

Pondering the Book of Ecclesiastes

How could a book about meaninglessness be so meaningful?

Why is the book of Ecclesiastes sometimes considered a problem child?

Is it because the book asks the question or questions others feared to ask: Why exist?
Why plan? Who will benefit? Does anything last forever and ever?



The question or questions of this book of Ecclesiastes are answered, but it takes all of the rest of the bible to do so!!!!

In some ways, the book is like night and dawn - it is still not day.

The book begins it seems in the midst of night, darkness, negative perceptions, vanity and death. Then slowly night begins to steal away and the light of dawn takes away the night. So it is with the book of Ecclesiastes. By the end of the book the day has dawned, although admittedly the full light of day must await the rising of the...

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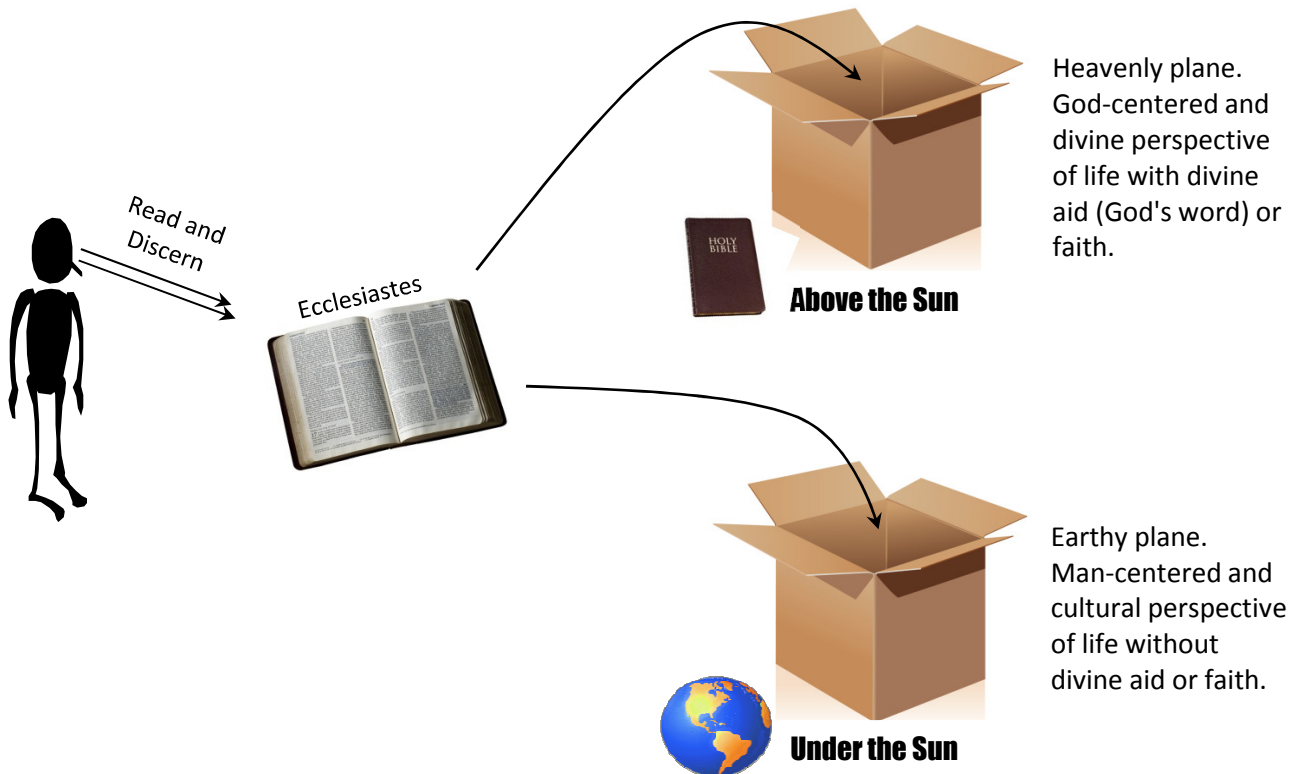
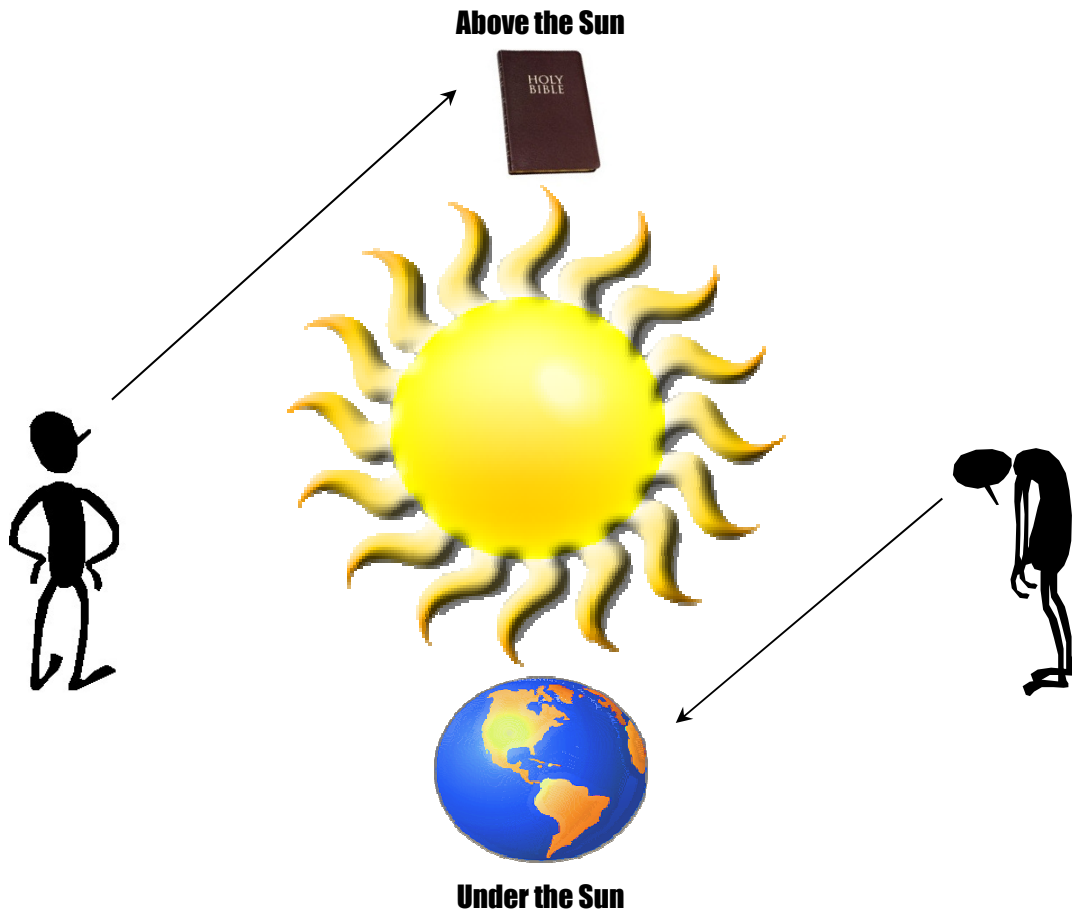
"DESTROY THIS TEMPLE, AND IN THREE DAYS I WILL RAISE IT UP...FORTY AND SIX YEARS WAS THIS TEMPLE IN BUILDING AND WILT THOU REAR IT UP IN THREE DAYS?"

"...BESIDE ALL THIS, TO DAY IS THE THIRD DAY SINCE..."

"BE NOT AFFRIGHTED...WHY SEEK YE THE LIVING AMONG THE DEAD? HE IS NOT HERE, BUT IS RISEN: REMEMBER HOW HE SPAKE...and THE THIRD DAY RISE AGAIN.
AND THEY REMEMBERED HIS WORDS..."

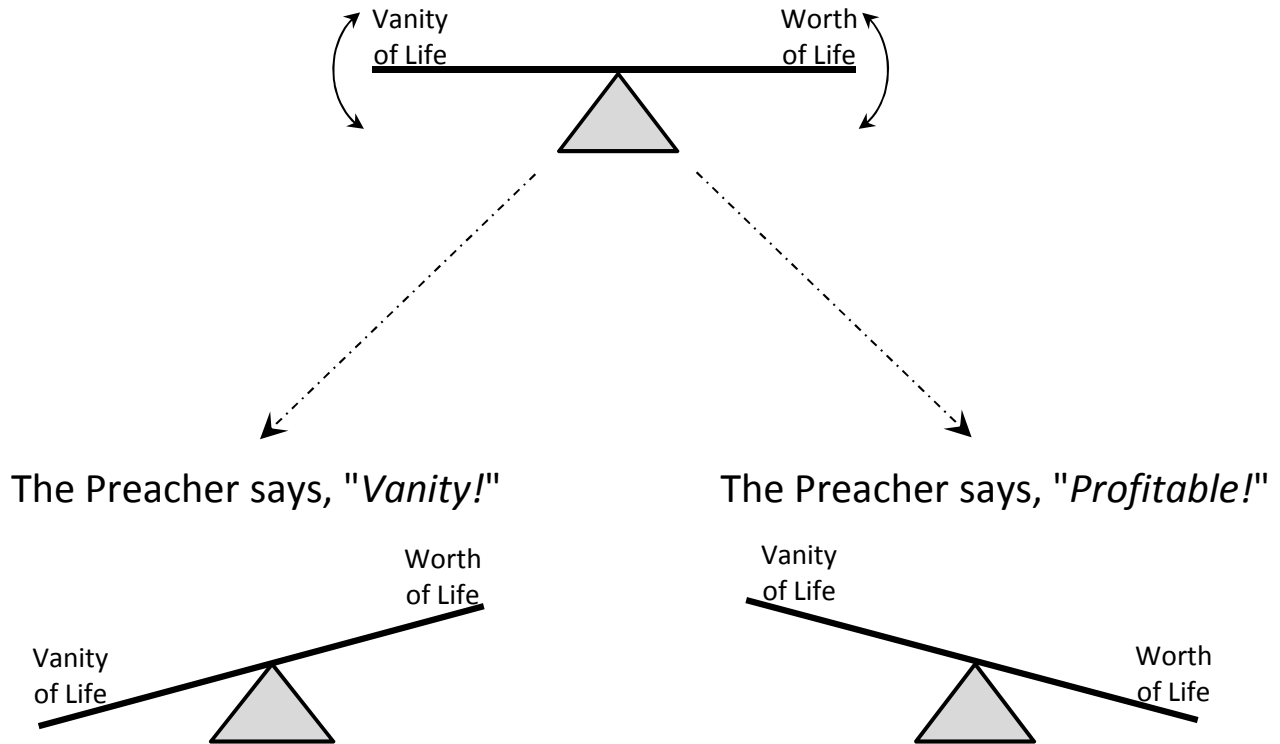
"...WHO...ABOLISHED DEATH...BROUGHT LIFE AND IMMORTALITY TO LIGHT THROUGH

The Preachers Contrast



The Preachers Contrasting View of Life

The Preacher asks, "What is the meaning of life? "



CONCLUSION OF THE MATTER

The contrast is **not** the conclusion.

The Preacher uses the contrast to reach his conclusion.

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

¹³ Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. ¹⁴ For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

Unlocking the Book of Ecclesiastes



The book of Ecclesiastes...locked?

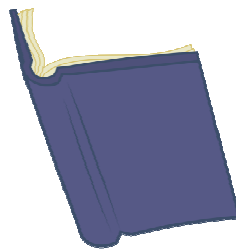
- A closed, locked book to far too many.
- But, God has men write to reveal not conceal.
- So, the problem must relate to not understanding the structure and purpose of the book.



