relationship with God the Creator.

Solomon believes there is a future after death and that God will judge everybody for their deeds in the flesh. (3:17) The evidence of partial judgments in life clearly points to the final judgment at the departure of life here in the world. Job went through great trials and tribulation in his life and it proved to him that there must be life after death. (Job 19:25-27) Job believed that God would save him from these trials and tribulations, and if not during his life here surely after death.

Solomon thought this was a hard test to believe. But God allows time of testing so that people can see their weaknesses and trust Him in faith. All here in this world are walking in the Valley of the Shadow of Death. God made us from the dust of the earth (Genesis 2:7) and at death our bodies will return to the dust. (Genesis 3:19) Until that appointed time we will carry on our work here. (3:22)

The bodies of all men and animals return to the ground at death. But Solomon knows that the body of a man is not everything. The life of a man is more than the body. Man was created in the image of God and has a conscious being. God breathed the breath of life into the man. (Genesis 2:7) Man is a spiritual being which the death of the body does not destroy. This is why man has eternity in his heart. It is not the body that is the real person but the spirit.

But we have not proven what happens to the spirit after the body's death. Solomon asks: "Who knows of such things?" The answer is that God knows and people can know when God shows it to them. This is not a matter of human wisdom. (Isaiah 55:8-9) Only God

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has the answer and the wisdom to discern these things we study His Word to learn the wisdom of God.

Chapter 4

The Evils of Oppression

Verses 1-3 The Power of Wealthy People

We may be rich and powerful, so powerful that we can force other people to obey our commands. It may be that many people are under our charge and work for our own pleasures. But we must never forget that the day is coming when we will lose that power. We will lose it in a twinkling of the eye and it could happen in any moment.

The wealth and power we may have belongs only in this world. Either we go to heaven or hell alike, there the strong will not control the weak. (Job 3:18-19) In both heaven and hell the people there will recognize the power of God and His authority. (Philippians 2:10)

On that day when we lose our wealth and power is the day that God will judge us. We will not be able to pay Him to be kind to us, as His judgments are in righteousness and they are proper. (3:17)

Solomon states that death is better than life in verse 4. After death we will be judged by God and His judgments are right. Far better than the judgments that are placed upon us here in this world. Often the judgments of this world are done in wickedness. (3:16)

In verse three Solomon says that it is better to never have lived. This is Solomon's way of saying to emphasize the cruelty of this world and its people. The Scriptures speak to this fact. (Isaiah 1:21-26; Micah 3:8-12; James 5:1-6)

Verses 4-6 Jealous and Lazy Attitudes

At first we see no the connection between cruelty, (Verse 1) jealous attitudes, (Verse 4) and lazy behavior. (Verse 5) But as we look in the book of James we can see a connection.

One of the concerns of James is that Christians care too much about money. (James 2:1-7) Great plans were being made to obtain wealth. (James 4:13-16) Their quest for wealth was driven by their jealousy of other people. (James 4:1-4)

James saw through them that they were seeking the comfortable life in order to imitate the rich who were lazy and cruel. A lazy person can have an easy life if he is rich and it can be comfortable by the means of cruelty. God will punish anyone who believes like that. (James 5:1-6)

One could say that these people bring about their own punishment. (4:5; James 5:5) ***"You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter."*** Their attitudes of jealousy have taken control of their lives and are so lazy that they will not lift a hand to work. ***"The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh."***

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Near the end of an animal's life the farmer will feed it well. He wants the animal to be very fat when he butchers them. A cruel person can imagine that his life is being lived well but he is only fattening himself for his own punishment. (Ecclesiastes 4:5; James 5:5) These kinds of attitudes can ruin a person's life by their plans to do cruel and evil things. It is better for one to be poor than to live a life of bad behavior. (4:6)

Verses 7-8 Work that Never Satisfies

In Solomon's study of the world around him he saw a particular man who had extraordinary behavior. In truth his behavior was no different than that of most people. From this man we can learn a useful lesson about human weakness.

The man thought that he could find satisfaction through his own efforts. So he labored himself constantly. Yet, in all of his work the man never found contentment. This man himself knew that his work was not serving a real purpose. He had no need of money and had no family to support. Still he labored on and was unable to relax.

The problem of this man was that all of his work belonged to this world. Nothing in this world that we can work for can truly satisfy us. This man's efforts were as weak as all man's efforts. All men will die and all men's' efforts will not satisfy them completely. They may find temporary satisfaction but it will not endure. We can only find satisfaction in God. (John 7:37; Psalm 62:1-2)

The man knew that he would never find satisfaction and he knew that he did not need wealth as he had no family. The man knew that he was using all his time foolishly. A lot of people are like this man. They continue to do the things they know will not bring satisfaction. They continue on thinking that somewhere in this world they will find satisfaction and because of this they will not trust God.

Verses 9-12 Advantages of Love and Friendship

Solomon saw all the evil in the world but found relief in that love still remained. Love over comes all. (1 Corinthians 13:1-7) We have not seen the perfect love of 1 Corinthians 13 and this is the love that the world needs. What Solomon saw was a weaker love, a love that people show towards each other. Worldly love is I'll help you if you help me or I will love you because of the benefit I will receive.

It is a world where people want to get love more than they want to give love. But even this weaker love can achieve good things. If a man who has companionship falls, then there is one to lift him back up. If a man sleeps with his wife, then they are able to keep each other warm. (1 Kings 1:1-4)

The more cords that are wrapped together the stronger they are. In the same way the relationships of people make them stronger. This is a true fact in relationships, marriages, and business associations.

There is a weight that is too much for the cords and they will break. In the same way too much strain on a relationship will break it and people will disappoint. We can only find perfect love in God and only God will never disappoint us.

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Verses 13-16 The Weakness of People's Support

Solomon has spoken of the goodness of relationships and now he finds the weakness of those relationships. He speaks of a powerful king who ruled for many years but became foolish in his later reign. The king ruled sternly and his advisors warned him but he would not listen. Because he did not recognize his error he became unpopular. As a result the old king lost the support of the people.

There was a young lad from a poor family who had become popular in his kingdom. The people turned and wanted the young lad to rule over them and took him out of the prison. It is easy for us to imagine that a young popular man of wisdom would always have the support of the people who had set him free. In a few years' time the people became unhappy with their new king. He may have even become as unpopular as the king that he had replaced.

We see that at first the young king was loved by the people but in time their weak love faded and he too was unpopular. The worldly love is a weak love and over time and trial will not last. David was a popular king and he did not depend on his popularity as his support. David declared that God was his support and God alone would sustain him. God would keep David safe. (Psalm 62:1-2)

Nobody could have had more people to support him than that young man had. That support seemed extremely strong. People were willing to fight and even die for him. But really, that support was very weak. It did not last. And perhaps there was no proper reason why the young ruler lost the people's support.

David was a popular king. But he did not imagine that his rule depended on the support of his people. He declared that God alone kept him safe (Psalm 62:1-2).

Chapter 5

Your Attitude Toward God

Verses 1-3 Foolish and Wise Prayers

People are under the false believe that we can earn God's grace. They carry this falsehood into their prayer life. They try to convince God that they are better than the people who might be next to them, or the people who are not in the Church, and certainly they are better than the common sinner. Maybe they do this to convince God that they deserve His help and support. They are like the Pharisee that Jesus spoke of in the Gospel of Luke. (Luke 18:11-12) Maybe they think that a long and wordy prayer with expensive gifts will gain His favor. (Micah 6:6-8)

When we realize our true state before God we are humbled. When we realize that we are all disobedient people then we realize that we do not deserve any kindness from Him. (Romans 3:23) We are to present ourselves pure before the Lord and this requires confession and repentance. Then we can approach God with thanksgiving because of His great mercy towards us. Then we can petition the Lord for our needs that His name may be glorified. (Luke 18:13-14)

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In the Scriptures we are often warned of having a proud attitude. Our prayers should always be in humility. We are but men kneeling before an Almighty God. A reverent fear is the beginning of the knowledge of the Lord and we should enter His courts of prayer with respect. Prayer is a conversation with God our Creator and requires speech and listening. All too often people do not wait upon the Lord and listen to what He says. And when He speaks we are to follow in obedience.

Our prayers should have the right attitudes. A right attitude is far greater than the words we speak. God already knows what we will ask of Him and He knows what we need. (Matthew 6:8)

God is the one and true God and when we pray we should pray in faith and trust Him more than rambling off many useless words. (Mark 11:23-24) Long prayers are often offered for the wrong reasons. (Matthew 6:7; Mark 12:40) Then there are times that the need for a long prayer exist. (Mark 1:35; Acts 1:14) Those who have a close relationship with the Lord pray constantly and their prayers please God. (Luke 18:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:17)

Verses 4-7 Promises to God

People should never try to control God. They promise to give a generous gift if He helps them. This act is trying to bribe God. This is the same manner that people behave towards a false god. Others offer gifts to God with the proper intentions. This is an expression of their thanks and love for God.

In Jerusalem the people gave their gifts to God at His house the Temple. Most of the people lived a long way from the house of God and could not go there often. When they waited to give a gift they made a promise. When they did go to Jerusalem they would present their gifts in the Temple.

Vows made to God matter to Him. This is especially true when the promise is to give gifts to Him. As soon as the people made the promise God accepted the gift. Therefore the gift already belongs to God and the giver has a duty to give it. (Leviticus 27:9-10)

Jesus was probably thinking of the words in Ecclesiastes 5:5 when He spoke the words in Matthew 5:33-34. Jesus also warned the people about making vows to God. It is better to make no promise than to make a promise you cannot keep. The trouble is that people do not think about their duties to God. We owe God for everything that we have. We owe God for our very lives and our life belongs to Him. People should not make a promise to God when they will not live for Him in faith and trust. God does not want our gifts, God wants our obedience to His Word.

Verses 8-9 Responsibilities Towards the Poor People

We see here two types of workers. Some people use their physical strength to work. These people are often poor and must work harder to make ends meet. These workers include the farm workers who provide the food that all need to eat. The other group are those who organize the work. In society their work is necessary as well. Without good

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leaders the people will struggle even to provide the food for their own families. All work requires organization.

In the second group of workers we see the government officials, judges, and even the king. If these workers are wise, then wealth will come to the nation and everyone will benefit. But these officials often use their position to benefit themselves with greater wealth. They may force the poor people to work harder and pay wages that are too low. They may make decisions that are not right and proper. They do these things because they only want to benefit themselves and not the other people.

God cares about all the people but He especially cares about the poor. God has risen up the leaders so that they can look after the poor and the weak. When the powerful and the strong use the poor for their own advantage God becomes angry. These cruel people will have their Day of Judgment and punishment.

Verses 10-12 Love of Money

If the love of your life is money you will never find enough, as the desire for it is never fulfilled. Money itself is not an evil thing but the love of money causes evil to come into the hearts of those who love money. (1 Timothy 6:10) There are many in the world today that money has become the god that they serve. (Matthew 6:24)

The person who desires great possessions maybe able to gain them but he will find in the end they will not benefit him. There is little comfort in possessions as the Jones are always keeping up with. Other people will see what one has and work to acquire them as well. It is a never ending effort to stay ahead. The Apostle Paul tells us that we should learn to be content with what we have. (Philippians 4:11)

The person who loves wealth will never be content with his wealth and the wealth he has will never be safe. When he sleeps at night he will not be able to protect his wealth. When he is awake there will be those who will constantly try to take it from him. Wealth does not always bring a better live. The increase of wealth brings on more worry about their wealth.

Luxury in life does not hold the promise of a good night's sleep. A poor person sleeps well without the worry that wealth brings upon a person. The poor can find a greater pleasantness in a life free of the worry of wealth and possession.