"under the sun"
"above the sun"

The key to Unlocking the Book.

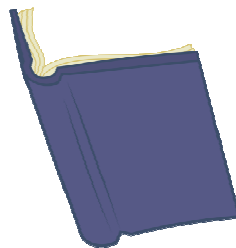
- The key to unlocking the book is the phrase "under the sun."
- "Under the sun" is viewing earthly life without the aid of divine revelation, so vanity is dominant under the sun.
- It is man trying to answer life's meaning simply by himself. 'Trying to lift oneself up by his own bootstraps.'



"under the sun"
"above the sun"

Unlocking the book; the Preacher's Method.

- The preacher tells what he was attempting to do and how he did it.
Ecclesiastes 1:12,13; 12:9,10
- The preacher, with great clarity, shows the vanity of life is not escaped by man's best reasoning and man's best efforts (under the sun).
- The preacher's purpose was to make man realize meaningfulness of life can't be discovered without turning to God's word (above the sun). Once realized, the preacher said, "let me help you."



"under the sun"
"above the sun"

Unlocking the book; the Preacher's Conclusion.

- The vanities of earthly life are sure, so attack life with vigor; for your strength will not serve you forever.
Ecclesiastes 12:1
- Death shall come, but death is not as it is seen under the sun. For the body goes to the dust, but the spirit returns to God and God is not the God of the dead but the living.
Ecclesiastes 12:7
- The data has been gathered and the conclusion is sure. Don't waste your years; be active, but control your behavior through fear of God and obedience for all men shall meet the judge.
Ecclesiastes 12:13,14

Ecclesiastes Chapter 1

- 1:2,3 My experiences brought me weariness.
- 1:4-7 Life and its order reaps monotony and is oppressive.
- 1:8-11 The ever-recurring changes didn't really bring progress, but were simply more of the same.
(The generalized view of life was found sobering and without encouragement. Let us retrace with more detail experiences that led to this generalized conclusion and view of life).
- 1:13-18 We sought an answer through human wisdom, but this did not help, because we learned we couldn't make the crooked straight. We magnified our grief and our sorrow from the search.

Ecclesiastes Chapter 2

- 2:1-12 We surrounded our self with sensual enjoyments, while thinking in our self not to lose control of our self to such experiences. We thought to indulge in such for the purpose of learning, not for personal surrendering of our will like so many do. Noble or not, we only learned such were of no profit.
- 2:13-17 It became abundantly clear that wisdom does indeed exceed folly, but we encountered a new problem. There is an event that no man escapes whether he is wise in life or foolish in life, they both die.
- 2:18-23 The fruitfulness of labor became a great quandary for me, because who would it be left to and for what good? I was left with hating my work, having no rest and simply in despair.
- 2:24-26 My experiences 'under the sun' led me to a conclusion aided with belief based on what is from 'above the sun' (God) how to live in a beneficial manner to cope with life and discover its meaning and purpose, so it is profitable. You make the best of what is around you and don't pine away by comparing your environment and circumstances with others. You don't fall prey to the reckless life styles that culture pursues as the answer to happiness. The resolve that came from my experiences was pursue life in a calm and wise way with recognition of God's revealed truth. You realize and experience life as a gift from God, enjoying your portion here and to reserve what is profitable for the time to come. This does not mean life will not have its travail (we are all living in a world subject to vanity), but it is the only way to not waste your life in weariness and always trying to catch the wind.

Ecclesiastes Chapter 3

- 3:1-10 Life appears to be filled with this vast array of sundry phenomena taking place, but don't be deceived there is order amidst all of this diversity of activities and happenings. Nature reveals an order and man with his changing mind and solutions will not change the end of all things.
- 3:11-15 While full discernment of this order is beyond man, we can know enough to know all will be fully accomplished by God according to his reckoning of time. Therefore, we are led to the same conclusion as stated before, to accept life with its portion of enjoyment and its time of travail learning from such to reverence God. Our lives will partake of what others have partaken of in the past, but this is no reason to draw back.
1 Corinthians 10:13 "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."
Psalms 31:22-24 "For I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes: nevertheless thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto thee. ²³O love the LORD, all ye his saints: for the LORD preserveth the faithful, and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer. ²⁴Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the LORD."
- 3:16-17 History cries of oppression, justice not meted out, but remember God will mete out judgment for the righteous and the unrighteous.
- 3:18-20 This present perception of life 'under the sun' can't be hidden and free of despair. How really would one see any difference between the beast of the field and mankind? They simply see the body of man and the body of the beast going back to the earth.
- 3:21 Frankly, 'under the sun' can one even know whether the life of the man goeth upward and the life of the beast goeth downward? An optional view of this verse could be saying, "How many men 'under the sun' even consider the destiny of man and beast at the time of death is any different? How many men realize there is a difference between man and beast after death? (A point in passing since the materialist loves to overwork this verse. It does not matter which of these interpretations would be most accurate, it doesn't permit the materialist to use the verse to say man is the same in nature as the beast of the field). The 'above the sun' view in the Old Testament gave enough light for man to consider the difference of man and beast, the resurrection and eternal judgment, but the light from above through the New Testament removed so many things from the shadows.
Psalms 49:14-15 "Like sheep they are laid in the grave; death shall feed on them; and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning; and their beauty shall consume in the grave from their dwelling. ¹⁵But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for he shall receive me. Selah."

The Psalmist is comparing the death of those that trusted in themselves and their riches and those that trusted in God and not themselves. The beautiful of the world are laid in a grave (probably handsomely marked), their body shall be mere food for decay (corruption) and their vaunted beauty will not last. The saint has a different perspective of death for death brings dominion and in the light of righteousness (morning a figure most likely for eternity) will stand forth in the resurrection and be received or taken into the eternal presence of God.

Matthew 22:31-32 "But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, ³²I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."

2 Timothy 1:9-10 "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, ¹⁰But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel:"

Philippians 1:23 "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better:"

Philippians 3:8-11 "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, ⁹And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: ¹⁰That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; ¹¹If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. ¹⁴For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. ¹⁵For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent (precede) them which are asleep. ¹⁶For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: ¹⁷Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. ¹⁸Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

3:22 An awareness of man's perception 'under the sun' doesn't change our previous conclusion regarding how to have a meaningful life. It would not change my words on how to live, even if it could be proven true that the grave was the termination of all things. The best thing to do, in spite of the conclusions of the reasoning and appearances 'under the sun' is rejoice in your endeavors, for this is your appointed portion. Who among men living 'under the sun' (i.e.; living without the benefit of divine revelation and faith) can determine what shall follow after his death? This is a rhetorical question? Why? My experiences and my experiments revealed the meaningfulness of life cannot be accomplished through man's own efforts. Man is far too limited to be the final authority of what lies beyond the grave, even though he

has the capacity to reason on the concept of future things. Let me remind you of my earlier words.

Ecclesiastes 3:11-14 *"He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end. ¹²I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life. ¹³And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God. ¹⁴I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him."*

Notice what I said. God will bring things to their proper end and we are confident of this, because He gave the beginning. Having the power to give things their beginning should prove to us he has the power to bring things to their ending. Secondly, man with his natural reasoning (simply living under the sun) can't discover those happenings before time regarding the end, but God in the end will make all things beautiful.

(Acts 17:30-31 *"And the times of this ignorance God winked at (overlooked – looked beyond – See Romans 3:25); but now commandeth all men every where to repent: ³¹Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead)."*

Who shall bring men to see what shall be hereafter? It can only be done by God and it cannot be done by the natural man.

1 Corinthians 2:14 *"But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. Therefore, live and enjoy your life to the best of your ability with faith, for your work in faith is not in vain. "*

1 Corinthians 15:58 *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord. Furthermore, what else do we know?"*

Ecclesiastes 3:15-17 *"That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past (seeks out what has been done, the deeds of the past that men pursued aren't overlooked by God – time doesn't change the facts – God is eternal). ¹⁶And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there. ¹⁷I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work."*

It is a true saying the bookkeepers of heaven aren't like the bookkeepers of earth!!

Revelation 20:12 *"And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works."*

2 Corinthians 5:9-10 *"Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. ¹⁰For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."*

Life 'above the sun' (faith founded on the word of God) answers the question we posed who shall bring man to see what shall be after him?

Acts 10:42 *"And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead."*

Romans 14:10 *"But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ."*

Romans 2:16 *"In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel."*

1 Corinthians 4:5 *"Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God."*

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 *"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. ¹⁴For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."*

Ecclesiastes Chapter 4

- 4:1-16 Now, let us continue to retrace some of the steps that led us to conclude accept life and fear God. We will step beyond my personal experiences and frustrations to find peace and look at the world with its misery and disruptions. This wider lens makes the search for meaningfulness in life appear even more frustrating than simply my personal experiences. We aren't going to deny the road of life is often rough, unpredictable and exasperating, even though we say enjoy life as a gift of God. The observations we are about to make aren't going to ease your mind at the moment, but we objectively view them, while insisting the only premise suitable to answering the purpose of life is to accept life as the gift of God.
- 4:1-3 The oppressed in this world is so innumerable and the impossibility of help and escape from their powerful oppressors makes death seem better than life and to never exist to be better than existing.
- 4:4-5 The achiever through diligent effort finds he basically gains the envy of his neighbor rather than praise. Verse 4 possibly raises a more disturbing question and that is, how much of the activities of this world are simply motivated out of rivalry to have an advantage over others? The other side of the coin is the indolent (idle, averse to regular effort and work), which only leads to poverty without an acceptance of responsibility. This has an adverse affect on the individual and on society.
- 4:6 We see it is better to have self-control of one's desires and to be content with a moderate degree of food, clothing and shelter, rather than surrender to the restless, ever seeking of more, more or the never caring about less and less. A small portion meeting our needs with rest is far better than ever striving for a larger and larger portion without rest. This would seem the best way to have our portion of enjoyment here, while living for that which is profitable in eternity.
- 4:8-12 An ironic and sad picture 'under the sun' is those that strive for more wealth and things so obsessively, they have no time to enjoy them or share them with enjoyment with others. They have pursued the things that are passing at the expense of companionship, which is one of the great blessings to offset the travail of this present sojourn.
- 4:13-16 The endless cycle that seemed so self-defeating in our own personal experience doesn't end with the individual, but is a part of life at large. The position of honor does not assure security and the masses are ever changing in their allegiance. Human greatness is swallowed up by time, while time never swallows up the restlessness of mankind in a world subject to vanity. Human authority has never fully answered the needs of man and a people governed by 'under the sun' values can never be satisfied.