It is wrong to love money or possessions as it places a false god ahead of the one and true God. We should love God first and love Him with everything we have including our wealth and possessions. (Mark 12:28-34) When we love God and put Him first in our life He will protect us. (Psalm 121) A good night's sleep is a gift from God that no amount of money can buy. (Psalm 127:2)

Verses 13-17 Things That Lose Their Value

There are those who work their whole life and gain nothing. This is a sad fact and it is not unusual. The truth is we can say this about everyone, as there is nothing in this world that we can take with us. Everything we have labored for in this world we will leave behind

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when we depart. We came into the world with nothing and we will leave this world with nothing.

Money, wealth, and possessions belong to this world. In both Heaven and Hell these things have no value. Even in this world the money and possessions that we have can lose their value. We can work our whole life through to leave something for our children. Working and saving, gathering and holding, and yet in the end they may be worth nothing. This often happens, it is sad but true.

In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus spoke of these things. (Matthew 6:19-21) Jesus said that we must not think merely about the things of this world. Many things destroy the possessions that we have and thieves can steal them from us. The wealth that we have in this world will not for us ever last. We should keep our perspective on the eternal things were the greater time of our lives will be spent. The only value in our lives is those things that God considers valuable.

The greatest thing of value that we can have in this world is our personal relationship with God. (Matthew 13:44-46) Nothing of value can be lost in Heaven and it will never lose its value.

Verses 18-20 Wrong Reactions to God's Kindness

The very poor of us work very hard at difficult and unpleasant labor. It is usually low paying and we struggle to make the ends meet. God cares for the poor and often shows His special kindness towards them. As hard as his labors are the person can find joy in his work. In spite of the hard times because of the grace of God he has enough to eat and drink. The man is grateful to the Lord for His kindness as there is always those who do not have enough.

The wealth of the rich really does not have a better life than the poor. The rich have plenty of drink and food. But the rich suffer because of their wrong desires and jealous attitudes. (4:4; 5:10) Their wealth is never satisfying to them and they are ever in need of more.

Sometimes God show special favor to the rich also and the rich can enjoy his wealth. He has learned to be content with the wealth that the Lord has provided him. Because he has a content heart he does not chase after more and more wealth. He is grateful because the Lord has given him contentment.

Too many times people often show a wrong reaction to the kindness of God. They should be grateful for the joy that the Lord has put into their hearts. But they find their joy in the possessions of their life and begin to allow the things of the world give them satisfaction. They forget that soon they will leave this world and face God who will judge them. (3:17) Their happiness is only for a short time while they are in the world.

Chapter 6

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The Futility of Life

Verses 1-2 A Rich Person Who Cannot Enjoy His Life

A person who has received possessions, wealth, and honor often does not gain the respect of the people. Instead the people try to work out how they can benefit from the wealth and possessions that they can receive the honor. The rich often find that their enemies pretend to be a friend. They will do business with him for their own advantage. They may give him too much wine so that he will make unwise decisions and promises to them. Others will pretend nothing and lay plans to rob him and even murder him to gain what is his.

People in the world strive to take wealth, possessions and honor believing that these are the best things to have. They will do most anything to acquire these things believing that these things will give them the good life. In these verses Solomon has told us of a man who had these things. They were a gift from God and he did not even have to work to receive them. If these are the things that give one a good life, then this man would have had a good life.

We can wonder why if God had given this man possession, wealth, and honor why God did not protect them. Perhaps this was God's way to show the man not to put his trust in his possessions, wealth and honor. But these things belong to the world only and will be no benefit in the life after. Only putting our trust in God will benefit us in this world and in the next.

Verses 3-6 What is a Good Life

Solomon is showing us how wrong the popular ideas of men can be. In that day a man with many sons was a successful man. Today we still say that a long life is a good life. In that day one would say of a man who had passed he now rest with his fathers. (1 Kings 16:6) Solomon has told us of a man who seemed to have a good life. He had many children and he lived longer than most. When he died the truth of his life became clear. His many children did not care even enough to bury him. That would mean that the wild animals devoured him. (1 Kings 16:4)

In their selfishness they did not care for the dead man's body because it had no value. But they would fight like dogs for the man's wealth. This would have been a terrible end for a life that seemed good and honorable. This seems worse because these things happened in the view of the people.

When an unborn child dies its whole life has happened in secret. The child never achieved the great things the people desire. His life passed from a short life into death. Death is the path that all must take. It makes no difference if that person is buried in a proper grave or not their bodies return to the dust. (3:20) But the spirit of a man must stand before God who is their judge. (3:17; 3:21; Luke 16:19-31)

Verses 7-9 Rest for the Soul

In these verses the translation for the words desire and appetite is soul. The use of the word soul means the real person. It is from the soul that our most important desires come

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from. The example would be that our body needs food so we hunger. The soul needs a right relationship with God and cannot live without Him. People will work hard for food to satisfy their bodies but food cannot satisfy the desires of the soul. This is why the fool and the wise alike cannot find satisfaction without God. In this important matter the wise have no advantage over the foolish. Careful study and thought do not give one a right relationship with God.

A poor man can hide the truth of his poverty. A man can pretend that he is not hungry. Other people can believe his deception but the soul of the man still will not be satisfied. It is good to learn to be content with the things that we have and all know that but the things that we can see in this world will not satisfy us. The soul will remain without rest and that person will stay in a desperate state without God. The only remedy is found in God's promises. The person who puts his trust in Christ will find rest. This is the promise that Jesus has given us. (Matthew 11:29; John 6:27; Psalm 62:1)

Verses 10-12 Who Would Argue Against God

Solomon seems to be asking questions here. Who is this and what kind of man would argue against God and who made him? (Job 40:2) From the beginning we know that this man was Adam. In the Hebrew this word man (Adam) became the word for all people. This word reminds us that God created man from the dust. (Genesis 2:7) It reminds us of the weakness of all people who at death return to the dust. (Genesis 3:19)

Even as we are only men we still argue with God. They will argue that His opinion of their lives is incorrect, the He should approve of their efforts, but their efforts only show how weak they are. Their arguments against God only show how wrong they are.

With this closing of the chapter Solomon has said enough of the weaknesses of men and their efforts to please God by their own works. Solomon has proved that riches, honor, and a long life do not satisfy.

Now Solomon will try to answer the question, ***"For who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime, during the few years of his futile life? He will spend them like a shadow. For who can tell a man what will be after him under the sun?"*** Now that we see that a man's life is short and weak. (Psalm 90) None can control what will happen in the world after their death. What then should people do in their lives? Solomon now tries to show the proper way for people to live. He will try to answer his question by study of the behavior of people in this world.

Chapter 7

Wisdom and Folly Contrasted

Verses 1-2 When the Truth is Unpleasant

A good ointment will hide the bad smell of something awful. But this only hides that which smells awful. Whatever it is that smells bad is still there.

A good name means an honest character. That is the character of the one who loves the truth. (John 1:47) This is a person that does not hide matters because the truth is what

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really matters. So this person is honest with himself and others. Most people agree that the truth is better than a lie but they do not wish to hear what is unpleasant.

They find themselves at places that are happy to give them opportunity to forget about their problems. This is their ointment to hide the unpleasantness of troubles. Solomon is saying that we would learn more going to funerals than to birthday parties. Our next destination is on the mind at funerals and our minds would be open to the lessons we can learn. There we would be reminded that we all must die and prepare ourselves for the next world to come. This is important wisdom to prepare for the day that we will meet our Creator and stand in His judgment.

Jesus teaches us that the truth will make us free. (John 8:32) Not every truth will have that effect. We cannot just think about when we will die we must think of the truth that God sent His Son to save us. We must invite Jesus into our lives. (John 3:16) Jesus is the path to our freedom. (John 8:36) Jesus is the way to eternal life. (John 8:51)

Verses 3-4 Serious Thoughts

Many people believe that happiness is the purpose of life. Solomon believes that such people are foolish that they let their emotions rule their lives. Wisdom requires a different attitude. Wisdom requires that we do the things that are right and proper. Life is not all fun and games but requires serious and sensible consideration. When we ponder our course in life we must be careful.

Happiness is not evil but the pursuit of happiness causes us to do many evil and stupid things. Nobody likes to be sad but until we are sorry for the evil things we do we will not ask for God's forgiveness. Until we see the need for a complete change in our life we will not invite God into our life. Sadness will bring about serious thoughts and when these thoughts are right and proper they can achieve good results.

It is not the happy parties that are wrong but the attitudes that people have at these parties. Jesus choose to be at such events. Jesus ate with people who were guilty of many wrong deeds. Jesus did not go there to join in their foolish behavior but to help the people who needed God's help. Jesus spoke many wise words of how God wanted to rule their lives. (Matthew 11:19; Mark 2:15-17) When we have sad feelings we can know the greatness of God's comfort. (Matthew 5:4)

Verses 5-6 Foolish Songs and Laughter

The people of Israel loved to sing, and they sang at home and at work. They sang at weddings and at funerals. Solomon himself had a collection of 1005 songs. (1 Kings 4:32)

The foolish did not sing to praise God. When the foolish sing it is for their own pleasure. The foolish think only of themselves and care only about their own feelings. None of us like being told that we are wrong but that attitude is also foolish. This is not the attitude of the wise. The wise wants to know of the wrong that he is doing. He needs to learn of these things so he can change his behavior. (Proverbs 9:8-9) This is how the wise become wiser.

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When the foolish finish their song they laugh even without purpose to laugh. But their laughter has no purpose, as it is just the sound that they make. Their laughter does not mean that they are happy, as when foolish people cannot laugh about something they will laugh at someone. The fools are as the thorns, they make a lot of noise but they have no useful purpose. Thorns are fit only for the fire and a fool is fit only for punishment.

Verse 7 The Danger of Money

Solomon wanted people to study so that they could become wise. Solomon constantly warned people of their foolish ways. But Solomon also warned the wise too.

People like to have wise rulers, wise officials, and wise judges. There are many opportunities for wise people. If a wise person uses these opportunities well he will become successful. That is where the danger lays. The purpose of wisdom is not to give one power, importance, or wealth. The purpose of wisdom is to show a person how to make good decisions that are right and proper.

It is not right, proper or wise to love money. (1 Timothy 6:9-10) The peoples love for money causes them to do many wrong and evil things. The love of money causes judges to accept bribes so they will issue judgments to benefit the giver. A judge like this cannot think that he is wise. His decision was not wise but foolish and evil. The love of money will cause an employer to cause his employees to work much harder. The love of money causes lenders to charge unfair rates. And the love of money causes rulers to use their power in evil and cruel ways.

These powerful people become important because of their wisdom but they have forsaken their wisdom for personal gain. The people may still see them clever and intelligent but they use their position only for their personal gain.

Verses 8-10) The Reward for Patience

“The end of a matter is better than its beginning.” Solomon would have done well to remember these words that he wrote. He began his rule well (1 Kings 3:4-14) but ended it in a terrible manner. (1 Kings 11:4-9)

Patience is important for tasks that we cannot finish immediately. Only the person who completes his work is successful. No task is greater than the way one lives his life. When we began a task well we often feel a sense of pride, but the beginning is often the easiest part. But then troubles come and if the task is great the troubles will be great too. We need the same patience that Job had during the troubles that he had. (Job 5:7-11) Job's troubles were severe and many but he kept his patience with trust in God. If we are impatient, then we will become angry. We may even complain against God and that is a foolish and wrong thing for us to do. God is good, holy, and perfect and we must not blame Him for our troubles.