Ecclesiastes Chapter 5

- 5:1-7 Now the preacher opens the lens of the camera even further and takes in an area of life not previously mentioned. It has been said he “passes from the dwellers in palaces to the worshippers in the Temple, the devout and religious men (McClintock and Strong, p.33, vol. 3)”. Now he begins to admonish at this point, wherein in the past he spoke of himself (I), now he speaks to others (thou). He is quick to note necessary behaviors, so the pursuit of the religious is not caught up in the vanity of life ‘under the sun’. We need to remember there is a view of religion among men founded on ‘under the sun’ in contrast to a view of religion founded on ‘above the sun’. This was highly critical in the preacher’s day, just as it is so critical in the present day. The worshipper of God that fears God must watch his steps and must be ready to hear God’s word, rather than the hearing of man’s thoughts regarding how to please God. The righteous have open ears and guarded lips, so they don’t fall into external ritual and show as the manifestation of religion. Man should ponder long before making rash commitment with the mouth, lest he be led to sin. Sin will be punished, so restrain yourselves from the unreality of dreams and speech that runs past our thinking, but fear God. The reverencing of God conveys obedience to the revealed will of heaven.
- 5:8,9 There is often a lapse of judgment in the hierarchy of earthly authority. But it is needful to remember, there is an appointed Judge above all who occupy the earthly seats of judgment. They, as well as we, will have our day in court. Let us be mindful the benefits of this earth are not partial (sunshine and rain), as God’s order is for the good of all men. The abuse of man and the fact this present world is subject to vanity does not change God’s order for good.
- 5:10-12 The craving for money and abundance brings an unexpected result to the door of the wealthy. The abundance does not bring sleep, but inflated associations and expense. The indulgence of luxury isn’t restful in its conclusion. To the contrary, the laborer sleeps far better, even though his possessions may or may not be of modest count.
- 5:13-18 Life can be very unpredictable and abnormalities can befall one quickly. The writer illustrates this with a rich man who suddenly loses his wealth and in such a drastic manner there is no bounty left. He is so destitute from the events, there is nothing left to be given to the heir or those that follow him. He toiled to have and has no reward for such and his grievous loss haunts him without relieve, so he only has constant despair, sorrow and anger entertaining his cognitions and emotions.
- 5:18-21 The answer for contentment of life in a marred world is brought to our attention once again. One is to behave morally and fittingly, enjoy the good of one’s labor and be conscious that God is the author of all good gifts. The ability and opportunity to enjoy our portion is God’s gift. A life of moderate comfort, self-control, not pulled by vicious lusts is the best offered in a world subject to vanity. This should make our days pass as pleasantly as possible for the joy of life will hinder the memories of past travail. The writer here summarizes the better way, the more excellent way to live

out our limited sojourn in a world subject to vanity, so our life and our death won't be vanity. We are given a little glimpse of the end of the book, when the writer will finally turn into the driveway of our home after a long, long tiring journey.

Ecclesiastes Chapter 6

Chapter 6 presents more about disappointments (the vanity of life under the sun). The power to enjoy life as God's gift doesn't assure that we shall. The avenues man pursues to obtain enjoyment of life are uncertain. Recall the collapse of the wealth of our case study in Eccl. 5:13-17 and its devastating effects. Now, in chapter 6 the writer casts his eyes on other misfortunes of life.

- 6:1-6 Enjoyment of life is not guaranteed by wealth obtained or even necessarily by abundance of family. Why? There is a lack of permanency in wealth and there can be many difficulties in the family. There is also the issue of death. When a man openly and truly ponders these facts from the perspective granted by 'under the sun' it is hard to dismiss the idea it would be better to have never lived. The thought is hard to escape, because we are going to die anyway. Why begin, face uncertain trouble and then die, rather than simply not have ever begun? You don't even know if your dead body will even be covered with the dust of the earth or left for the pecking of the birds of the field or the spoiling of the rays of the sun?
The answer to life isn't found 'under the sun'. Death is the great equalizer, so long years do not resolve the issue of why am I here? Reality states don't plan your retirement without enjoying life at the moment.
- 6:7-9 Men are basically equal in life in spite the possessions shown, as they all constantly hurry to meet the demands of life. Once the appetite (the soul) is fulfilled, the craving of the appetite returns. Who among man is an exception to this rule? It is best to be satisfied with what one has, whether little or much, than be drawn by the restlessly wanderings of desire.
- 6:10-12 Don't misunderstand there is more to life than simply eat, drink and be happy. The nature of man is evident in creation and in the events that followed. Who is man to contend with God? What does man settle with many words? The many words and proposed modes of satisfaction only increase the ensnaring net of the vanity of life? We have truly reached a dead end 'under the sun'. Man can't answer the question what is good in this life for himself? Man can't even tell you what will follow regarding his plans for tomorrow. Therefore, what should we do to discover life's purpose and live suitably to fulfill that purpose?

Ecclesiastes Chapter 7

(Possibly chapter 7 is attempting to help with the circumstances of life posed in Ecclesiastes 6:12 *"For who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow? for who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?"*)

- 7:1-6 Instructions in relation to suffering. Consider the thinking of concerned mourners at a funeral in contrast to the mindset of people gathered at a frivolous party. Which atmosphere lends itself to making man recognize the vanity of life without faith in the Lord Jesus Christ?
- 7:7-10 Dangers: Beware of responses that simply add to the frustrations of life, rather than aid in overcoming them.
- 7:11-12 The need for wisdom is indispensable due to the nature of life. The wisdom noted here is evidently different from the vanity of seeking wisdom under the sun. We begin to see why earlier contrasts were not to be accepted as conclusions, but were given to lead us to conclusions above the sun and not under the sun. Recall Ecc 1:18: *"For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow."*
- 7:13-14 It is evident life has many unpredictable turns. Therefore, it is essential to be ever conscious that God is in control. He is on the throne (Rev. 4,5).
- 7:15-18 Dangers along the way and coping with the vanity we see.
- 7:19-22 Realize the need for wisdom. Life is a tumbling affair of events. Evil abounds: We know its source, we realize it's depth and we see it manifested everywhere.
- 7:23-24 The accessibility to wisdom is not an open door easy to enter.
- 7:25-29 Does the preacher here express his empty experiences of seeking his own way, rather than the way God had laid out? Does he sense the vanity of his many experiences he had with wives and concubines? His expression here regarding his relationship with humankind (male and female) is true to his living under the sun. But he realizes from his relationship with God (God had appeared to Solomon twice) that man is not as God made him. He realizes man's imagination for sin is unending and what has man brought forth that hasn't been used for wrong?

Ecclesiastes Chapter 8

The chapter has a word about who is wise and lends a hand to how to live under circumstances that entertain limitations and the burdens of a world that is scarred with sin and its consequences. These circumstances call for wisdom, so one does not foolishly destroy himself for what he can't change, but at the same time does not sin due to ongoing frustration or be so compromised that one's life doesn't uphold right and resist the growth of evil. While the preacher has outlined the difficulties of pursuing wisdom, he also reveals wisdom is helpful in time of oppression and that wisdom in such times speaks of the need to cultivate obedience. Also an underlying message is to realize wisdom cannot deliver one from all the woes that life brings to mankind or necessarily understand all the adversity that befalls one. The preacher in the opening of the chapter speaks of the frustrations of rulers who oppress, but reveals victory is found in the fear of God and not by choosing your behaviors due to the fear of men. Again just because the control of God cannot be fully discovered, don't submit to the 'under the sun' view of life that leaves no place for the hand of God. The preacher is becoming more open with the 'above the sun' view as he begins to feel more confident he has shown the meaninglessness of life 'under the sun.'

8:1 Who is wise and the effects of wisdom.

8:2-9 Authority and how to live under authority. The history of government is entwined with rulers who have been oppressive. Governmental authority is restrictive, but submission is encouraged.

Reflections on the subject:

1 Samuel 8:10-20 "And Samuel told all the words of the LORD unto the people that asked of him a king. ¹¹And he said, This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots. ¹²And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots. ¹³And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. ¹⁴And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. ¹⁵And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. ¹⁶And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. ¹⁷He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants. ¹⁸And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the LORD will not hear you in that day. ¹⁹Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us; ²⁰That we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles."

The contrast between the days when the Queen of Sheba said, "Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom" and the words of the congregation of Israel after Solomon's death to his son Rehoboam. *1 Kings 12:4 "Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee."*

NT. passages: (Mat 22:21; Rom.13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-14).

- 8:10-11 Men live and abide by the knowledge taught 'under the sun', so the land will manifest inequity and injustice. When these fall upon you or upon others they provoke burdens of grief and anxiety that burdens us, but we must continue. This will be grievous for it appears the wrong doer has escaped the hand of judgment. Don't be deceived like the evildoer, who in his wickedness is encouraged to do more evil because punishment for his wrong was not quickly administered.
- 8:12-13 The strength to continue in these perverted times is anchored in the truth that it shall be well with those that fear God. Why? The words of the funeral don't always tell the true story or the end of the story. Realize what appears as the shortened hand of justice 'under the sun' doesn't mean the wicked have escaped. When a shadow disappears into darkness what has it gained? Don't be deceived, whatever a man sows he shall reap.
*1Co 4:5 "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God."
Heb 4:13-14 "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do. ¹⁴Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession."*
- 8:14 Life and death viewed 'under the sun' has an unanswered paradox regarding reward and punishment, so life indeed appears meaningless and without purpose.
- 8:15 Again, don't be swayed by the events of life as viewed from 'under the sun' but accept the everyday nature of the gifts of life and recognize they are God given and enjoy them. These gifts accepted in thanksgiving, while we live on this earth will sustain us beyond the vanity of seeing the wrong rewarded as right and the right being rewarded as wrong.
- 8:16-17 Let me reiterate the totality of life's meaning is beyond us and God has not revealed everything. Truth shall never be uncovered by the mere wisdom of man (under the sun).
Deut. 29:29 "The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law."
Don't be conceited in your knowledge.
1Co 8:2 "And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know."
Recall,
Ecc 7:16 Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself?
There is no benefit to exhausting one's self over what you cannot know. Enjoy the portion God has given you, recognize his hand in your life and be thankful and glad for the goodness of the day and learn from the days of evil to trust God. It is evident

the fullness of wisdom shall not be ours, for who can know more about God's doings than what he has revealed? To the contrary, grasp the wisdom that can be obtained for it will benefit our decisions in events that shall befall beyond our ability to predict or control. The enigmas of life are to be recognized. They will not be escaped, but we should not permit them to destroy the fact that life is meaningful 'above the sun'.

Ecclesiastes Chapter 9

Chapter nine basically presents two major factors of life that must be given due consideration. The preacher in previous chapters has noted a number of things man does not know, but now he turns his attention to some things all men do know. Death is a reality and death will not be denied. All men experience sundry events of life no matter their different conditions or positions in life. All men experience the same end that is death. Death is impartial and not swayed by variance in life between men. Secondly, while men build the business of life on predictability, the truth is life is unpredictable. The stark reality of 'under the sun' is placed in the face of man. The reality of death and the unpredictability of life basically leaves nothing for those 'under the sun', but a dire fatalistic end. But the preacher is not fatalistic nor claims these facts are a reason to waste life. Why? There is more light to be shed on this matter from above the sun. Living meaningfully for God has an awareness of one's works. Furthermore, while there are questions beyond the reach of wisdom, wisdom is still a valuable asset in life. This is true even though wisdom is very vulnerable to rejection due to the clamor of the foolish in high places and the sinner's destructive influence against wisdom.

Overall in the ninth chapter it looks like the preacher is back to his old tricks. He basically squeezes the meaningfulness out of life's pursuit for the diligent or skillful. He does give an escape from this picture of vexation in the midst of the chapter, as he again speaks of enjoying what God has given.

9:1 *"For all this I considered in my heart even to declare all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them."*

Possibly we could link this verse with 8:16-19 and the enigma of life. How would the man simply living 'under the sun' determine whether God loved (approved) or hated (disapproved) him? We think the question of love and hate here is considering the relationship between God and man and not simply man with man. Consider the heathen concept of the love or hate of their gods was interpreted due to whatever good or bad experience they encountered. They even went so far to attribute what happened to them based upon whether the gods were fussing among themselves.

9:2-3 *"All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath. ³This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead."*

Well, when we view life 'under the sun' what do we know and cannot deny? The sting of death bites every person and is no respecter of persons (Heb. 9:27). The preacher says, "There is an old song about you are always on my mind and it is always on my mind". May we ask the preacher what is always on his mind? Yes, it is death (Ecc. 1:4; 2:14-17; 3:18-20; 5:15,16; 6:6; 8:8; 12:5-9). There is no barrier to prevent death as an intruder and he steals up upon you quickly because you only have one life to prepare for him.