No matter how hard the task becomes, how many troubles come along side of the task, we seek God's help in whatever the trouble may be. We want to complete are God given task in a manner that pleases God. If this is our desire, then that will give us the patience

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to continue our work through the difficulties. When our task is to serve God our patience will bring great reward. (Hebrews 10:35-36)

Verses 11-12 The Best Gift For Your Children

The parent wants to provide for their children. The hope that you have is the inheritance will benefit your children long after you have departed. For this reason people save their money but then they worry about it. They worry that their children will not use the money wisely. If the children use it wisely, then it will protect them from many troubles. It will support them when difficult times come and it will offer them real benefits.

A gift of money can actually cause many problems for the children. They may waste the money or someone may take it from them. Then the gift has failed to achieve the purpose in which it was given.

There is a wiser gift that the parent can give to their children. It is a gift that even the poorest parent can give. It is a gift that will always benefit the children. That gift is the gift of wisdom. (Proverbs 8:10-11) The parent gives this gift by teaching the child to be wise. A parent must teach his children to make the right decisions and how to behave in the right manner. The most important lesson a parent can give is to teach the child to respect and serve God. (Proverbs 3:5-6) All true wisdom comes from God. (Job 28:28; Proverbs 2:5-6)

Love of God's wisdom will give life to the possessor. It will be the best kind of life. (Proverbs 3:17-18) The wisdom of the Lord can protect them better than the money of the world and wisdom from God can do much greater things. God's wisdom gives a man a right relationship with God and with other people. There is contentment in their lives and their life is worthwhile.

Verses 13-14 Why We Need Troubles

It was not the original intent of God that the lives of people should be hard. In man's first home was a place where life would always be pleasant. (Genesis 2:8-9) Because of man's disobedience God changed the arrangements. Thus man would have a life of many troubles and they would have to work hard for the things that they needed. (Genesis 3:16-19)

Because it was God who made these changes there is nothing that man can do to change them. God will allow some to have wealth, health, and happiness but when these things do not continue they should not complain to God. God is not evil and does not cause evil things to happen. But God does allow troubles to come into our life that we can learn important lessons.

This is the lesson that God wants people to serve Him and only Him as their God. (Deuteronomy 5:7-10) People who do not choose to serve God choose money, success, and happiness as their gods. But these are false gods and they will always fail in the end.

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This is a hard lesson to learn but it is for a good purpose. If people were happy without God, then they would never trust Him. If money, possession, and happiness satisfied them, then they would never see reason to obey God.

God has prepared a home where people's lives will always be pleasant. (Revelation 21:1-5) This home is not for all but those who have chosen to worship God and only God. (Revelation 22:12-15)

Verses 15-18 Wrong Attitudes About Goodness and Wicked Behavior

We believe that a good person should have a long life and the wicked should have a short life. This seems fair to us but that is not the way that it happens in the world. Sometimes good people die at a young age as a person's goodness cannot save him. It is also true that a wicked man can live a long time in this world but that does not mean that we should be wicked. There is no benefit for a man to live a wicked life. During the long life of the wicked they add many more deeds that God will judge them for.

Solomon warns people that they can have wrong attitudes towards goodness and wicked behavior too. People should always do what is right and wise. Some people trust their own goodness so much that they will accuse God. (Romans 3:3-7; 1 John 1:10) But they are wrong in their thinking that their own goodness will save them. (Romans 3:20; Luke 18:9-14) Our own goodness will not save us. None of us can live a life in perfect righteousness, which is the standard to enter into the Kingdom of God. Only by the righteousness of Jesus Christ can we hope to enter in. When we judge others against ourselves we are passing judgment upon ourselves. (Romans 2:1-5)

We all work deeds of wickedness and we cannot truthfully deny that fact. (Romans 3:9-19) The fact that we all fall short of the glory of God is not an excuse to continue in our wicked behavior. (Romans 3:7-8) People who continue in blatant wicked behavior can have their life time shortened by God's judgment. (Numbers 16:28-35)

When we have a reverent respect for God we will avoid these wrong attitudes. The person that respects God will confess and repent on a daily bases. (1 John 1:9) He allows God and His Word to teach him how to live. (1 John 1:7) And his trust is in God's goodness to save Him. (Romans 3:21-24) It is easier for us to trust God than to depend upon our own goodness for our salvation.

Verses 19-20 Wisdom and Goodness

Wisdom is very rare and perfect wisdom is impossible to find from anyone or anything in this world. Solomon considered wisdom and righteousness to be the same thing, as real wisdom is always good and goodness is always wise.

When we reach chapter 9 of Ecclesiastes Solomon tells a story that proves a wise man is stronger than a whole army. From Solomon's story we will see that a city is defended by one wise man. In these verses we see a wise man defeats an enemy city. The cities of ancient times built strong walls for their defenses. In this enemy city there were ten strong captains but the wise man was the stronger.

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This is the strength of one who is perfect in wisdom and the world desires to find such a person. In all effort to find perfect wisdom in the world we find only disappointment. There is none that is completely good. All have done evil and wrong things against God's law. ***“All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.”*** (Isaiah 53:6) We are all guilty and God's judgment is against us. None can stand before God and pretend to be wise and good. The standard of God is perfect wisdom and perfect righteousness.

People have powerful enemies that are far worse than their fellowmen. These are the enemies of Satan and the power of death. (Ephesians 6:12; 1 Corinthians 15:26) We are also held in bondage to our own evil deeds. (Romans 7:17-22) To defeat these enemies in our life we need real wisdom and goodness.

Ourselves we do not have that wisdom and goodness, and we cannot find it in this world. All our careful study and good works will not bring us to perfect wisdom and goodness. Perfect wisdom and goodness can only come from God. (Job 28:28) Only God can save us from our terrible enemies.

The Apostle Paul proclaims that Jesus is the wisdom of God. (1 Corinthians 1:24) Therefore, Paul did not trust in his own righteousness but had received righteousness from God when he trusted Jesus Christ. (Philippians 3:9)

Through Jesus God give His people wisdom and righteousness. God makes us holy and frees us from our enemies. (1 Corinthians 1:30) We have no need of self-pride except in the pride of what God has done for us. (1 Corinthians 1:31) So we cannot save ourselves but God can, so we must trust Him.

Verses 21-22 Am I Good Enough

We may view ourselves as a good person but the best of us are guilty before a just God. (7:20) We do not need to wait till the final judgment of God to know this. We already know that we have done many wrong and evil things. Our own hearts and conscience declares us guilty.

Solomon uses a story of a master and his servant to explain this point. When the Scriptures were written many people worked as servants. The wealthy would have many servants in their house. Even the less wealthy would have servants to carry out tasks for them. A servant would usually behave well when before his master, as if he did not the master would punish him. Often times the servant would feel anger towards his master and say unpleasant things about him when the master could not hear.

In Solomon's story the servant thought that the master would not hear what he had said. But the master did hear and punished his servant. The master would not allow such behavior as it was a question of honor.

Everyone at times will say bad things about other people. Masters also will say terrible things of other people. The master himself was guilty of the same offence that he was

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punishing his servant for. By doing this the master was showing that God would have to punish him also. In the master's conscience he knew that he deserved God's punishment.

There are times we accuse other people in order to make us feel innocent, but this does not make us innocent. It only increases the reason that God will punish us. (Romans 2:1-6) We may even consider ourselves better than some people but still this is not good enough. All of us deserve punishment for the evil things that we have done in our life. God in His love for you and me sent His Son Jesus to save us from that punishment. (Romans 6:23; John 3:16) We must confess and repent of our evil deeds and invite Jesus into our lives. God will forgive those people who will trust Him.

Verses 23-24 What is Wisdom

Solomon proved all that he had written by careful study and thought. This is what people will call proper wisdom. In Solomon's studies of wisdom he only proved that he had not hardly begun to understand the wisdom of the Lord. The wisdom of God is far more perfect and wonderful than our finite minds can comprehend. In this world there seems to be no limit and variety to things, but this world is only a small part of God's creation.

Man cannot even understand his own thoughts and actions so the wisest of men should know that they are not really that wise. They have studied enough to make good sense and give others good advice, but their decisions are not always right and their advice is not always wise.

Job tried to understand from where wisdom came from. He knew that wisdom did not come from the world. (Job 28:1-19) He knew that something so perfect could only come from the Creator of the world, from God. (Job 28:23) Wisdom is a good and perfect gift that God desires to give us. (James 1:17; James 3:17)

All the thoughts of men fall short of what God wants to teach us. God wants people to be content in their relationship with Him far greater than their minds can understand. (Philippians 4:7) The wisdom from God begins when we respect Him. (Proverbs 9:10) Wisdom continues to grow in our lives as we continue to trust God. (Proverbs 3:5-6) God's wisdom is far better than the wisdom the world can offer and what people call wisdom. (Proverbs 3:7; Isaiah 55:9; 1 Corinthians 1:25) Man cannot understand God's wisdom but He teaches wisdom to us through the power of His Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 2:7-10)

Verses 25-26 Why People Constantly do Foolish Things

Solomon explores the nature of foolish behavior. Foolish behavior is wicked behavior. People will do things that they believe to be stupid, wrong, and dangerous. It is puzzling that anyone would choose to behave in that manner but many are doing these things constantly.

Satan tempts us with evil behavior that he may control us. It is as a woman that has chosen not to be loyal to her husband. She will trap a man in the same way that evil behavior tempts us all. The man that falls into this behavior knows that his actions are foolish and dangerous. But he seeks the pleasure knowing that his happiness will last

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only the moment. This feeling of pleasure causes him to forget the trouble that he will be causing his family.

Solomon spoke about this in Proverbs 5 and 9:13-18. These passages are not only about wrong sex but all kinds of wrong behavior. We do these things because we fall to the lust of the eye and the lust of the flesh and allow these evil desires to control us. (James 1:14-15)

Only the person whose heart is set on pleasing the Lord can avoid this behavior. It is important to understand how we can please God. It is not by our own good deeds or efforts. (Romans 4:1-8) We must believe and trust in God. (Galatians 3:6-9) We must walk in the power of the Holy Spirit and these desires will not control us. (Galatians 5:16-23) God will free us from the power of evil because Jesus died for us. (1 John 1:7)

Verses 27-28 Is Anyone Completely Good

Even as in these verses Solomon said that nobody is completely good still Solomon searched for such a person. His search was in vain as in a thousand men he could not find one good. Neither did he find one good woman. To find a person, man or woman, in this world who is completely good I believe has never been found except in Jesus Christ.

Solomon knew that there was not to be found a perfect man. The only perfect person that Solomon found was in the Bible. In the book of Psalm there are descriptions of a man who is perfectly good, for example. Psalm 1, Psalm 15, and Psalm 24:3-5. There are many stories of good people in the Bible but none of them were completely good. We read of the wrong deeds of Noah, (Genesis 9:21) Abraham, (Genesis 12:10-13) Moses, (Numbers 20:7-12) and David. (2 Samuel 11) The Bible also describes Jesus Christ who was completely good. (Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 1:19; John 2:1) Jesus is the only man God considers perfect.

In the end God will make all His people perfect. (Hebrews 11:40; Hebrews 12:23) This is possible by the death of Jesus, the Lamb of God. This process has already started by the work of the Holy Spirit which dwells in the lives of God's people. (Romans 8:1-2; Romans 8:9-11; Galatians 5:5)

Verse 29 Why We do Wrong Things

Everyone does wrong and evil things. (Ecclesiastes) God the Creator never does anything wrong or evil things. It was not the intention of God for people to live as they now do. After the fall of man in the Garden of Eden man has chosen to do evil things. God is not responsible for this as men are evil by their choice.

This is what Solomon had learned by his careful study of the world and the people in it. This is what the Bible teaches us as a matter of history. All that God created was completely good. (Genesis 1:31) At first man lived in a completely good world and they were completely good. (Genesis 2:8-25) Man chose to not be loyal to God and obey His word and they made that decision on purpose. (Genesis 3:1-12)

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Man fell to the temptation of Satan because they wanted to be as God. (Genesis 3:5) Man wanted to know what it was to be evil and they allowed their desires to tempt them. (Genesis 3:6) As a result they disobeyed God and sin entered into the world.