Ecc 1:4 "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever."

Ecc 2:14-17 "The wise man's eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness: and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all. ¹⁵Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity. ¹⁶For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man? as the fool. ¹⁷Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit."

Ecc 3:18-20 "I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts. ¹⁹For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity. ²⁰All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again."

Ecc 5:15-16 "As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand. ¹⁶And this also is a sore evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go: and what profit hath he that hath laboured for the wind more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man? as the fool."

Ecc 6:6 "Yea, though he live a thousand years twice told, yet hath he seen no good: do not all go to one place?"

Ecc 8:8 "There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it."

Ecc 12:5-9 "Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets: ⁶Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. ⁷Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it. ⁸Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity. ⁹And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs."

9:4-6 "For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion. ⁵For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. ⁶Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun."

While one is living there is hope for one has opportunity to evaluate his circumstances, weigh the results of past decisions and determine new strategy. Funerals are expensive, but have you ever considered the cost of death? It even bankrupts hope for the corpse 'under the sun'. While you are alive you can respond to the happenings of earth, but not so after death. A word of caution is in order here,

as these words are not trying to speak about life beyond the grave, but speak about earthly experiences ceasing – you are done with earthly things.

9:7-10 *“Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. ⁸Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. ⁹Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun. ¹⁰Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.”*

The preacher breaks his silence and shatters what folks thought he was saying by permitting some light from ‘above the sun’. The only remedy from this dismal picture of death is faith in God and enjoying the portion he has allotted us. In essence, the only way to prepare for death is preparing to live by the portion God has granted man. The preacher has previously advised man to enjoy the portion God allotted, but in this passage he appears to come on stronger and summons – go thy way for this is what God has approved. He becomes very forceful in his words. He basically says - Hey, stop your pouting and get on with life. Death is coming, but have a life before it comes. How? Well enjoy what God has approved in the common experiences of life. You can only respond to the happenings of earth while you are alive on this earth. Thereafter, what does the dead know of the happenings on earth? Nothing!! The dead have no means of affecting the happenings of earth. The verses of advice to enjoy life due to God before this strong summons may be more frequent than most notice, because of so many verses which are negative about life ‘under the sun’.

We find the preacher saying (2:24-26; 3:12-15,22; 5:18-20; 7:14; 8:15; 11:9,10) enjoy God’s gift.

Ecc 2:24-26 *“There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God. ²⁵For who can eat, or who else can hasten hereunto, more than I? ²⁶For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit.”*

Ecc 3:12-15 *“I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life. ¹³And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God. ¹⁴I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him. ¹⁵That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past.”*

Ecc 3:22 *“Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?”*

Ecc 5:18-20 *“Behold that which I have seen: it is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for it is his portion. ¹⁹Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God. ²⁰For he shall not*

much remember the days of his life; because God answereth him in the joy of his heart."

Ecc 7:14 "In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him."

Ecc 8:15 "Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun."

Ecc 9:7-10 "Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. ⁸Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. ⁹Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun. ¹⁰Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest."

Ecc 11:9-10 "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment. ¹⁰Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity."

- 9:11-12 *"I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all. ¹²For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them."*

The preacher appears to now consider another circumstance of life that would seem to magnify the idea that life is meaningless and put wisdom to shame. Under the sun, one might conclude there is no known link between actions and results (cause and effect seems void), as time and chance affects all. Man builds his plans around seedtime and harvest time, but these plans do not escape time and chance. While man builds his life on predictions, the truth is life is truly unpredictable. The day of death is not commonly announced. But, this is no reason to not be mindful of the general rule of life above the sun, of reward and punishment, or to forsake all wisdom.

Ecc 8:5 "Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing: and a wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment."

Time and chance can affect all, trouble doesn't always knock, she frequently just shows up. Neighborhood changes come without anticipation and beyond your wisdom to guide in a more fruitful way.

- 9:13-16 *"This wisdom have I seen also under the sun, and it seemed great unto me: ¹⁴There was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it: ¹⁵Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man."*

¹⁶Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength: nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard."

Wisdom is still to be pursued and is beneficial in spite of sudden change in the fortunes of life. Wisdom is more capable of aiding one in the circumstances of life that befalls unannounced, than the strength of position formed on the alliance of men. This is true, even though under the sun there is little assurance of wisdom being recognized or commended. The illustration of the poor wise man is clear regarding wisdom, whether it is saying he delivered the city and was forgotten or whether it is saying he could have delivered the city, but his words were ignored. The preacher sees wisdom even with its limitations as helpful in life, but don't assume it will be appreciated or will receive much attention.

9:17-18 *"The words of wise men are heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools. ¹⁸Wisdom is better than weapons of war: but one sinner destroyeth much good."*

The general under estimation of wisdom is being further demonstrated. Wisdom is easily thwarted by the clamor of the foolish. It is amazing what loudness without thought can do in the midst of men. "Almost always, true wisdom is packaged in a subdued container (Waddey)". Wisdom is so very vulnerable. Wisdom presents to us the face of paradox in her strength and in her vulnerability. Wisdom is the great savior of grief by having the weapons broken rather than sharpened, but on the other hand one sinner can bring grief to a multitude. Achan is a standing example of these words (Josh. 7:1-26) and another name that is not as well-known quickly comes to mind. It is Doeg.

1Sa 21:7 *"Now a certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the LORD; and his name was Doeg, an Edomite, the chiefest of the herdmen that belonged to Saul."*

The rest of the story is found in 1 Samuel 22:7-19.

1Sa 22:18-19 *"And the king said to Doeg, Turn thou, and fall upon the priests. And Doeg the Edomite turned, and he fell upon the priests, and slew on that day fourscore and five persons that did wear a linen ephod. ¹⁹ And Nob, the city of the priests, smote he with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and sucklings, and oxen, and asses, and sheep, with the edge of the sword."*

The NT. notes this problem.

2Ti 2:16-18 *"But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. ¹⁷And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; ¹⁸ Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some."*

The contrast here between the wisdom and the sinner probably reflects the man living above the sun (1 Ki. 4:29) and the man living under the sun with tainted moral character.

Ecclesiastes Chapter 10

The tenth chapter receives very different reviews, as some see it as a divorcee from the rest of the book, while it would seem verse 1 is tied to the previous admonition regarding the ease with which wisdom is thwarted in the public square of life. It is true there is a style change, as the chapter turns to proverb-like advice regarding behavior. Cooks suggests the chapter is a partial answer to a question previously posed and this seems like a good link. The preacher previously asked as he struggled with the problem of life in a world of vexation, what is good to do?

Ecc 2:3 "I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life."

Ecc 6:12 "For who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow? for who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?"

We walk into room number 10 and we are introduced to a chap we will simply call folly. We then spend an evening of visiting with folly and in doing so, become too well acquainted with him. We are surprised where he dwells, how his speech is contradicted by his actions and his discourses claiming knowledge uncover depths of ignorance. The incompetence of his understanding declares itself and unfortunately, we learn the reach of his folly goes far beyond himself. In contrast, we quietly (if attentive) learn much about wisdom that includes piety and patience and how helpful wisdom can be in meeting the challenging perplexities of life.

The preacher's change as we listen is rather startling, since he actually seems openly desirous to be more helpful. It is not easy to forget how he constantly took away meaning from everything in life we thought was meaningful. You wonder if has seen something above the sun?

10:1 *"Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour."*

We are still learning how wisdom is so easily thwarted continuing the words of 9:17,18. The march of wisdom and its strength must be carefully guarded, because one slip or misstep will be so noticed, leading to discussions that causes men to overlook the benefit and wondrous glory of the whole procession. This vividness of the destruction of folly by one thoughtless and wrong action is powerfully brought to our mind. The dead fly found ensnared in the vast container of precious ointment brings ruination. History is filled with men of reputation being taken down from great prominence by one unwise decision. The effort to build compared with the ease to destroy is no secret. How much good can be forgotten due to one small incident without wisdom? How small an odor can disrupt the fragrance of a room full of flowers? Many a person from the bible can answer this question, such as Aaron, Moses, Esau and even King David. Consistency is the jewel to preventing wisdom from being rudely and too quickly thrown aside.

10:2-3 *"A wise man's heart is at his right hand; but a fool's heart at his left. ³Yea also, when he that is a fool walketh by the way, his wisdom faileth him, and he saith to every one that he is a fool."*

The right hand symbolizes what is right and powerful, while the left hand depicts what is wrong and morally repugnant. "A wise man's heart leads him to do right, and a fool's heart leads him to do evil (Waddey quoting Taylor)". This picture carries

through the bible and we recall the final judgment revealed in the NT. Matt 25:33 *"And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left."* We receive here a general introduction to folly and will learn more about him in the verses to come. Now, folly will put itself on display without intending to do so. We learn the problem of folly begins from within (the heart) and folly would probably be the last to realize it has a heart problem. Mark Twain's comment lends itself well at this point "It is better to keep your mouth shut and appear stupid, then to open it and remove all doubt." Some credit the following wording to Abraham Lincoln. "It is better to remain silent and be thought a fool, than to speak up and remove all doubt." Proverbs 17:28 gives the flip side.

Pro 17:28 *"Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding."*

There is a reason for this for in Proverbs 17:7a it reads,

"Excellent speech becometh not a fool..." and in Pro 18:6-7 *"A fool's lips enter into contention, and his mouth calleth for strokes. ⁷A fool's mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul."*

10:4-7 *"If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place; for yielding pacifieth great offences. ⁵There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, as an error which proceedeth from the ruler: ⁶Folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in low place. ⁷I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth."*

Solomon surely during his reign met many an unqualified government appointee, while knowing of other men far more qualified. You would expect those in places of authority would manifest wisdom in their behavior and decisions, but what is seen under the sun reveals otherwise. It is seen under the sun the ruler's behavior can be improper to his servants and with unwise choices unfitted people are placed in positions they cannot fulfill. When the anger of the ruler falls upon you be calm and not quick to reprove. Remember Pro 15:1 *"A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger."* Think before you act, when you have fallen prey to the king's anger for pride and principle are easily confused and remember, who knows how long are the days of the king? It is not uncommon under the sun for a ruler to make unwise choices, thus appointing unfit people in places of position. This leads to hearing wrong counsel, to inefficiency and failure, which in turn destroys the ruler's reputation. It would be difficult to find a more classic example of this than Solomon's son Rehoboam.

1Ki 12:8-11 *"But he forsook the counsel of the old men, which they had given him, and consulted with the young men that were grown up with him, and which stood before him: ⁹And he said unto them, What counsel give ye that we may answer this people, who have spoken to me, saying, Make the yoke which thy father did put upon us lighter? ¹⁰And the young men that were grown up with him spake unto him, saying, Thus shalt thou speak unto this people that spake unto thee, saying, Thy father made our yoke heavy, but make thou it lighter unto us; thus shalt thou say unto them, My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins. ¹¹And now whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions."*

We learn in life far too soon (maybe we should say not soon enough) that quite often those in positions of responsibility are often irresponsible in sundry ways. This is a

lesson that can be learned from the Johnstown flood. (David McCullough book The Johnstown Flood). How often have the events that are now history with all of its horrors been charted in the cloak room before they sat down with the throne? (Illustrations are many – Diamonds, Gold and War, M. Meredith).