People do wrong things for the similar reasons. People make plans in their hearts to satisfy their evil desires. They feel that they do not need God to rule their lives. Instead they want to be like God and rule their own lives. Their desires for the things of the world rule their actions. They do things that they know are wrong and evil knowing that they deserve God's punishment. (Romans 1:28-32)

Carnal man lives in a hopeless state and still God's mercy is available to him. God sent His Son Jesus to die for the wage of sin in our place. Because Jesus paid the debt of sin for us God can forgive us. (John 3:16) To receive His free gift we must confess our sin and repent and allow Jesus to come into our life.

Chapter 8 Obey Rulers

Verse 1 Wisdom is Wonderful

This verse praises the man and his wisdom. The man himself may not be attractive but his wisdom changes him in a wonderful manner. Wisdom is a wonderful thing. The only man in the Bible that is considered to be perfect is Jesus Christ. (Hebrews 7:24-26) So it seems right to praise Jesus Christ here and His wisdom.

As a child Jesus astonished the teachers of the law of God. (Luke 2:46-47) When Jesus taught the people were astonished by His wisdom. (Mark 1:21-22) No one had taught Jesus His wisdom and all were impressed by Him. (John 7:15)

The wisdom of Jesus is for all of the people of God. In the Bible we read of a face that shone. The Face of Moses had shone when He had spoken to God. (Exodus 34:30) On one occasion in the Bible the face of Jesus shone too. (Matthew 17:2) When the people of God see Him their face will shine too. (2 Corinthians 3:18) The light that shines is the greatness of God's perfect wisdom.

Verses 2-4 When You Appeal to a King

In chapter 5 Solomon has already advised us how to appeal to God for help. Now Solomon is telling how were are to appeal to a king. For help

In ancient Israel the king had complete authority and he was not just the ruler but also the judge. The kings word was law and all had to obey. No one would speak against the king unless he wanted to fight the king. The Israelite people had promised before God that they would obey the king.

People may have been afraid to make an appeal before the king. Some Bible translations say do not be in a hurry but the in the Hebrew language it means "Do not tremble because you are afraid." If the king has allowed you to make an appeal before him, then you should

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not be afraid to do so. The king will listen to your troubles and decide what he considers to be right.

Evil people should be afraid of the king as he should not be persuaded to support them in their wicked ways. The king has complete authority and will use that authority to punish them.

We can learn something from the ancient kings of Israel about God's work as a judge. Even evil rulers and judges are serving God when they use their power properly. (Romans 13:1-7) Rulers and judges are people and they make bad decisions as anyone else and in this world some judgments and laws themselves are wicked.

God has authority over all. He has authority over the kings, rulers, and judges. (Revelation 20:11-12) God alone is perfect and His judgments are in righteousness. (Deuteronomy 32:4)

Verses 5-6 When We Must Wait for Judgment

The king was the most important judge in ancient Israel. The king would use his power to support those who obeyed the law. Even the poor could request the help of the king. That may seem to be a good arrangement but it had its problems. The king was too busy to speak to everyone who had a problem. (2 Samuel 15:1-4)

The people had to wait for the opportunity to come to speak to the king and sometimes it would be as long as several years. They knew the king desired to help them but they did not know when the opportunity would come to see him.

In order to receive help from the king the people would have to wait for the right time. (2 Kings 8:3-6) To see the king the people would have to make their request in the proper manner. The king was willing to help anyone who obeyed his law but if the person did not wait for the proper time or ask in the proper manner they would receive no help from the king.

This problem is seen even in our modern judicial system. The troubles of a person may be great, he may deserve the judge's support. But that person cannot be sure the judge will see him and there may be a long delay before the judge does see him.

We do not usually see the results of God's judgments immediately. God too has chosen a proper time for His judgments. God has made a proper time for everything. There is a reason for God to do this. God is holy and He is not like a human ruler or judge who may disappoint us. God has made everything beautiful at the right time, and that includes His judgments, as they are perfect.

Verses 7-8 Nobody Can Prevent His Own Death

You can appeal to a judge or a king and they may help you but this may not be the end of your troubles. Nobody knows what the future holds and the troubles that may come and nobody knows the appointed time of their death.

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But we all know that there will be a time to die. (Hebrews 9:27) Even those who are powerful know that there is a time they will take their last breath. The breath of a man is very weak in comparison to the wind of a storm. A powerful person may be able to control other people but none can control the storm.

A wicked person believes that he is able to control the people and events of life. If he is a person of great position he may even think that he is able to control the judge or the king. In the end the wicked person will receive that which he deserves. The Apostle Paul wrote that the wage for evil behavior is death. (Romans 6:23) Neither the wicked nor the righteous by their lives in the world can prevent their deaths.

After death God will judge and nobody controls God. He will punish the wicked people. (3:17) The wicked may avoid the punishment they deserve for their whole lives through but when they face God their punishment is certain. Through the Prophet Ezekiel God urged the wicked people to change their behavior and their attitudes. They should turn from their wicked ways and be loyal to God and walk in His ways. God wants to forgive them and does not want them to suffer. (Ezekiel 18:21-23)

Verses 9-10 The Fate of Powerful Wicked People

In the lifetime of the wicked their schemes have caused much pain and trouble. They had no concern for the suffering of the ones they effected. Their only concern was for themselves, their wealth and success and happiness. The evil schemes did not always cause the effect that they would have supposed. Sometimes they are caught in their crimes and must go to prison. And there are times that the wicked suffer because of their own schemes.

The Church is not filled only with righteous seeking people as there are wicked people in the Church too. They have a pseudo religion but at their heart they are wicked. Maybe they thought that their religious acts would save them but it will not. Solomon as he attended their funerals gave thought to these wicked people.

There is a question of the true meaning of the word forgot in verses 10. Some manuscripts use the word praise while others use the word forgotten. Both words praise and forgotten can be seen as true. At the funerals of the wicked they are praised as people seldom speak poorly of the dead. But afterwards they are soon forgotten. This is the nature of men that they will praise someone hoping to receive some of their wealth, importance or power but then will soon forget them.

It is true for the good person as well, as in time they too will be forgotten. In the short time of a hundred years no one will remember our names. This too is the evidence of the weakness of people. God is not like that He has remembered every person who has lived, and will live. He knew them before they were ever born. And He will remember them in the Day of Judgment. God remembers the ones who are loyal to Him. (Hebrews 13:5) To them God will give honor. (Luke 19:12-19; Revelation 22:3-5)

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Verse 11 How Countries Become Evil

Solomon had become dismayed by the corruption of the legal system of the Israelite state. The people had become wicked and powerful, acting in a cruel manner. (Ecclesiastes 4:1-3) The poor were suffering and the judges of the land were not helping them. (Ecclesiastes 3:16) The people could appeal to the king but had to wait for the proper time and the proper manner. (Ecclesiastes 8:5-6) If they did not, then the king would not help them.

God's laws as given by Moses would protect the rights of the poor. (Deuteronomy 24) It was the responsibility of the judges and the king to defend the people's rights. (Deuteronomy 16:18-20; Deuteronomy 17:14-20) But the people were not obeying the laws of God. The rich would bribe the judges to make the decisions that they wanted. The poor who did not have money would have to wait for judgments. The judges were corrupted by their greed. The delays in judgment were as bad as wrong judgments. The poor were neglected and their rights were not protected.

God had given these rights to the poor and it was the judges that had taken them away. This behavior was running the whole of the nation. People then saw that wicked behavior was a way to become rich. As a result those who wanted to become rich began to act wickedly. They were not afraid of judgment as they could bribe the judges. They all had forgotten that one day they will face God who will hold them accountable and God cannot be bribed. (Micah 6:6-8)

Verses 12-13 Is It Better to be Good or Evil

The shadow seems to be a good description of the life of the wicked. As the evening of the day approaches the shadows become longer and continue until they die in the darkness. Wherever the wicked may travel the effects of his wickedness will follow him as a shadow. As he grows older his wicked deeds increase. Solomon looks to the eternal perspective that in the time the life of the wicked will dye and the power of his wickedness will die with him.

People are wicked because they have no reverent fear of God and they care not that He is their judge. (Ecclesiastes 3:16-17) If they are blind to the judgment, then they live in disobedience to His law. Where the wicked are swallowed in their darkness the righteous live in the light of God's Word. ***“But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, That shines brighter and brighter until the full day.”*** (Proverbs 4:18)

Proverbs 4:18 describes the good person's life as the light of the dawn. His light increases to the full day and overcomes the darkness. (John 1:5; 1 Thessalonians 5:4-5; Psalm 36:6)

Solomon tells us it is better to respect God and not be as the wicked. It is better to live in God's light than the darkness of sin because of the future glory that God will give to His own. God will judge all people and His justice will be given to all. (Ecclesiastes 3:17) God will reward the person who has walked in His ways. (1 Samuel 2:30)

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Verses 14-15 Who Should Enjoy Life the Most

We all have our own thoughts of what should happen in this world. These thoughts remain strong in our own minds even when the facts do not support our thoughts. The book of Ecclesiastes is a book that clearly expresses the facts of life even when we do not like them. We like to believe that good people deserve better lives, but that does not happen in this world. In this world there seems to be benefits for those who act wickedly and they seem to have better lives.

What do people mean by a better life? Some see the good life as health, wealth, and happiness. The desire of people is to have health and wealth so they can be happy. But there are many who have health and wealth that are not happy. With that fact then happiness is what matters to have a good life.

We see the expression of happiness mostly at parties where they eat the best of food and drink plenty of wine. Their songs are filled with laughter. In Chapter 7:1-6 Solomon warned about people who carried on in such a way as foolish behavior. Solomon says that these people are not preparing for the day of their death and the judgment of God.

Here in Ecclesiastes 8:17 Solomon is saying what good people deserve. Solomon knows that no one is completely good. (7:20) So Solomon is talking about people who respect God. (8:12) These people understand that God will judge them for their deeds in the flesh here in this world so they behave in a proper manner. (Ecclesiastes 7:3)

Some good people may seem sad but they have every reason to be happy. Good people deserve to know constant joy! Solomon describes this as a party as Jesus did in the Gospel of Luke. (Luke 15:22-25)

If Solomon is giving advice in these verses to whom is he giving that advice? He is certainly not telling the wicked to enjoy their lives. Solomon did not believe that the wicked should have any good thing. This would not be Solomon's advice to foolish people as he had told them to stop their parties. (Ecclesiastes 7:1-6) They were also to be in preparation for the day they would face God. Solomon is not advising good people to behave as a fool as that would soon make them a fool.

In this world the people of God must be serious and sensible because there are so many wrong things here. If the happiness of good people is just for a few special occasions? Are the wicked people to have parties while the good people suffer? (Mark 6:21-28) We must remember that we live in a world that is not as God had intended.

It will be a different world in the future when all live under the rule of God. In Heaven God's people will not know sadness. (Revelation 21:3-4) Heaven is being in a wonderful party. (Luke 14:15-24) There will be no wicked people in Heaven as there is here on earth. (Revelation 22:15) While we are here on earth God gives His invitation to everyone to come and live in Heaven. (Revelation 22:17)

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Verses 16-17 The Greatness of God's Work

Solomon studied the efforts and achievements of man's labors. But in comparison to the works of God's Creation the efforts of men are weak. All the works of men's lives would not achieve much in comparison to the work of God. Neither do the labors of man last. This study of the works of man helped Solomon to better understand how great God is. Everything that God does achieves the purpose for which it was created. God always acts at the proper time and none of His work is in vain.