- 10:8-11 *"He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him. ⁹Whoso removeth stones shall be hurt therewith; and he that cleaveth wood shall be endangered thereby. ¹⁰If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength: but wisdom is profitable to direct. ¹¹Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment; and a babbler is no better."*

We are suddenly treated to a rash of proverbs that those of folly merrily go on their way ignoring and violating. Folly may say, "It is no fool." But we are reminded Jesus taught by their fruits ye shall know them. While these proverbs raise the flag of caution, the fool simply rushes in without reflection of the end results of his behavior. How many of the woes of life are self-inflicted? A classic example of falling into your own trap is Haman or should we say 'hanging from your own rope' (Esther 7:9,10; 9:24,25). Look before you leap is a mere whisper to those of folly. Furthermore, it is very likely he never will discern why things are now as they are and will only pursue a course leading to more folly. Whether the preacher is giving advice for how the wise should respond to the lack of wisdom in high places or simply giving general counsel to cope with life under the sun the proverbs are worthy of our attention. Ponder them and think how to express each one in your own words. It is worthy of reflection that folly in the scriptures is not a mere matter of one being a dullard, but is spoken of in terms of being wicked. These proverbs teach, prepare for the task before you begin and use wisdom to save strength.

- 10:12-15 *"The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious; but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself. ¹³The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness: and the end of his talk is mischievous madness. ¹⁴A fool also is full of words: a man cannot tell what shall be; and what shall be after him, who can tell him? ¹⁵The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city."*

We continue to learn more details about the profiling of a fool, lest we be foolish. We are not surprised that a contrast in speech of the wise and the fool would be given consideration for the scriptures speak often of the tongue and its power for good and evil. One of the greatest and true indices of a man's self-control and character is his speech (Ja. 3:3-13). Words from the wise are building and uplifting (do we not hear the echoes of the Master – Lu. 4:22), but the words of the fool tend to self-destruction and erosion of the spirit to the listeners. NT. words come to mind when we think of the gracious speech of the wise.

Col 4:6 *"Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man."*

The words that come out of the fool uncover what is within and the link between the two should not be ignored. There is one thing the fool never lacks for, and that is words, but in truth he doesn't understand what has been or what will be no matter how long he talks. The many words of the foolish leave no opportunity to hear the revealed word of God. Hence, we end up with evil, as mentally and morally the fool relies upon himself without the revealed will of heaven. What will become of a

culture immersed in the under the sun view of life founded on the insights of the natural man without the aid of the word of God and faith therein? There will be wicked madness. The preacher sought to understand this in *Ecc 7:25* *"I applied mine heart to know, and to search, and to seek out wisdom, and the reason of things, and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness:..."*. Could we say the preacher has discovered it in the words of chapter 10 to a large degree?

The practice of *Ja. 1:19* will not be found in any village called Folly. We also recall

Ecc 5:1-2 *"Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. 2 Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few."*

Folly's overabundance of words blows his disguise. There is one thing you can count on and that is a fool will gladly announce his presence. When you determine to attempt to aid a fool in his understanding, you should consider the following. He will respond with many words to tell you what he knows and in doing so will reveal what he doesn't know, as he fully convinces himself of what he knows (*Mt. 12:34-37*). It is only a fool that has the ability to make a simple thing difficult and the folly of the ungodly to clutter the straight and narrow path. The path home is well lighted, but don't try to show it to the fool, for he cannot see it due to the darkness of his folly.

Isa 35:8 *"And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein (wander on it)."*

It is well to remember when you light a lantern for a fool his words always blows it out before you get the globe down.

10:16-20 *"Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning! ¹⁷Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness! ¹⁸By much slothfulness the building decayeth; and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through. ¹⁹A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry: but money answereth all things. ²⁰Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter."*

The tentacles of folly and the influence of wisdom are critical to the life of a nation, as one brings woe and the other brings blessing. The preacher notes the dire consequences in the land when the immature are put in authority and when priorities of personal pleasure are placed before necessary duties regarding the welfare of the people. When positions are rightfully filled (not servants upon horses and princes walking) and behaviors are pursued to enable the fulfillment of responsibilities (eat in due season, for strength) the land will be blessed. Behavior should be the result of self-control, not the result of self-indulgence (thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness!).

The outcome of neglect can only be neglected so long, for eventually what has not been sown will be known in the harvest. While it is well recognized one shall reap what he sows, it is often overlooked what is not sown that should have been sown also brings a crop. Whether the reference to the house is alluding to the previous thoughts on a nation or to individual behavior doesn't dull or change the lesson except in magnitude.

The nineteenth verse is difficult to discern. Does the behaviors speak of how the conditions of the broken down house came into existence by folly or is it contrasting the fruitful results of the life of wisdom? It would seem the attitude of those living under the sun and taking no care for their responsibilities is expressed in verse 19. They flaunt themselves in extravagance and see such as the height of life. Kidner views verse 18 and 19 as a contrast between a decadent government and a responsible government. Finally, in these times of vexation due to folly in high places be mindful of the need of restraint in what you voice in the presence of others. Typically, we do not need to be reminded to be careful what we say in the presence of our enemies, but it might be well to be reminded think twice about your words before family (thy bedchamber) and friends. Don't be embracing thoughts of evil against those in high places, lest the tongue slips and even the lightest of words be turned against you. The world is full of ears (all ears) and the powerful always have friends desiring more and more favor with them. This favor is often pursued by repeating the words of others in the most malignant manner possible. There is great wisdom in ever being conscious there is hardly a private word that ever remains private (thanks to family and friends). There is another reason for ever weighing our words and that is God has no need of hearing aids. It is better to be listening for little birds, than little birds listening to you. Isn't it true when the youngster is amazed how we found out that we openly reveal a little bird told us? The kings of OT days weren't questioned (Ecc. 8:3,4), so guard your words, for you do remember don't you, it is better to be a living dog than a dead lion?

Ecclesiastes Chapter 11

The preacher evidently considers he has made his point that life under the sun (man living only by his natural ability and understanding) is meaningless, so he brings attention to living a life that is launched and sustained by faith. The preacher previously with some subtlety revealed that life is meaningless without faith founded on the revealed will of God (above the sun in contrast to under the sun). The natural man (under the sun) cannot produce reason to confirm that all of his successes in wisdom, wealth, position, power and pleasure escape the vanity of life and its meaninglessness. The preacher's 'trump card' was played from time to time and could not be denied. There is one event that happens unto all men and that is death. Secondly, one's death removes him from the affairs of this earth. Furthermore, to put 'salt in the wound' the preacher observes what can the dead actually do in controlling the hands that will receive the portion he strenuously labored for with wisdom? It could easily fall into the hands of the slothful or the foolish, rather than the deserving.

The preacher had been rather subtle or low key in this matter of living by faith due to his strategy of presentation. He saw it was highly necessary to make men see the vanity of life under the sun, which he learned the hard way from his own life. He realized he had to make men see the worthlessness, the vanity of their own endeavors to make life meaningful. He had to press their efforts, self-interests and self-elevated rewards to show them such was absolutely worthless in answering, "why am I here?" He had to break through the natural man's accumulation, his cultural perspective of meaningful life. He pressed the point to where men would consider him obnoxious and they would cringe and say, "stop, stop." Why did he do this? He realized from what he observed and what he experienced under the sun, until he could make man see the meaningless of their life under the sun, they would never turn and accept the revealed word of God. It takes the realization of hopelessness in one's own life style to escape the meaninglessness of life that makes one turn and seek the revealed will of God and in turn find the meaning of life. The purpose of life and meaningfulness of life can only be found by faith founded on the truth from above the sun and engaging a hope that permits one to enjoy what God has approved (Ecc.9:7-10). This is the only escape from the unpredictability of life and to handle adversity, when it knocks on your door without warning in the midst of a sunny day.

The preacher now recommends that by faith one can enjoy the portion of life given by God and escape the nagging question, "Why am I here?" The life lived by faith founded on the revealed will of God can remove the vanity of life, even though death, unpredictability and the fact that wisdom (above the sun) (1 Cor. 2:4-8) is given little esteem in the eyes of men. The truth is quite often even the wisdom of man that could save misery in life under the sun is ignored. While the preacher does not deny the reality of the previous mentioned hardships, he says by faith we can go forward in life with vigor and hope. Therefore, he tells how to pursue the venture of faith.

11:1-6 Living a life launched by faith. We see the life of faith immediately urges an open hand of benevolence. The wise and faithful steward realizes the portion God has extended to him is bountiful. Our portion to enjoy as God's gift is never meant to simply be heaped upon ourselves.

Eph. 4:28 "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth."

11:7-10 Living a life sustained by faith involves light from above and brings joy in the midst of darkness. Therefore, don't waste the days of strength, but in your days of strength be mindful to guide your steps by the will of God for judgment belongeth to the Lord, who is righteous.

Psa 119:9 *"Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word".*

Ecclesiastes Chapter 12

As we have seen in chapter eleven the preacher has fully come out of his closet to announce meaningful life can only be found in living by faith. Now, he declares the urgency to live by faith while your days permit, for that period of time is not lengthy due to the very nature of your strength.

Ecc 12:1 "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them...."

The preacher then launches into one of the most moving pictures of aging that has ever graced the eyes of men in word. Again, the preacher does as he has done so many times in the book note that death stakes its claim. But now there is a new twist in the end curled to strike stronger than before. While death lays claim to the end of life under the sun, the constant observation under the sun that the death of the beast and man is the same is now challenged.

The urgency to act while there is pleasure in your days bring the echoes of the Master of masters urging by parable don't delay and plainly points out the night cometh when no man can work. The preacher gets right to the point; your days of pleasure (strength) are limited. We hear the Psalmist say,

"The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.

¹¹Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath. ¹²So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom (Psa. 90:10-12)".

The Psalmist understands the race against the days when we would not have pleasure in them.

Psa 71:18 Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come."

A few verses earlier he said,

"Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth (Ps.71:9)".

12:1-8 The preacher declares urgency in the life of faith and vividly reveals why. The days of pleasure and strength are frequently the mere vestibule to one's life. Job in one of his great laments viewed his days as swifter than a weaver's shuttle and the NT. chimed in millenniums later that one's life is like a vapor.

We find the words of the preacher so real, so more true to life than anything man conjures about us. It is irrevocably ordained, the time of our earthly body is limited. This vanity cannot be escaped, but the matured spirit sees there is a time when we should be replaced and this is best. Tennyson penned, "Old men must die; or the world would grow moldy, would only breed the past again". There is a time to leave the stage and old age is the preparation for the departure. This preparatory period makes the departure more palatable for the aged and for those the world has been left in their trust. This is not a plea for inactivity and zest of life while aging, or to surrender before the grasp of death is firm, but it is a voice against useless vanities to fend off the ordained limitations of life. The preacher as painful as his exposure was from time to time shook us into the reality of things that are and must be, especially the limits of the earthly house and what should be done and not done. Montaigne wrote, "Your death is a part of the order of the universe, tis a part of the life of the world...tis the condition of your creation". The bible reader simply adds one footnote, our death is not a part of the order of creation, but what man did after

creation and then, what God did to save man from himself. We see the journey of man to his 'long home' involves giving "... place to others, as others have given place to you." The Psalmist interrupts us again, for he said teach us to number our days, for our days are not many and in essence, it is not the length of days that counts, but the use of the days you have been given. It is true there are those who have had length of days, but lived little and those who have had shortened day, but lived much. But remember to 'live much', one needs to fear God and keep his commandments. 'Living much' as defined by under the sun is vanity of vanities and vexation of the spirit and ignores the preacher's final words regarding a judgment to come.

- 12:9-14 This closing section is frequently spoken of as the epilogue, but there is much gleaning to be done here. The preacher reviews his methodology for his conclusion and gives staunch evidence why his conclusion should not be criticized by the gainsayer. His conclusion to the whole matter is clearly stated and without apology. The preacher well knows how he approached the subject regarding the meaning and purpose of life, so he goes to great pains to make his conclusion brief and clear. Some will still try to pervert his previous words revealing the vanity of life under the sun and attempt to make his statements applicable to what he never intended. It was indeed vain for the preacher to think he could prevent such from happening, (Of course, in all fairness he never had opportunity to read Kipling's poem 'IF'). The clarity of his conclusion was to bring man to discern without the revealed will of heaven man could never answer the sore travail God had given to the sons of men to be exercised thereby under the sun.