The greatness of God's work astonishes us today. We cannot comprehend the mysteries of His creation. We see the plants and the animals and know the perfection of their forms. We see that they are a tiny part of the vast creation of God here in this world. The world itself is only a tiny part of all that God has made.

Scientists study these things their whole lives and cannot begin to understand all that God has done. Scientists throughout the ages have not scratched the surface of all that God has done. Only a fool imagines that he knows everything. The Scriptures tell us that true wisdom comes from God and the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. (Job 28:27-28' Proverbs 2:5-6)

It is unpleasant to us to know that our human knowledge and effort are ever so weak in the truth of God's work. But that truth can make us free when we realize our weakness and do not depend upon our own intelligence for our work. It is then that we can really trust God and if we do He will teach us. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Chapter 9

Men Are in the Hand of God

Verse 1 Are God's People Different from Other People

There are those in this world that are loved in a special manner by God. These are the righteous and wise. They are righteous because God has forgiven their sin and they are wise because they respect God. (Job 28:28) These people of God are not better or cleverer than anyone else but they are special because they have chosen to obey God. They have invited God to rule their lives and accepted the invitation to learn God's wisdom.

Their lives seem to be as the other lives in this world, as they have their portion of good and bad events as others do. They too deal with success, trouble, illness, accidents, and death as everyone else. By this similarity you will not be able to tell that they belong to God's special people.

They are in the hands of God and receive His protection and His special care. Through all of their trials and tribulations God is looking out for them so they really are different from other people. They do not live by luck or chance but under the rule of God in their lives.

Success does not come into a person's life as a result of God's love. Troubles in life do not show that God hates that person. God desires to show His kindness to every person.

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(John 3:16) God allows troubles into the life of His own but looks after them in a special manner.

Verse 2 Can Religion save People from Their Troubles

No religion will save people from the troubles of this world. All people must suffer the curse that came upon the world because of sin. Some believe that religion will save them and they give gifts to God to persuade His mercy. Gifts are expensive and some will promise a gift if God answers their prayer as they desire.

Offering God a bribe is the same as offering a bribe to a judge for favor. It is a sinful action and an improper use of religion. The reason people give gifts to God is for His honor and to promote the work of His Kingdom.

There are people in the world who have become ill and cannot attend a worship service in God's house. But this does not hinder their desire to practice their religious beliefs. They still can pray to God. They still can have a relationship with God. All people are alike and all people can practice their religious beliefs.

Verses 3-4 Does Hope, or Chance, Rule This World

Some see the events of their life as a matter of chance. There are people that believe that all that happens is a matter of chance. In the Scripture it is taught that something much worse than chance has great power in this present world. It is the evil forces in the heavenly places that ruin people's lives. (Ephesians 6:12) These evil desires fill the hearts of men and that is why people do not act in a sensible way. The evil forces that are above this world are real and they are very powerful and their purpose is to lead men away from God.

People live in the hope that good things will happen to them. Hope is an important part of our lives. People have a sin nature and this nature causes people to hope for wrong things even as hope itself is a good thing.

The best hope that people can have is that they will go to Heaven. This is just a possibility unless that person knows God personally. Hope can seem to be a matter of chance but true hope is a relationship with God. People nurture that relationship by prayer and study of the Bible. When people learn to confess their evil deeds and repent, invite God into their lives, then their hope becomes a certain truth. (Hebrews 6:19)

Lions, known as the king of beast, are impressive animals. Wild dogs are cruel and nasty. But a dog can be taught to be loyal to its master and obey instructions. So there is hope even for a wild dog. Someone can change the nature of the wild dog but nothing can be done for the dead lion.

People have evil hearts because of their sin nature from the fall of man in the Garden of Eden. The heart of a man can fill his mind with evil desires. (Romans 3:10-18) But the hope of mankind is that God can change the hearts of men. (2 Corinthians 5:17) People must trust God in their life and He will do that for them during their life. After life here is

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over it is too late. (Luke 16:19-31) The time for a man's salvation is now. (2 Corinthians 6:2)

Verses 5-6 What Happens to Wicked People After Death

Life is full of opportunities and many people grab hold of them. One Opportunity that people fail to grab is the opportunity that God offers. People spend their lives satisfying their own evil desires or spend their lives to gain profits that only benefit in this world. They spend little of the short time in this world to prepare themselves for the time of their death and the judgment of God.

When people die the body returns to the dust and the spirit returns to God from where it came. (Genesis 2:7) There in the presence of God that life will be judged. (Ecclesiastes 12:7) For the one who trust God completely that is a wonderful promise. (Philippians 1:23)

When the evil deeds of a person is forgiven by God the right relationship is restored between that person and God. At death that person does face judgment at the judgment seat of Christ but their sins are covered by the blood of Jesus and God saves them from the troubles of the world. The person is given entry into the Kingdom of God, Heaven, where never again they will know pain, sorrow, or death. (Revelation 21:1-4) When that time comes their knowledge will be complete in the Lord. (1 Corinthians 3:12)

There is a difference for the wicked people. Solomon reduces the knowledge to the most important in life that all people must die. That fact and that alone is the most important for a wicked person. Wicked people have no knowledge of God. (Psalm 53:1) They have no knowledge of His wisdom. (Proverbs 2:6) They only know that they must die, and after that they will not even know that.

They will know that God is their judge and they will know they will receive punishment. It is their knowledge of this world that will end in their death. (Ecclesiastes 9:6) In the lake of fire there will be no friends as their opportunity to show love has ended with death. There will be no governing relationship in the lake of fire and there will not be opportunity to show hate. Their evil desires have also ended in their death. All the emotions that seemed so powerful in this world will now have ended in death.

When people hear this and realize its truth they should have a strong desire to avoid hell. We cannot save ourselves from this but God wants to save us. That is why He sent His Son Jesus to suffer death instead of us. (John 3:16) This is why God urges us to confess and repent of our sins and invite Jesus into their lives.

Verses 7-10 How People Waste Their Opportunity to Know God

The Bible warns us in severe manners but we look for statements that seem more pleasant. By avoiding the unpleasant we can miss the meaning of the passage. In Ecclesiastes 9:3:6 Solomon wrote of the effects of death. Solomon explained his own beliefs on the subject. Now in these verses he speaks to one particular person.

That man had not received Solomon's advice about parties, he did not want to be serious and think about his death. He did not see himself as evil and that God should approve

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His works. Solomon seems to be angry in his reply to this man. He tells the man to go away and not forget that God has only given him a short time here on earth. He tells the man that while he is here he benefits from God's kindness.

If the man wants, he can use this time given to enjoy himself. It is only for a little while so he must use every minute to make himself happy. The period of God's kindness will come to an end at his death. It is then that God will judge how he used his time here on earth. (Ecclesiastes 11:9)

This man thinks that he can save himself by his works, so he will work very hard. But there will be no more works when he is dead and that day will come quickly. The point of Solomon is that the man is wasting his time to know God. The man wants to eat and drink, to love his wife, and to enjoy his work. Solomon has already tried all these things (Ecclesiastes 2:4-10) but they achieved nothing that was worthwhile. (Ecclesiastes 2:11) The efforts of the man will not save him from death or hell.

Verse 11 Time and Chance

The race goes to the fastest runner and it is he that certainly deserves to win. But if he stumbles and falls someone else will take the prize. In history we have seen that the strongest army does not always win the battle. The lack of food or water can ruin a powerful army. Armies have lost wars because their captains gave foolish orders. The clever are not always wealthy and the wise do not get enough food. Intelligent people sometimes do not receive the honor. And nations can remain poor because their rulers make foolish decisions.

We believe that strength and intelligence give the advantage over other people but there is no certainty to it. There are two factors that we sometimes fail to explore in this world and they are important for success. That is time and chance.

There seems to be a proper time for everything. (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8) The best of a person's efforts can fail because he acted at the wrong time. Even if he acts at the right time success can still be a matter of chance. Events as accidents and opportunities happen and nobody can control them. (Ecclesiastes 9:1-3)

There are no certainties in this world that we can depend on because nothing is certain. That is why the Bible tells us to trust God. God knows the proper time for everything and He will not disappoint us. God's people can trust in Him completely. (Psalm 62:1-2; Psalm 46)

Verse 12 The Right Reaction to Trouble

Trouble comes quickly. If we were ready for trouble, then we would try to avoid it. But often times there is nothing that we could have done to avoid trouble. It is then we feel as a fish in a net or a bird in a snare. We find ourselves in a desperate situation but we cannot escape.

We often complain that we did not deserve the troubles that have come upon us and usually that is true. Trouble often comes not at the result of bad behavior, even as success

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is not always from good behavior. These things seem to happen by chance and it never seems to be in a fair way.

The most notable example of this is in the book of Job. Job was a man rich who suddenly lost all his wealth and family. Shortly after Job lost his health. Job did not deserve his troubles as he was a righteous man who served God. (Job 31) Even Job's friends thought that he must have sinned greatly to deserve all the troubles that he had. (Job 22:4-45) The troubles of Job did not happen by chance. Job's troubles can be as a result of an evil plan of Satan. (Job 1:6-12; Job 2:1-7) God allowed this trial because Job's loyal reaction would bring honor to God.

Troubles will come into our life and for various reasons that we do not even know. The best reaction for us is to trust God. It is God's desire to forgive us when we confess our wrong deeds to Him. (Exodus 34:7) It is God's desire to save us when we humbly ask for His help. (Jonah 2:9; Jonah 4:10-11) This is the experience that David had as he tells us in Psalm. (Psalm 124:7-8)

Verses 13-15 How One Man's Wisdom Saved His City

Solomon now tells an impressive story. A king had a strong army and surrounded the city. The city's inhabitants were too few for the defense of the city. The soldiers of the invading army had built up piles of earth to get past the city's defenses. The result of the battle seemed certain and all were waiting for the king to give the final order to attack and kill the city's inhabitants.

Solomon has already told us that strong armies do not always win the battles. It can seem that the events of life happen by chance. (Ecclesiastes 9:11) The city was saved and it was not by chance but by the wisdom of one poor man who none had respected. Solomon does not tell us what this man had done but there is a similar incident in 2 Samuel 20:14-22) There a wise woman saved the city.

The point of Solomon's telling is that wisdom is far better than strength. (Ecclesiastes 9:16) People in general do not respect wisdom. This is sad as wisdom is more valuable than any other quality. (Proverbs 3:13-18) This is because true wisdom comes from God. (Proverbs 2:6)

Wisdom may not give wealth and honor. But in this world there are things that are more important than wealth and honor. It was wisdom that saved the city and its inhabitants. There was another battle that seemed certain as well. The evil forces that are strong and control the whole world and has made the world a prisoner. (Galatians 3:22) Wisdom is more powerful than strength and the wisdom of God is more powerful than the evil forces that come against our life.

The people laughed at the death of Christ. (Mark 15:29-32) The people viewed the death of Jesus as weakness. It wasn't weakness but God's wisdom. (1 Corinthians 1:22-25)

Even as the wisdom of the man in Solomon's story saved the city the wisdom of Christ saved His people. (1 Corinthians 1:18) The wisdom of Christ is powerful enough to save

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His people from Satan. (Hebrews 2:14) His wisdom also saves His people from the evil forces that control this world. (Hebrews 2:15) The people in the city did not remember the wise man who had saved them and many in this world do not recognize the wisdom of Christ which could save them. (1 Corinthians 2:7-8; John 1:10) The wise still seek Him and can receive Him into their life. We can believe and trust Him. (John 1:12) If we do these things He will save us. (John 3:16-17)

Verse 16 Why People Will Not Listen to Wise Advice

The wise man who saved his city in verses 13-15 deserved great reward but had received none. He did not become famous or gain wealth, he remained poor and was forgotten. The people would not listen to his wisdom and he was despised.