The preacher in chapter 11 has told us to live an active life in the fear of God and in this 12th chapter he continues to emphasize this message. His exhortation for the young to act in their youth is powerfully and uniquely supported by casting a vivid eye on the future, as age places its weighty, non-resistible hand upon all of humankind. It is true all men die, but many of them do not die from diseases (as men say), but simply old age. Finally, our life upon the face of this earth ceases and we are now done with this earth and its relationships. Unfortunately, the materialist here tries to extend those verses revealing death severs us from earthly doings to make a statement about that after death man goes out of existence. The preacher responds by saying don't walk in the path of the fool; look at the context and read the rest of the story. How does one return unto the fountain of life and enter into non-existence?

The preacher gives us the most wondrous poetic vision of age that has ever graced the written page by inspired or uninspired man. The metaphors of descending storm, a dilapidated house and furniture in shambles are graphically used to make us observe old age without quickly turning away. Then, pondering the fragility of life and death he echoes his opening theme vanity of vanities. His case that life under the sun leaves us nothing to keep has been proven, but also an answer to such vanity has been given. Remember your Creator for there is something beyond the sun. Contextually, we are given the way of escape from vanity of vanities under the sun. There is more to this life than just man's observations, but there is a revealed God. You are now alive and it is your time to respond to the revealed God and his commandments for his glory, your welfare and the welfare of your fellow man.

Finally, he notes the methodology behind his writing (an argument for not rejecting his conclusion) and gives his conclusion. The conclusion is underlined by pointing out that nothing shall escape the judgment of God. Truly, God is mindful of man's uniqueness (Ps. 8). Man was given a hand to do and a will to determine what that hand would reach and what that hand would grasp. Unfortunately, in doing so, he often forgot to remember the Maker of the hand and the Giver of will. Hence, the vanity of vanities of earthly life. Furthermore, in the end of your earthly life (poetically, the forty years given to see what you would do, the probation period, for he is gracious) you will be asked in judgment how responsible were you with the hand and will I permitted you? We both know it was given to you for good and not evil. Therefore, being a righteous Judge, who has already extended grace to you in life, must now in righteousness make all things right.

Thus, understand and heed the words of

Ecc 11:9-10 *"Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.*

¹⁰Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity." Also,

Ecc 12:13-14 *"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. 14 For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."*

We close the preacher's book for a bit (for people of faith will need to open it from time to time to remind them to live by faith in days of good or evil), but as we do so, we say to him, you have properly challenged us. Yes, we still struggle to capture the essence of a number of verses written to make us understand what makes life meaningful. But, you have made the big picture clear, so we know how to live under the sun. Fear God and keep his commandments for there is life beyond the grave. We now know the death of man and beast are not the same and we do know that death is no longer the vanities of vanity (Rom.8:20), for in Jesus the veil has been removed. What you hinted of in the shadows has been brought to the light and found true.

2Ti 1:8-10 *Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; ⁹Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, ¹⁰But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel:....*

This, we have learned not by the winging of a bird we could not identify, but by the words of an apostle of Jesus Christ moved by the Holy Spirit.

In fact, we have record that Jesus was seen of many witnesses, as the resurrected Christ.

1Co 15:4-8 KJV *"And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: ⁵And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: ⁶After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. ⁷After that, he was seen of*

James; then of all the apostles. ⁸And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time."

Preacher (you are Solomon aren't you), we are indeed hopeful the book of Ecclesiastes is your words of repentance that reveals your reckoning that led you back to the wisdom of God rather than living under the sun (the wisdom of the natural man) and have your confession it was vanity of vanities to depart from the living God.

Man's Approach to Make Life Meaningful

Ecc 2:1-3, 10
Ecc 6:8-9
Ecc 7:2,7
Human desire with no end.
Human frivolity hides reality.



Ecc 2:4, 10-11, 19-21
Ecc 4:4, 13-16
Ecc 8:10-14

Earthly fame - fleeting and sure to be taken by another.
Human labor - who gains from the successful laborer?
Human awards - tarnish and often wrongly presented

Earthly Accomplishment

Sensual Pleasure

Pleasure



Religious Ritual

Ecc 5:1-2
Human religious ritual - what are religious outward expressions without a submissive heart?



Ecc 2:24-26

Ecc 3:11-15,22

Ecc 5:18-20

Ecc 7:14

Ecc 8:15

Ecc 9:7-11

Ecc 11:9-10

Ecc 12:1,13,14

Eternity

Wisdom



Ecc 1:12-18
Ecc 2:15-16
Human wisdom - what is the end of the wise man?

Wisdom Philosophy to fill your mind.
Pleasure Hedonism to fill your body.
Wealth & Power Materialism to fill your pockets.
Religious Ritual Outward forms to fill or appease your conscience.

Wealth

Position

Control or Power



Ecc 2:7-8
Ecc 4:7-8
Ecc 5:10-13
Ecc 6:1-6

Human wealth - Possessions but for when? Gain, but for what? When is enough, enough for those that have?



Ecc 4:4,13-16
Human rivalry - how is one's success viewed by those living under the sun?

Enjoyment: Receiving God's Portion with Faith (Escaping the Vanity of Life 'Under the Sun')

The rays from above the sun occasionally had beamed through the shadows under the sun, as one followed the words of the preacher through the book. But, as evidently planned, the preacher permits the full shaft of light from heaven (God's Word) to break through and give the conclusion to the whole of man in this life. The primary vanities of life, such as death, unpredictability of events and man's limited wisdom are not denied as hovering clouds over earthly life, but are driven away by a life of faith founded on, "Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil (Ecc 12:13-14)."

*Ecclesiastes 2:24-26 ²⁴ There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul **enjoy** good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God. ²⁵ For who can eat, or who else can hasten hereunto, more than I? ²⁶ For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and **joy**: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit.*

*Ecclesiastes 3:12-15 ¹² I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to **rejoice**, and to do good in his life. ¹³ And also that every man should eat and drink, and **enjoy** the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God. ¹⁴ I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him. ¹⁵ That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past.*

*Ecclesiastes 3:22 ²² Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better, than that a man should **rejoice** in his own works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?*

*Ecclesiastes 5:18-20 ¹⁸ Behold that which I have seen: it is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to **enjoy** the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for it is his portion. ¹⁹ Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to **rejoice** in his labour. ²⁰ For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answereth him in the **joy** of his heart.*

*Ecclesiastes 7:14 ¹⁴ In the day of prosperity be **joyful**, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him.*

*Ecclesiastes 8:15 ¹⁵ Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be **merry**: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun.*

The preacher makes a strong statement at this point for the life of faith. Previously, he has given somewhat shaded advice for the life he now forcefully commends. He says do this,

because this is what God has approved for you to do. His previous lack of such a forceful statement is due to the nature of how the preacher had been developing his message.

*Ecclesiastes 9:7-11 ⁷ Go thy way, eat thy bread with **joy**, and drink thy wine with a **merry** heart; for God now accepteth thy works. ⁸ Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. ⁹ Live **joyfully** with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun. ¹⁰ Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest. ¹¹ I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.*

*Ecclesiastes 11:9-10 ⁹ Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things **God will bring thee into judgment**. ¹⁰ Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity.*

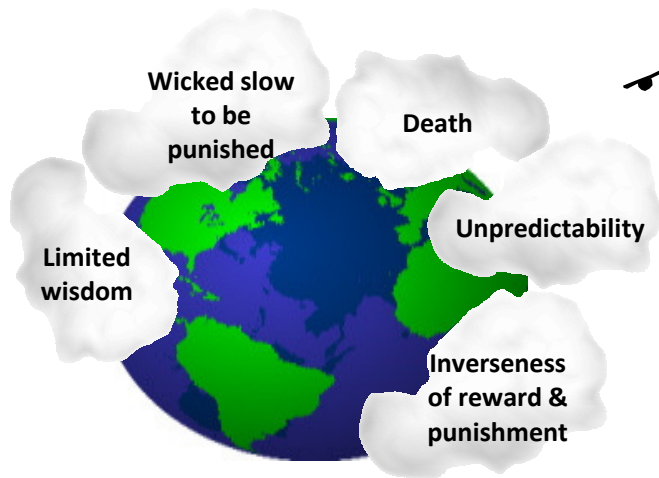
*Ecclesiastes 12:1 ¹ **Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth**, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them;*

*Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 ¹³ Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: **Fear God, and keep his commandments**: for this is the whole duty of man. ¹⁴ **For God shall bring every work into judgment**, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.*

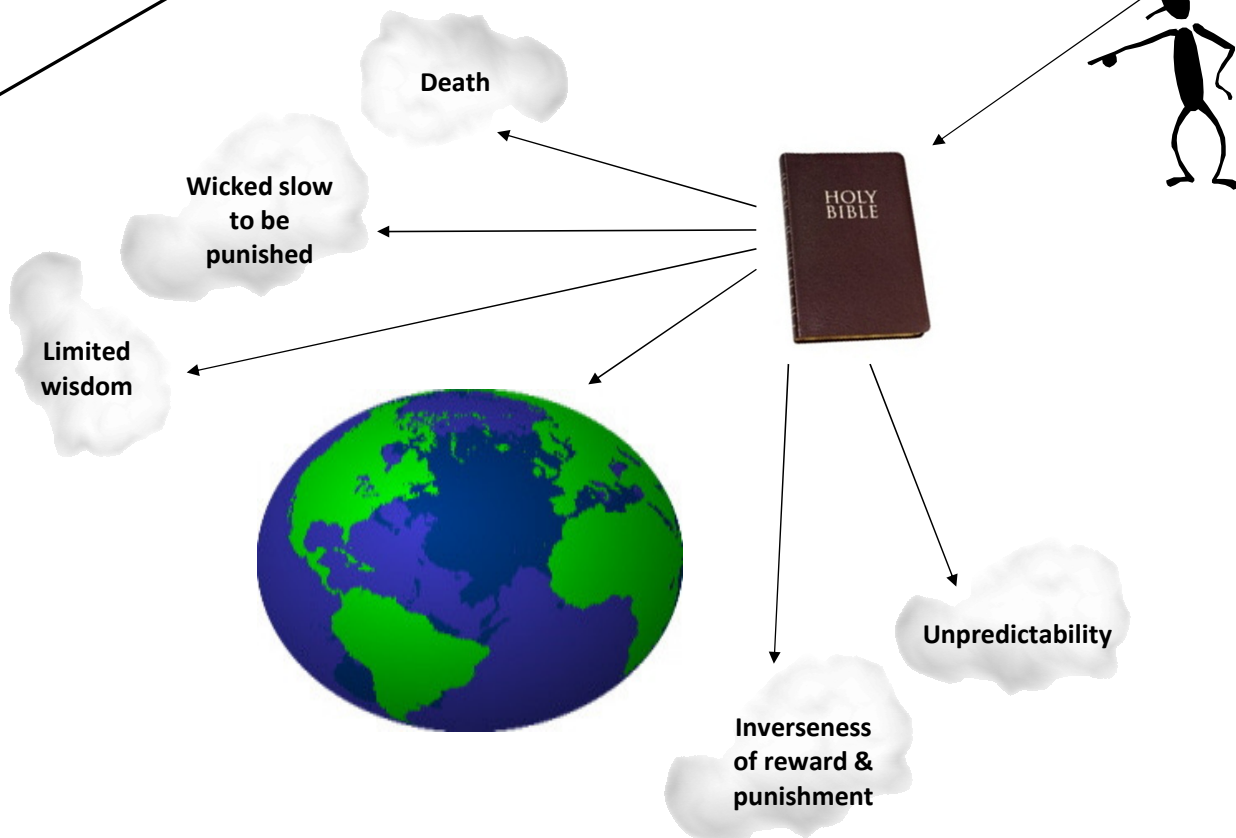
****We need to remember that eat, drink and be merry or to enjoy your portion by the preacher is not an invitation to hedonism in a number of verses. We need to remember that crooked ways and evil days is not always an indication of morally wicked days, but in a number of verses simply a reference to adversity. We need to remember that adversity and punishment are not necessarily synonymous terms, as some seem to think.**

The Hovering Issues of This Life

This is why the Preacher says this life is
"vanity of vanities."