Wisdom is a quality that people have just like strength and wealth. But people will respect a strong man and fear him. People do not care much for the wealthy man but do desire his wealth. Wisdom seldom impresses people and many will laugh at him rather than praise him.

Good advice is rarely popular among people as they are attracted to their wicked ways and they do not care to hear the wisdom of the righteous. The wise man will say that the evil deeds of the people offend God. (Romans 3:10-18) The wise will point out all the wrong that people have done against God. (7:20) The wise should tell people that God will judge them for their deeds here on the earth. (3:17; 12:14) The wise will tell them that they are unable to save themselves and only God can. (Romans 6:23) All this is true but it is not popular.

Wisdom causes people to be uncomfortable. If all people were wise then they would not need the wisdom of the wise. The wise will give advice to those who lack wisdom and of course they will disagree with his advice. People must become desperate in their life to desire proper wisdom. This is the example in Ecclesiastes 9:13-15. Before the city was in danger nobody cared for the wisdom of the wise man. Then afterwards nobody remembered him. But in the time of danger the people followed his advice and therefore by his wisdom the city was saved.

Christians experience this today. They speak God's message declaring his wisdom but few are willing to follow his teaching. (Matthew 7:13-14) Most people will not trust God until everything else in their life has failed them.

Verses 17-18 Quiet Words of Wisdom

Whereas one wise man can save a city one foolish man can destroy a city.

A foolish ruler will shout to get the attention of his people. The ruler is trying to convince his friends and frighten his enemies. The ruler will speak with boldness so his soldiers will be bold. He will act wildly in desperation to control their sense of fear.

The wise do not need to speak loudly when he gives his advice. He will speak in a sensible manner because he wants his people to be sensible. He is seeking to appeal to their intelligence and not their emotions. His efforts are not for control but to teach them the

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truth. The truth will save a person, (John 8:32) the shouts of the foolish cannot save anyone.

This is why wisdom is the better instrument than a soldier's weapons. Wisdom is a better force than strength. (9:16) And a poor man who is wise can save a city from a large army. (9:13-15)

The sinners do wrong and evil things and the Bible considers them to be fools. Only fools do not follow God's wisdom. In their evil deeds they oppose the good that God does. They not only cause trouble for themselves but for other people too.

All are sinners but have the opportunity to discover the wisdom of God. Wisdom cannot be found in our own thoughts because wisdom comes only from God. (Proverbs 2:6) With reverent fear of God He can teach us to be wise. (Proverbs 9:10)

Chapter 10

A Little Foolishness

Verse 1 A Fly in the Ointment

Many serve God but they do not serve him completely. They want God's approval in their lives but still they on purpose do bad things. In truth they are combining good actions with evil actions. The result of this is not good. God insists that people serve Him only. (Deuteronomy 5:7-9) Jesus said that it is impossible to serve two masters. (Matthew 6:24) When people do not obey all of God's commands they are guilty of all of His commands. (James 2:10-11)

Perfume has a sweet smell and is only useful when its smell is pleasant. The maker of perfume must be sure to keep his product clean. A fly may seem to be a small matter but it will spoil a whole jar of perfume. A dead fly in the perfume will cause the whole jar to go bad and when opened it will smell bad.

The Bible considers it wise to serve God and declares it to be foolish not to serve Him. A wise person will give his life completely to God. (Acts 3:19) A wise person will not join in on any evil activity. (Psalm 1:1)

People who serve God will sometimes do wrong things and they consider that a serious matter. (1 John 2:1) They will confess and repent because they need God's forgiveness. (1 John 1:9) God is able to forgive their evil deeds because Christ has paid the debt for their sins. (1 John 2:2)

Verses 2-3 Wise and Foolish Behavior. Is It Just a Matter of Opinion?

What is wise or foolish is not a matter of opinion, as there is a difference between wisdom and foolishness. Wisdom and foolishness are complete opposites. Some people imagine themselves to be wiser than other people are and this causes many arguments between them. They might insist that their opinion matters but if they wanted to learn they would not argue so much. (Proverbs 9:9) Having a foolish argument will not prove anything because wisdom is completely different than foolishness.

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Solomon uses a word picture to explain his point. The wise man and the fool walk along the same road together. While they are doing this the foolish man wants to go in the opposite direction. They are unable to walk together because every decision leads the fool away from the wise man. They are unable to agree because they have different desires. The wise man desires the right thing but the fool does not care if his decision are right or not. The fool is looking to satisfy only his desires.

One wanting to be wise will walk with the wise man and listen to his wise words and intimate his actions. This is how one can learn from the other. Wisdom is not just careful thoughts and sensible decisions. To find true wisdom one must respect God. (Proverbs 9:10) Wisdom is not opinion based but God based and that is the complete opposite of foolish behavior.

Verse 4 Reasons to Behave Calmly

When rulers become angry it may be because we deserve his anger for doing something wrong. Or the ruler may be angry for another reason. In each situation we will experience the stronger emotion and even feel anger to and want to strike back. This would not be the wise thing for us to do. To allow our emotions to control our behavior is foolish. Our reaction to the angry ruler should be one of calmness and to continue to carry on and preform our duties in an honorable way.

By this behavior we will avoid punishment even if we are the one who is in the wrong. But there is a greater reason that people of God should maintain good behavior. Even as we are working for the ruler in this world the real master is our God. We give honor to the rulers of the world because God tells us that we should give them respect. (Romans 13:1-7) We are to obey them as if we were obeying Jesus. (Ephesians 6:5-8)

We must realize that the rulers of this world will not always treat us with due respect. Often times they will not give us the rewards that we rightly deserve. But the rewards of the people in this world should not be a great concern to us. It is the rewards that we receive from God that are more important as they are eternal.

Verses 5-7 When Rulers Make the Wrong Decisions

A ruler will chose his servants carefully. He will give authority to those who are loyal, honest, and capable. He trust them to govern well.

A powerful ruler will not always act in a sensible manner and will give the important positions to his friends who may not be capable. If the ruler is foolish enough to do that then his friends are probably foolish too. In the Bible a fool cares only about pleasing himself and does not serve God or care for other people.

When a ruler gives authority to fools better people lose their important positions. But the foolish ruler takes away their wealth, authority, and importance.

The ruler may have done this just to show how powerful he is. The princes in verse 7 are important officials as judges and the leaders of the army. Now the great men work as slaves and they must give honor to those who were formerly slaves.

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No human ruler has complete authority even in this world. God has authority over every ruler. God gives honor to humble people and takes away the authority of proud people. (Luke 1:51-53) God has to do this because powerful rulers have given authority to the wrong people. (Mark 10:42) When the day comes that God rules all these things will be justified. (Revelation 20:4)

Verses 8-9 Lessons About Danger

Solomon list four activities and four dangers. The form of these statements from Solomon may lead us to think he is teaching the same lesson. Solomon does not tell us the lesson and perhaps he thinks that we should figure it for ourselves.

From them we are learning practical advice. Each activity has its own certain danger. A person cannot work in a safe manner if he does not know the dangers of his work. People need to know the dangers of the work they are doing so they can protect themselves.

Solomon is also giving a warning that people should not be too confident about their future. No matter what people may do there is always the present danger of death. People cannot protect themselves from every danger although they must try. Life at its safest best is short and we must always prepare for our death. The most important safe guard is to have a right relationship with God, as one day He will be our judge.

Solomon is also giving a lesson on ambition. In each of the examples the person involved wanted to gain a benefit from his labor. But the person gained no benefit as an accident happened. The work may have been necessary but it was impossible to avoid the danger. Work for people is not always necessary and they are done for ambition or greed. They strive to make money that they do not need and place themselves in danger when it is not necessary.

Verse 10 Why Everyone Needs Wisdom

The axe is an iron tool that is especially dangerous. The axe is used to cut down trees or cut through large pieces of wood. The wood is hard and requires a lot of energy from the one swinging the axe. If the axe is dull it would make the work much harder to do so the axe must always be sharp. If the axe is dull the worker should not use it as it would be more dangerous to use. A dull axe makes injuries more likely to happen.

We all know that we want our rulers to have great wisdom but wisdom is not just for the important people but the common as well. The common man who uses the axe needs to also have wisdom. The workman must be wise enough to know when to sharpen his axe. Otherwise he will wastes his strength and place himself in greater danger. There is no benefit if he does not sharpen his axe.

Many people learn how to carry out a task but do not learn to do it well. They are like workman who us dull axes. Their lack of wisdom causes them to work much harder and they place themselves in greater danger. They fail to see the benefits of wisdom in their labors.

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The Bible teaches that wisdom is a wonderful quality. (Proverbs 8:1-21) Wisdom shows how to have a right relationship with God, which teaches us how we should live. Wisdom is an essential quality for every person. (Matthew 7:24-25)

Verse 11 Get Rich Quick Schemes

We have all fallen to the get rich quick schemes or at least I have. The promise is quick money with little effort. These plans will always fail, good money requires hard work.

Solomon introduces us to the get rich quick scheme of his day the snake charmer. One charmer will teach the snake to dance while he plays music. When he does this in public the people will pay him money and in some countries this still is a practice. Another charmer may have learned the skill to get snakes out of houses and people will pay him for that.

Many snakes are dangerous animals and they can bite and kill people. If the snake is very dangerous the people will pay him greater amounts of money. It is a dangerous life for the snake charmer as at any time the snake may bite him and cause great illness or death. Money is of no value to a dead man or comfort to a man who is very ill.

It's easy to imagine the profits that our plans may achieve. Even our best plans will take a lot of effort and hard work. We must learn the skills needed to accomplish our goal. We must understand the risk and plan against the dangers. Then we must carry out the work and continue until the entire task is complete. Even then we may not be successful.

The one who is truly wise does not make his own plans but asks God to direct his paths. Then that person trust God and follows Him in faith. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Verses 12-15 A Foolish Person's Words Ruin His Own Life

The wise know that they are responsible for all their words and actions. Because he is careful and sensible he shows his respect for God. The wise person's words then are full of kindness and goodness.

The words of a foolish person has a different character. Solomon uses a strange and terrible word picture that the fool's mouth eats him up. It is as if his words were like a wild animal that attacks him. From his foolish words his own life is ruined. His words are the cause of his troubles and the reason for his punishments.

The Bible says that a foolish person refuses to respect God. His care is for his own desires. When he speaks his words express only his own silly thoughts. The words of his mouth have little meaning and as he speaks his true character become clear to see. In the end the words of his mouth evolve into wickedness.

When the fool speaks of the future his plans are preparations for wickedness. As the fool has no vision of the future that God will be his judge.

The fool does not work as others do. He works to say and work evil things. But his efforts, as wicked as they are, still tire him. Perhaps even more than the honest workman. After the honest workman's day is done he still has the energy to return to his home. But the

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fool does not and perhaps he finds his rest in drunkenness. Who knows where the drunkard sleeps as his foolishness has ruined his life.

Verses 16-17 Wrong Desires Ruin People's Lives

These verses may be for kings and princes but they hold a lesson for everyone. The subject is greedy behavior and the dangers of alcohol. It is a lesson of how wrong desires can ruin lives.

The king is acting as a child and being irresponsible. His drive is to satisfy his own desires and he like friends who also party, feast, and drink much wine. He is a king and can do as he wants so he appoints friends as important princes in his country. They spend their days eating and drinking. As a result the country suffers and none can tell the rulers to act sensible. No one can receive a just judgment, as the judges have become drunks. The military cannot defend the country as the officers spend their time at the parties when they should be leading their army.

In verse 17 the country is very different as they have a noble and honorable king. His army officers are strong and the judges are sensible. His country is successful and the people benefit from the rule of a wise king and his princes. In this country the rulers are not greedy and none are given to too much drink. They care for their country and not about just themselves.

What is true for rulers is also true for other people. When wrong desires control a person's life he cannot govern his family well. Neither can he govern his own life well.

Verse 18 Reasons Not to be Lazy

The Bible has many warnings about laziness. God has given His people work to do. (Psalm 104:23; Exodus 20:9) Paul expresses that Christians have work to do. (2 Thessalonians 3:6-13) There are reasons that people do not want to do their work. Perhaps they have no strength or they have become greedy. Or maybe they are drunkards. It may be that they know an easier way to get their money. That way is usually a wicked scheme. It could be just laziness and work does not interest him and he prefers to do nothing at all. Whatever the reason the result is always the same.

The lazy person will suffer. If he does not repair his roof it will leak. His family suffers, as when the roof leaks all who live in the house suffer. His possessions suffer from the water that comes through the roof.

His problems do not end there as now when he repairs the roof it will be more work than when it first started to leak. When the repair was small he did not want to do it and now it is major and he must. If his laziness continues he will lose his house. If he is too lazy to repair the roof what other areas of his property does it effect? Kings have lost their countries because of their laziness and greedy attitudes.

Verse 19 Is Money the Answer for Everything?

The subject of the verse seems to be the rulers of verse 16. They have prepared everything for their own pleasure. They have ordered the food for their own party in

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plentiful amounts. They have ordered plenty of wine too as they could not consider running out. They must drink until they are controlled by their drunkenness. This to them is the essence of a good party.

Their money will provide everything that they need to make themselves happy. For a poor man such a party would not be possible. But these people are the princes and the wealth of the country is for them to enjoy. Nothing is too much for them as there is no end to their wealth. So they spend greatly for their own pleasure.

The attitudes that they have are lazy, greedy, and evil. If the poor acted in such a way he would lose his home. When rulers act in such a way they ruin their countries. The people are angry with their rulers, but they are afraid. It is clear to the people that great troubles are soon to come. They see the desperate situation but are powerless to do anything about it.

In the Bible there are several accounts of rulers who have behaved in this way. The Prophet Isaiah warned about such behavior. (Isaiah 5:9-13) Babylon at the height of its power lost it by this kind of behavior. (Daniel Chapter 5)

Verse 20 When Even Your Thoughts Can Be Dangerous

It is easy to be angry with the rulers of your country. But it is not sensible even if they are doing many wrong things. The rulers are rich and powerful and they can use their power against you. They have authority and they may give orders against you and other people will obey them. It is better to be sensible and not have powerful people come against you.

You may be careful of your words in public but say whatever you wish in private. That too can be dangerous, as you never know who may be listening. You may never know the one who told your words to your rich enemies. It will be better for you to never say these words. If your king is cruel and powerful you do not want him to come and oppose you.

The thoughts you have in secret cannot change the attitude of the king. Even if you did oppose him in public your actions are unlikely to have any effect. When rulers of the world are very wicked political action usually achieves nothing. An evil person hates good advice. (Proverbs 15:12) A wise person know when he should keep his silence.

Solomon uses another word picture in his use of the birds. It is the idea that someone is always listening. You can never really be sure when you are alone or with friends. Your private words matter as your public words.

Chapter 11

Cast Your Bread On The Waters

Verse 1 Future Troubles are Certain

The purpose of this chapter is to warn about troubles that must happen, troubles that will certainly happen and cannot be avoided. There will be troubles in the country across the world. The enemies will attack. Or there will not be enough food. Or there will be other terrible troubles. There will be troubles in people's lives. They may become sick. They will

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become old and weak and in the end they will die. Such things have happened to every person that has ever lived and it would be foolish to imagine that it would not happen to us. Solomon makes the same kind of statements that others have made in similar circumstances. Jesus also did that too. (Mark 13:15-19) In troubles that cannot be avoided people should make preparations for the trouble. Not knowing what the trouble is breeds a desperate plan for a desperate situation. It is hard to prepare when you do not know what the trouble is.

Solomon tells us to cast our bread upon the waters. Many have tried to work out the meaning of these words. Some have guessed that it means to send ships to trade grain. Or to sow grain in muddy pools when the streams flood. Those plans offer some possibility but desperate people do stupid things in hope for success. If this is another word picture then it could mean that it is useless to try and save our possessions. The trouble could be so severe that it would be impossible to save anything. If you wish to have bread then you must do even more desperate things now.

Perhaps it is to diversify and send our possessions in many directions in hope that one direction will be safe. Perhaps in the future you will be able to recover some of them. As a small relief there are promises of generous giving in the Bible. (Proverbs 22:9; Isaiah 58:10; Malachi 3:10; Luke 6:38; 2 Corinthians 9:6-11)

Verse 2 A Friend in Trouble

When great trouble comes some people place their hope in their possessions and wealth while others place their hope in the friends that they have. Solomon believed that the difficulties would be very severe and told us to spread our possessions and to make as many friends as we could. The hope is that one or the other plan might succeed. People should not wait until the troubles start but make preparations ahead of the troubles.

The Bible does encourage us to love other people. (Luke 10:27-37) But the reason for our love for others should not be to gain benefits for ourselves. (Matthew 5:46-47; Luke 14:12-14) We should show God's kindness to other people and especially the poor. For this act of Godly love He will reward us, not other people. (Proverbs 19:17)

There is another problem with a plan to make many friends more important than the lack of sincere reasons. When people place their trust in possessions or friends then they are not trusting God. In all circumstances great or small we are to place our trust in God. God alone gives security to our lives. (Psalm 62:1-2) Even the greatest of friends are weak and we cannot place our faith in them. (Psalm 62:9) God is almighty, God loves His people, and in Him alone we should put our trust. (Psalm 62:11-12)

If we refuse to trust God then we are left to desperate plans like those in Revelation 6:15. When the terrible trouble comes we must be ready. We also must know that even the best plans will fail. Our friends will not be loyal, our money will have no value, and if we find food it will not satisfy. When the end comes God will judge.

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Verse 3 Troubles That Nobody Can Do Anything About

People generally hope that they will never face any real severe troubles and if they do they will be able to deal with them. There will be troubles in everyone's life over time. Some of these troubles will be severe. Of course in the end we all will die. Nothing can prevent that.

Therefore, we can compare our lives to the day when the dark storm clouds fill the sky and we know on that day it will rain. Throughout our whole lives we know that trouble is coming and we know that death is approaching. The evidence is clear to that fact. Death is like the fall of a tree, after it has fallen it cannot be returned to its position.

So a person's death is permanent and it separates that life from everything in this world. That person's body returns to the earth and the spirit must stand before God and be judged. What we do in this life then has eternal effect. It matters if a person has a relationship with God. It is important for us to confess our evil deeds and repent for them. It is important that we allow God to rule our lives. There is no time for delay, as after death it will be too late to trust God. God has told us that we must trust Him today. (Hebrews 4:7)

Verse 4 Troubles That Nobody Can Avoid

The farmer watches the weather carefully. There is the right time to sow and there is the right time to gather. If the weather is bad at these times sowing and harvesting cannot be done. In verse four we have a word picture of a very desperate situation. The weather will not be suitable for sowing and harvesting. The wind and the clouds are evidence that a terrible storm is approaching. If the wind causes the trees to fall in the storm, then there is no hope for the crops. People will be worried and do desperate things, carry out stupid plans with hope that something will succeed.

All of this is a word picture of people's lives. All people realize that death is approaching. Many of them know that God will judge them after their death. But they refuse to trust Him. They will not ask God to save them. Instead they carry out their stupid schemes to try and save themselves.

Some believe that they can save themselves by their good works. Solomon has told us that our good works on earth achieves nothing. (Ecclesiastes 2:22-23) Some believe that their wealth will save them but at death all their money remains in the world. And some believe that a proper attitude will save them but this idea is also wrong. (Ecclesiastes 7:15-20)

The Bible tells us that we can only have a right relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ. (John 14:6) Because Jesus gave His life as a sacrifice for our sin debt God can forgive us. (John 3:14-16) Jesus is the only way to prepare for the judgment of God.

No one knows that appointed time of their death so now is the time to start a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 6:2) We may have made our excuses but the time is now and today is the day, it is the only day that we have.

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Verse 5 God's Work Astonishes Us

The work that people do is easy to understand. The work of people is weak and the best efforts do not achieve much. The work of people is public and everyone can see the true nature of their work.

God's work is different and it is astonishing. Before the baby is born God forms the body. This is work that we cannot see. (Psalm 139:14-16) But we can see the wonderful results of His work.

If the efforts of man's work is as weak breath, then the work of God is like the powerful wind. (Acts 2:2) We cannot see from where such winds come. (Job 38:22-24) We may not understand how God causes them to blow but we can feel their power.

As weak as people's work is their foolish behavior is terrible. (Ecclesiastes 10:5-11) If man knew the full work of this world that God has created it would be greater than anything man could imagine. We cannot see the full works of God and we cannot understand it neither do we know God's plan.

If we want to know God's plan it can be found in the Bible. (Ephesians 3:2-11) The plan of God is that people can be born again into a spiritual relationship with Him. (John 3:7; John 1:12-13) At that time, like a powerful wind, God's Spirit will work in and through them. (John 3:6; John 3:8) This is not understandable by our minds. (John 3:9-10) But it is all possible through Christ death. (John 3:16-17) In the power of the Holy Spirit people can work in great strength to do the work of God. (Galatians 6:8-9)

Verse 6 Can Our Work Succeed?

Solomon has already urged the people to not be lazy but now he expresses the special reason to be busy. Solomon believes that the great troubles will soon come. So he is urging the people to carry out their work now as they may not have another opportunity.

Solomon has already said that the time may not be right for the sowing of seed, as the weather is not right. (4) The people's effort may not be fruitful but the work is necessary. It is only God who can bring a good harvest and the people must do their part even as their best efforts are weak.

We are looking at another word picture of our lives. We want good things to happen but we want them in our human strength. But we do not have the power to cause these good things to happen. The success of our efforts depend upon God. (Psalm 127:102) It is the work of God and that is what matters. It is God who makes our weak efforts fruitful. This is the reason that our most important work is the work that is the work of God.

The people asked Jesus how they could do God's work and He answered them in the Gospel of John (John 6:28-29) Jesus told them to believe in the one whom God sent meaning that they should believe in Him. Jesus is the one whom God sent into the world. (John 17:3) The words of Jesus are the words that God gave Him to speak. (John 7:16) If we believe in Jesus and follow His commands God gives us a wonderful promise, eternal life. (John 3:16)

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Verses 7-8 The Light of Life and the Days of Darkness

Our desire is for life and not death. Life is precious and our life is a gift from God. Even as the sun surrounds us with its light and warmth, so too our life offers us many opportunities. Our greatest opportunity in life is to know God the giver of our life. God is the giver of the perfect light. (James 1:17) Everything that is good and perfect comes from God. When we know God we belong to that light. (1 Thessalonians 5:5) When we know the light of God darkness does not cause us fear even when that darkness is death. (Psalm 23:4; Luke 1:78-79) God gives us eternal life and the darkness will never overcome His light and the life we have from God. (John 1:4-5)

Many reject a life that never ends, as they choose not to serve God. They choose to follow their own desire and life by their own emotions. They do not want to know God and would not obey Him. When their time of judgment comes they will not be ready to face God.

Solomon uses darkness to mean death. He has chosen darkness to show that the good things in life had ended for that person. Instead of everlasting life that person will suffer pain and darkness. This is not the description of the one who has eternal life so it is the one who faces God's eternal judgment. For this reason Solomon urges people to choose the right relationship with God.

Verse 9 Enjoy Life – But Remember God's Judgment

Young people learn quickly how to enjoy life. For the young life is a series of adventure and opportunities. They see no limit to their possibilities as all things seem new.