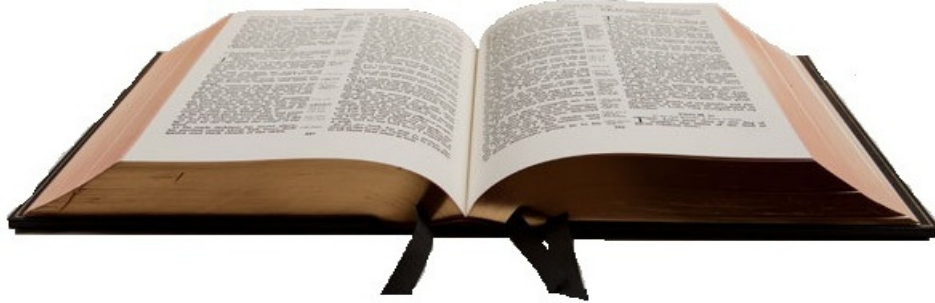
This is why the Preacher says
this life is "profitable" and
"enjoy your portion."



Goads and Nails

Ecclesiastes 12:11

The words of the wise are as **goads**, and as **nails** fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd.



*To prod.
Negatives.
Takes away your security.
"Under the sun."*



*To fasten.
Positives.
Gives you security.
Above the sun.*

Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

Life under the sun: chaos without progress.

Ecclesiastes 1:12-18

Human wisdom leaves questions.

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

Wealth and pleasure do NOT satiate. Instead of satisfaction there is the pursuit of just one more dollar; just one more fix.

Ecclesiastes 2:24-26

God gives us a portion that satisfies life's meaning when directed by faith.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

Life is filled with unpredictability, but God's providential hand brings all to its proper end.

The above examples do not comprise an exhaustive list of all of the "goads" and "nails" found in Ecclesiastes, but they represent a few examples to demonstrate the concept.

Theme and Presentation Method

When we consider the theme of the book of Ecclesiastes we could say it is presented as a double theme. There are few books that globally grab the fundamental theme of the bible more by the 'cuff of the neck' than the book of Ecclesiastes. Ryken said it well, "...that life lived by purely earthly or human values, without faith in God and supernatural values is meaningless and futile (WOD, p.320).

The key to unlocking and pursuing this theme is **under the sun = under heaven**. This phrase will present itself some thirty times in the book. This phrase is critical in understanding the words of the writer and to ignore it is to toss the context of a statement to the wind. When the writer speaks of 'under the sun' he is speaking of a life lived by purely earthly standards and of human perceptions unaided by the word of God or faith. The lens of perception of the 'under the sun' man have been purely ground and formed by man's cultural perspective without the input of the word of God, which must come from above the sun. Under the sun is living by the enticing words of man's wisdom; a faith that stands on the wisdom of man and is simply the wisdom of this world. It is void of reckoning founded upon divine revelation.

1 Corinthians 2:4-6 "And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: ⁵That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. ⁶Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought:"

Under the sun conveys being earth bound and cut off from supernatural values. The phrase under the sun speaks of human lives and viewpoints that have no awareness with what is above the sun. This does not mean they deny the existence of God, but they don't know God as revealed in his word.

How does the writer set out to accomplish his goal?

Ecc 1:12-13 "I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. ¹³And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith."

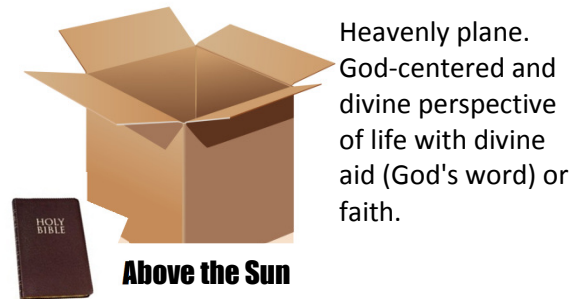
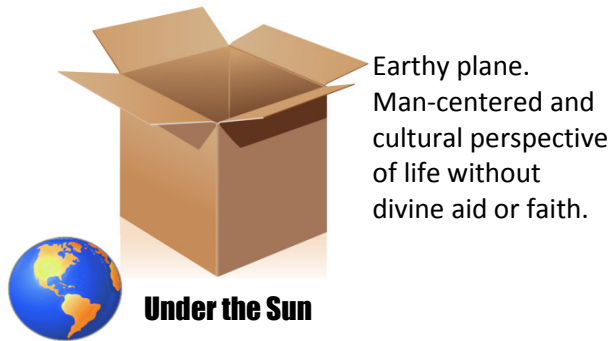
Furthermore, we know his findings were not haphazardly reported. He wrote

Ecclesiastes 12:9-10 "And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs. ¹⁰The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth."

Ryken says it well. "He demonstrates at length the inadequacy of any world view other than a God-centered one, and he combines with this demonstration a series of affirmations of an alternate world view (WOD, p.320)." What does this mean for the reader? It means we approach the individual passages and ask our self – where do I place this passage?

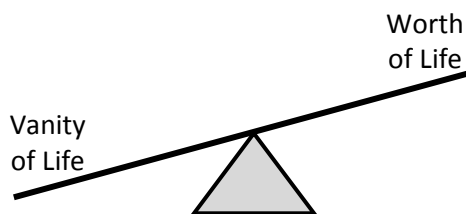
What we do is to visualize two boxes. The one box will be labeled 'under the sun' and the other box will be labeled 'above the sun'. We use the phrase 'above the sun' to convey the aid of divine revelation and faith founded upon that revelation (Rom.10:17), because where is the origin of God's revelation? We have 'under the sun' in direct contrast to convey human reasoning without the aid of divine revelation. Now, let us take the various statements by the writer and

decide which box they go into. The negative statements will go into the 'under the sun' box and the positive statements will go in the 'above the sun' box.

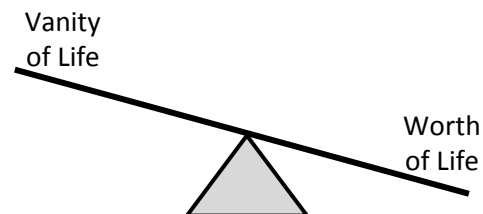


If we are going to take each passage as being the author's concluded position, we are going to end up with a whole series of meaningless, contradictory statements. What the writer is doing is making us face two sets of statements. The one view depicts life is meaningless (under the sun) and the other view depicts life is meaningful (above the sun). Let us illustrate by visualizing vanity (meaningless) and profitable (meaningful) on a teeter-totter.

The Preacher says, "*Vanity!*"



The Preacher says, "*Profitable!*"



We are faced with two sets of statements:

Group One: Life is meaningless (Nothing lasting –Unprofitable now and hereafter);

Group Two: Life is meaningful (Beneficial –Lasting-Extolled).

What is the writer doing? There is a contrast in opposites and we can classify them under the two categories. They are 'under the sun' and 'above the sun'.

Since the writing is dialectical the negative view of life with its despair and futility is not to be taken as the writer's final view of when he is speaking of life under the sun. What is commonly missed is this is not the writer's final view of life, but the futility of life under the sun, which is in contrast to those who consider God's word about life (above the sun). We do not have to wait to the very concluding two verses of the book to learn this is true, as many seem to think.

For example;

Ecclesiastes 2:24-26 "There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God. ²⁵For who can eat, or who else can hasten hereunto, more than I? ²⁶For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit."

We will see the writer will break out briefly from time to time in praise for the God-centered life (the above the sun view).

What the reader has to do in this book is to learn to get into step and realize the cadence will change from time to time. At one point in time the 'drill sergeant' is marching to the cadence of 'under the sun' and then at other times to the cadence 'above the sun.' The preacher, as he speaks presents the futility of the pursuits of life on earth and then, he follows with an affirmation of life pursuits and the listener must fall into this pattern. The goal in reading would be to tabulate the concisely clear passages that view life as vain and negative and the passages that view life as profitable and positive. This pursuit will uncover some verses that are ambiguous, but we would simply try to follow the rule of having the unclear passages bow to the clear passages.

As noted earlier, the taking of each passage as the writer's settled conclusion would result in a "...meaningless collection of contradictory statements". A satisfactory understanding of the book is to discover the harmony of the book by adequately explaining verses on the one hand that declare life meaningless and on the other hand verses that extol life. This pattern structure alerts us to how we shall read the book.

Why the Mingled Pattern?

What could be more realistic to how human experience and the battle of faithfulness knocks on our door? Our sojourn is of a mixed nature, one kind of experience, then another. The spiritual pursuit, the daily battles and tensions are lived out in our lives sometimes within a day, sometimes within a week, a month, a year or a span of years. This is really the way life comes at us and our faithfulness is challenged or settled.

The preacher challenges the reader with this approach and calls for a high degree of alertness. We must watch this chap closely, for what is he going to say next? We are pulled into a vigorous exchange, as the two viewpoints face off on the question is life worth living? Ryken wrote of this method: "The dialectical pattern of opposites is a strategy of highlighting: the glory of a God-centered life stands out all the more brightly for having been contrasted to it gloomy opposite (WOD, p.321)."

The writer is simply not taking us through his mood changes, he isn't demonstrating being bipolar or having his medication schedule confused, but how one's perspective of life is, when it is viewed without divine aid or with divine aid. We believe to miss this last sentence, is to miss the heartbeat of the preacher and the book of Ecclesiastes. The view of life without divine aid or with divine aid is drastic, as different as light and darkness. The contrasting views are presented like a story, a seeking journey, a search for an answer to the gnawing question why am I here?

The preacher attempts to point out the labyrinth of dead ends men typically pursue to get through the maze of life and convince themselves life is meaningful. This is done with the hope one will stay on the path that gives life meaning now and forever more. The ideal is to get on the path early that makes life meaningful without harmful delays and wasted year, for one's years of strength are soon to pass.

The preacher gives samples that human wisdom (culture) usually prescribes for satisfaction of life, but they are revealed to be subtle deceivers. He points out money, sex, work, success, material things, sensuality and control, as life rolls and roars along with its acquiring and commercial spirit does not solve the problem of meaningfulness. One has to bring the portions of earthly life permitted by God under control through faith by understanding the truth of God that comes from above the sun to grasp meaningful life.

The preacher states boldly and without contradiction is any man better qualified to point out the truth about life and its meaning than himself, for what human experience and opportunity wasn't at his beckoning? The words of the preacher are biting satire of the world's pursuit of things and prestige, which will never satisfy. While, the early parts of the book are extremely severe in pointing out the vanity of life, don't overlook the preacher's brief words in the early goings regarding the meaningful life style. They are typically overlooked and this can easily distort the understanding of the preacher.

The Pattern: Roughly Speaking Goads and Nail

A Time to Break Down and a Time to Build Up

Negatives – Take Away Your Security Positive – Give you security

Under the Sun

Above the Sun

Negative: Let me tell you in my introduction life is vanity. The things you seek are fleeting, like chasing the wind. You will tire of the word vanity in this book, for it will rudely remind you of unanswered restlessness (1:1-3).