Solomon's purpose is to warn people, especially the young that God will judge the things that we do. People can live by their desires and be controlled by their emotions but God will judge these things in the end. Solomon's message is a severe warning against doing whatever our hearts desire. Warning against falling to every temptation of the evil one. In all the things we do God will be our judge.

We have already seen what God's judgment of these things must be and we know that our natural desires are evil. We know of all the wrong that we have done in our life. We know that we have been disobedient to God's Word. And we know that most often we chose to do these things that are displeasing to God. None will face the judgement of God and be found not guilty. (Romans 3:23)

We all are God's creation and we must be mindful of our relationship with Him. Either we know Him and have peace or we reject Him and live in fear of the day we stand before Him.

No one can adhere to the Word of God perfectly so we must learn to trust Him completely. This is the example of Abraham that he trusted the promises that God had given him and in faith followed His commands. (Romans 4:3) We can do because of Christ's death on the cross. (Romans 4:23-25)

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Verse 10 Is There Any Advantage to be Young and Strong?

The young may have strength but both their youth and strength fade in time. Any advantage the young have they will soon lose. In the end, as everyone else, they will be judged by God.

As the young grow older pain and anxious thoughts grow stronger. Solomon tells his readers not to think of these things. Even in the youngest and strongest time of lives we are still weak, as we are but people. The most important thing in life is to decide if we are to serve God or not.

For Solomon that was a clear decision. He had studied how weak man is and he knew how great God is. The only conclusion for Solomon was to serve God. The young should not waste their energy in making the wrong decision to follow their own desires. The older person should not think about his pain and anxious thoughts. People think too much of themselves and not enough about God.

The purpose of God is to have a close relationship with His people. His desire is to adopt people as His sons and daughters. (John 1:12-13) God wants to fill the hearts and minds of His people with sincere love, both for Him and for other people. (Mark 12:29-31)

Chapter 12

Remember God in Your Youth

Verse 1 Remember God Who Created You

Ecclesiastes 12:1-8 is one of the most beautiful poems in the Bible. However the subject is sad as it describes how a young person becomes old. Of course this person's life ends in death. The poems purpose is to teach the lesson that is stated in verse 1 and 6. People should remember God before it is too late to appreciate His goodness. Certainly they must remember Him before the day of their death.

Solomon's use of the word remember does not mean to just think about God. God is our Creator and for this reason we should always be mindful of Him. From His creation He desires our love and thanks. By His creation all that we have comes from Him and that should affect every part of our lives.

There is an urgency in Solomon's plea for people to not delay. The proper time to enter into a right relationship with God is now. Then we can walk in His providence for the rest of our life. We live in a world of troubles and they are always near to the future. There will be times that we can find no pleasure but we must not allow these troubles to cause us to forget God or neglect our relationship with Him.

When we become ill or weak we sometimes allow this distraction to become unaware of God's goodness. In the days of our youth we should remember the kindness of God and give our lives to Him in the strength we have to serve Him. God created us, He loves us, and He cares for us.

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Verses 2-5 The Problems of Old Age

People speak of old age as a wonderful thing. They say we wish you a long and prosperous life. Old age is often difficult and for those who remain strong and healthy is good reason to be grateful to God. But that is not what most people experience. There are troubles throughout the whole of life but in old age these problems become more difficult.

Solomon describes these problems in his poetry using a word picture in every line. The meaning of these pictures is that the weaknesses of people increase with old age. They do not see or hear as well and they may seem more unaware of the things of the world. They face a decline as they prepare to leave this world.

The world and everything in it is temporary and will not last. People and their homes are temporary and it is only beyond death that we reach our permanent home. That home can be with God in His heaven or can be alone in hell. We are then to remember God and confess and repent from our evil deeds and give Him control of our lives. We are to cheerfully serve Him so that after death we will continue to know His joy and peace. This is the only way to prepare ourselves for the day when God is our judge.

Verse 6 Life and Death

Solomon describes life in a beautiful way but the reality is it is uncomfortable for us because the verse is about death. Life is a delicate thing, as a silver chain that has been made by hand. It is beautiful but is easily broken. Life is beautiful but it always ends suddenly.

Life is precious, as a gold bowl. Gold was the most desired and expensive metal in the day of Solomon. It takes a lot of gold to make a bowl. But if the bowl breaks none can repair it. Nothing on earth is more valuable to us than our life. When we die none can give it back to us.

People need water constantly especially in a dry land. If the supply of water is broken it will cause a terrible effect upon life. If the supply cannot be repaired, then that life will end in death.

At any point in our lives death is only a moment away. All know that they will at some time die but no one knows when that time will be. Solomon gives sensible advice in these circumstances. We must always remember God. We must have a right relationship with Him now. After death, God will judge us.

Verse 7 What Happens After Death?

Solomon gives us a clear description of what happens at death. It is not mere opinion as the Bible clearly tells us in Scripture.

In life here in the world the body and the spirit remain together. It is easy to know the body from the spirit. The body is made from material things that come from the earth. Our bodies are made from the dust of the earth. (Genesis 2:7) The body cannot live without the spirit and that spirit comes from God. The spirit does not belong to this world and it does not come from the world.

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When death comes the body and the spirit return to their proper places. The body returns to the dust and becomes a part of the earth from where it came. The spirit does not return to the earth, as it does not belong to the earth. The spirit returns to God who gave it to the body. God then judges the life of the spirit it had in the body and one of two judgments will be made. (Matthew 13:47-50)

God wants to forgive people of their sins and can because Jesus has paid that debt for their sin with His life. (John 3:16) If people accept Jesus for who He is and what He has done for them, then their spirits will go to Heaven. (John 14:2) People must believe on Jesus and invite Him into their lives as Lord and Savior. (John 1:12)

People who have not accepted the free offer from Jesus cannot benefit from the kindness of God. God will judge them guilty of their transgressions against His Word. This is the other side of God's love, justice and it is unavoidable. (Luke 16:19-26; Revelation 20:11-15)

Verse 8 All is Vanity

Solomon began this book stating that all is vanity. His meaning of the word vanity is without proper purpose. Now near the end of the book we see that his opinion has not changed.

Here Solomon has described life and death as vanity. He has used this word constantly through his book in ways to describe people's lives, their thoughts, and their work. His meaning is that people are very weak and they care about things that do not matter. Their labors are for things that have no real value and they love things that are not important. Their activities are without proper purpose and they achieve nothing really worthwhile. And of course they achieve nothing by their deaths.

Solomon's thoughts of God are very different. People should respect God. (Ecclesiastes 5:1-4) All that God does is perfect. (Deuteronomy 32:4) God's Word achieves its purpose. (Isaiah 55:11) God does nothing that is vain. Even God's creation of man was perfect. (Ecclesiastes 7:29) For this reason people should think about their relationship to God. (Ecclesiastes 12:1)

People's life accomplishments amount to nothing because they do not care about their relationship with God. Instead they worry about their possessions, their desires, and their feelings. For people who have chosen to serve God it is different. They have a true relationship with God and He looks out for them. (Job 1:8-10) God's people does God's work so their efforts are not in vain.

Purpose of the Preacher

Verses 9-10 King Solomon the Great Teacher

King Solomon was a great and wise king. (1 Kings 4:29-34) His words of wisdom made him famous across the world. (2 Chronicles 9:1-8; 2 Chronicles 9:22-23) Solomon's wisdom was a gift from God. (1 Kings 3:5-12) Solomon did not study to become wise but studied because he was wise. (Proverbs 9:9) Solomon did not acquire his knowledge just

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for His benefit but along with his duties he taught the people. It is possible that one of Solomon's students put the book of Ecclesiastes into its present form. This student wanted to use the Wisdom of Solomon to teach people that they need to have a right relationship with God. (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)

Solomon studies the nature of people very carefully and he could see that people were wasting their lives in meaningless activity. His message was to get people to think seriously about their lives.

Like many great teachers the life of Solomon is disappointing to us. If he had followed his own advice, then he would not have carried out the evil acts of his life. (1 Kings 11:1-10) This fact alone teaches us that we should not place our faith and trust in man but in God alone. The wisdom that God gives is far superior to that of any man. God will give us that wisdom.

Verses 11-12 Advice About Books

Solomon now gives us his advice on books in general. In the earlier times of the Bible people did not buy books but copied old books. This was their method of study and it was hard work.

Even at that time there were many books and some were not worthwhile for the student to copy and study. The students would chose the books that would make them wise and the books of God's commands, the Bible, was the best book.

Solomon compares books of wisdom to two sharp objects, goads and nails. The farmer would plough his land with a goad. This was a long stick with a sharp point. Large oxen would pull the plough across the land. If one of the oxen went the wrong way the farmer would use the goad to control it. The goad was painful to the oxen and it soon learned the lesson. Wise words are sometimes unpleasant but they teach correct behavior and attitudes when we are doing something wrong.

The nails are probably pegs. Pegs are sharp objects that hold a tent in its place. The pegs would be hammered deep into the ground so they would have a firm hold. Wise words are like something that fixes deep into our lives. They are not popular stories that have shallow effect on our emotions. Words of wisdom effects every part of our lives. The shepherd is God. (Psalm 23:1) A shepherd is one who looks after animals. God as a shepherd guides and directs our lives.

Verse 13 Respect God and obey his commands

Many find the book of Ecclesiastes hard to understand. Here at the end of the book Solomon gives his own explanation of the meaning of the book. If there is still confusion of other parts of the book this statement is clear.

We can see with this statement that the book of Ecclesiastes does not teach a different message from the rest of the Bible. In this book Solomon teaches us that we must have a right relationship with God and we must be loyal to Him. In our loyalty we must obey His commands. The commands of God can be found in Deuteronomy 5:6-21. The most

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important command is that people should love God with all their hearts. ***"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."***

God wants to change the minds and hearts of people so they will love Him and His law. (Hebrews 8:10-12) God wants to forgive people so they will not have to suffer His wrath. We cannot build a relationship with God by obeying His commands because we will not succeed. (James 2:10) We need God to change our lives, (John 3:3; 2 Corinthians 5:17) This is why God sent His Son Jesus. (1 John 4:9-10) Jesus suffered our punishment so we can have a right relationship with God. (Isaiah 53:4-6; John 3:16-17; Galatians 3:10-14)

Verse 14 God Is the Judge of All Our Deeds

In the early chapters the subject of the book is the works that people do. In the later chapters the subject is the judgment of God. In the last verse of the book it is about both these subjects. It declares that God is the judge of all our deeds.

Solomon has insisted that people can labor their whole lives and receive no benefit. All of their life's labors achieve nothing. That is nothing that really matters. They might become rich and live long lives. But if they do not have a right relationship with God all these things of life benefit nobody. They will never find satisfaction for their own desires and if they face God's judgment unprepared they will be lost in eternity.

The judgment of God has never been a popular subject. Solomon knows that all people are guilty of evil deeds. People have neglected God's Law and have done so on purpose. God knows all that we have done even the things we have done in secret.

Because all people are guilty some have tried to do things that will satisfy God. They try to please God by their weak works. But this is foolish behavior, as God's judgment is certain. The only way to prepare for God's judgment is to have a right relationship with God. We cannot earn this relationship by our works we must receive it as a free gift from God. (Romans 4:4-5) The free gift is for people who trust God and God forgives those people. (Romans 4:6-8) God then looks after them in a special way. Their lives on this earth will be much like the lives of others but their judgment will be completely different.

There is a difference in this world between foolish and wise behavior. Real wisdom is a gift from God. (Proverbs 2:1-6) Through that wisdom people can receive a right relationship with God. (Proverbs 3:5-6; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25) The person who serves God has no reason to fear God's judgement. (2 Peter 3:10-13) The fact of God's judgment for them will be free from all that is evil. (Revelation 21:1-5)