Negative: Life when observed over generations will manifest itself, as a series of meaningless cycle under the sun. The pursuits of the generations of men with all of their magnified effort and seemingly good motivation I observed was simply rewarded with a trophy of weariness. This disturbing fact that life's pursuit under the sun did not end in meaningfulness or satisfaction aroused my curiosity. Therefore, I thought I shall seek out and answer what it takes to constitute meaningful life (1:4-11).

Negative: The typical (popular) routes to satisfaction suggested under the sun were found misleading and simply led to dead ends, rather than meaning and satisfaction.

- a) Negative: Human wisdom seemed promising, but the futility of human wisdom manifested itself in being too restricted (unable) to give the final answer to the meaningfulness of life. Oh, human wisdom has some merit, but it couldn't put to rest the final answer to the question why I am (1:12-18).
- b) Negative: We considered wealth and pleasure as the road, so we drank deep and encompassed much for we had opportunity to do so more than others. We were disappointed, because we soon learned that no matter how many things we possessed or the height of experiencing pleasure the appetite wasn't satiated. (Plainly speaking when does addiction ever wave the white flag and say enough)? There was the need for more, so wealth and pleasure are deceivers in promising meaningfulness of life (2:1-11).

- c) Negative: We saw a glimmer of meaningfulness in achievement (the feelings, the prestige, the awards), but the power of achievement to deliver satisfaction began to disappear when someone had the nerve to ask how permanent is one's achievements? The pursuit of meaningfulness in life was constantly irritated due to the impossibility of ignoring life ends in death. When you die and you will die, who is going to receive the benefits of your achievements (2:12-17)? Observation can't be denied that those living under the sun are ever squabbling over who gets what?
- d) Negative: We found the role of work in our life didn't bring the satisfaction it should have brought. Work seems to simply provoke the need for more work and the real problem was, who was going to enjoy the fruits of our labor? We were not naïve, for it was clear our works would be left to those after us. The annoyance was, we actually couldn't control whether our labor would fall into the hands of the wise or the hands of a fool. This nagging reality is enough to simply throw skillful hands up into the air (2:18-23).

Positive: These unwelcome discoveries regarding the dead ends of man's effort to embrace a meaningful life were overcome by help from a source beyond man's reasoning. We discovered the quest for meaning to human life can be satisfied (2:24-3:22).

- a) Life when viewed as a gift from God can be enjoyed and in fact, should be. It is here that meaningfulness comes to light (2:24-26).
- b) Time and its events are orderly from a human perspective. It is true man doesn't control every happening of life, but this doesn't mean seedtime and harvest time are totally thrown to the wind. The uncertainty of events often leads men to foolish answers under the sun from endless despair, drowning oneself in senseless pleasures or thinking asceticism will put us beyond the folly of men. The unpredictability is to be accepted and the overall order of the providential hand permitting times that are good and times that are evil is to be received as a part of earthly life due to its nature (3:1-8).
- c) When we look beyond the sun we are permitted to learn of time from God's perspective and this should color our human view of a time for everything, so we are not tempted to surrender to the answers of those living under the sun. The power of verse 11 that God has made everything beautiful in his time lends itself to us to enjoy and accept the sway of time, as it befalls us. The answer of the things that befall us are placed in the hands of God and gives us a disposition to go forward rather than a disposition of frustration and retreat (3:9-22). [[There is not a greater lyric on time ever been penned]].

Negative: Society is viewed with an eye discerning some of the groups that constitute society and how few find meaning in the spectrum of activities they include. There are people so oppressed and so helpless, it would appear death would be better. Many times, those who strive and have achieved much are rewarded with envy from their fellows rather than praise. How many find no quietness to life due to being over ambitious and how many destroy themselves due to no ambition at all? How few have the self-control to capture quietness of life? The price of money is far too expensive for those who pursue it without end. The futility of pursuing money to find satisfaction is satirically verbalized (4:1-6).

Positive: The benefit of companionship in life is highly commended to help offset the mixture of good and evil that befalls us. Companionship is salve for the raw chapping that life brings with the rubbing of adversity, while unity makes the feeble strong (4:9-12).

Negative: There is one thing you can count on and that is, you can't count on the masses. They are so fickle, so don't be driven by their applause. Don't be lifted up by the voice of the crowd, for their heroes today are their goats of tomorrow. What is a better illustration of this than the voice of the crowd in the last week of Jesus' life on earth? They shouted praise for him as a political Messiah, but when they saw he was not a political Messiah they shouted condemnation (4:13-16).

Negative/Positive or Positive /Negative: We are uncertain whether the preacher is voicing a protest against ritualistic worship without submissiveness of heart (under the sun) or whether he is commending true worship in escaping the futility of life (above the sun). It is foolish to commit oneself to that which he will not fulfill. A fear of God will not lead one into the pasture of rash words and unfulfilled vows, which pave the way for destruction (5:1-7). [[There is much to be learned from these verses that are highly helpful, but we need more time to determine the intent of the preacher. Fortunately, these verse give us much beneficial advice without us having to decide whether they were to be wholly taken in a negative or positive vein. We originally gave this a negative intent, but are unsure at the moment.]]

Negative: Attention is given to the shallowness of thinking and spending one's life in the pursuit of wealth, as the key to meaningfulness. The absolute inability for wealth to bring a conclusion for a meaningful life is exposed with great ardor, since the preacher was very conscious how alluring and destructive the love of riches is for many (1 Tim. 6:10). Does justice not get spurned due to high hands grasping for wealth? Riches send out many invitations, so your gain demands more gain to feed the comers. How often does a pillow of money find a restful head? Riches frequently destroy and often quickly abandon the owner. Riches have often entailed much labor, but at death they are left behind (5:8-17).

Positive: Again, we are uplifted by words that reveal the human quest for meaning of life is available and reachable. God has made available the comforts of life to be enjoyed and this can be done by those that place themselves under God's will. When God is the center of life the gifts he gives are used with contentment, rather than with stress and longing. When one realizes his portion is God-given, he will have opportunity to enjoy it and the adversities of life will not steal his joy (5:18-20).

Negative: The preacher overloads the vanity of life under the sun, as he attempts to make man realize you must look beyond yourself to find meaning to earthly life. Be realistic, what do you see with the human eye? One obtains all he needs and yet never partakes of it. What is gained, when in the end there are no mourners at the cemetery? What is it to eat and still be hungry and what is gained, when one is consumed by desire that is never satisfied? What is the good of all one does for tomorrow? When one doesn't know what tomorrow shall bring or whether he will see tomorrow, since life is like a shadow (6:1-12).

Negative: Wisdom is best learned through the tragedies of life. The house of mourning is a far greater teacher than the frivolous merriment of man's structured entertainment to create laughter. Consider these proverbs, if you are too impressed with thinking the meaning of life will simply be found in the good times without thinking (7:1-8).

Positive: There is wisdom in accepting the adversity of life. Wisdom lends its hand of care and protection to those not totally immersed in the philosophies under the sun (12) and not overwhelmed by the tragedies of life. One must be mindful that God is in control. This cannot be forgotten in the day of prosperity or the day of adversity, so we will learn to live by faith (7:9-14).

Negative and Positive: There is a lifestyle to be avoided and there is a lifestyle to be accepted. Let us contrast them for clarity (7:15-19).

- a) Negative: The general law of reward seems inconsistent with the right receiving wrong and the wrong receiving right. Therefore, men pursue a life of indifference or moderation in good and evil under the sun. This decision of noninvolvement will never find the meaning of life, but cultivate much evil, since none are righteous (15-17).
- b) Positive: The proper response to life's inconsistency is not to withdraw, but to take a diligent involvement in life for fear of God is not vain. Wisdom utilized allows one to prevail over mighty strongholds (18-19).
- c)

Negative: The source of sin and moral evil is man himself and not God. It is man that is unrighteous and this takes in all of accountable mankind. Man was made upright, but by his own reckoning has devised many instruments and modes of evil doing. The preacher is not content to simply state that man is unrighteous, but tells of some of the things found from his inquiry to support his conclusion of the unrighteousness of man (7:20-29).

Positive: Wisdom reveals itself in those who possess it. Consideration is given to behavior especially in interacting with those in positions of authority. When we consider the unrestricted power of the authority (kings) of that day, we can understand the wisdom given. The fact that death cannot be blocked by the hand of man is critically noted in the mix of this advice. This group of verses notes some negative circumstances, while trying to give helpful advice to cope with living under severe limitations (8:1-9).

Negative/positive: Injustice weaves its way into life and the indifference in dealing with injustice often cultivates more evil in the hearts of men (10-11,14). To the contrary, fear of God is encouraged and the wicked will receive their due reward, in spite of the perversion of rewards and punishments under the sun. Faith is commended and man should enjoy the portion God has granted him in this life (8:10-15).

Negative: The frustration of life under the sun is manifested by major complaints. Wisdom with its benefits is not as far reaching as needed to answer the truth about man and his existence. How does one under the sun discern his standing in the eyes of God? The impartiality of the finality of death and the severing of earthly ties is the final, bitter tasting dessert seen for all men under the sun. It is admitted it is better to be alive than dead, since one can influence earthly activities, but with death one can no longer influence earthly events (8:16-9:6).

Positive: A strong, forceful command to enjoy your portion of life, for God has approved such to be enjoyed. One should take a grip on life while opportunity avails itself (9:7-10).

Negative: There is a degree of unpredictability in life that can bring evil to man, that is beyond his prevention (9:11-12).

Negative: Wisdom, which has the power to conquer those with great might in high places is often rejected and the person of wisdom who saves many is soon forgotten (9:13-16).

Positive/Negative Wisdom doesn't introduce itself with extravagant displays, but it is more forceful than an abundance of physical weapons. Wisdom is vulnerable to destruction due to small feats of sin and a small act of folly (9:18-10:1).

Negative/Positive: A host of proverbs revealing how men under the sun often brings harm to their life and how the fool can't disguise himself due to a loose tongue. Wisdom is commended for it can aid success and reveals itself in sound speech. The plight of a nation is learned through the fitness of its rulers and their appointees. It is not wise to say much regarding those in authority for private words typically reach the ears of others (10:1-20)

Positive: Life should be engaged and not wasted. Benevolence should be extended without excuses. The results of one's endeavors may vary, but this is all the more reason to be decisive in action and extended your labor to the fullness of your strength. Limitations are noted and response to the limitations are named and encouraged (11:1-8).

Positive/Negative: Youth is the time of strength and should not be wasted. The best use of your strength is to not waste it on folly and dead ends, but mold your purpose and behaviors with the realizations your actions will be judged by the righteousness Judge of all. This will aid you to pursue righteousness. One should realize youth is soon to pass and age whittles away the strength and pleasure of the body. Remember the Creator in your youth. Yes, it is true death will not remain in the wings forever, but will appear on center stage largely at the time he chooses. Don't let his presence in the wings paralyzed your actions, for we have learned the spirit returns to God who gave it. When we were laboring under the sun we couldn't determine whether the spirit of man went upward or the spirit of the beast went downward, but that now has been settled from above the sun (11:9-12:8).

Positive: The writer reviews his purpose and mode of attack. He states the findings of his intense searching for life and its meaning. We have found the meaningful life and the haunting vanities of life under the sun can be overcome. This is accomplished by faith built on heeding the revealed word of God that has come from above the sun and realizing there is life beyond death (12:9-14).

**The negative – positive breakdown is largely following a breakdown of negative and positive statements from Leland Ryken's Words of Delight, pages 323-326.

The Preacher's Lyric of Age

Ecclesiastes 12:1-8 ¹ Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them; ² While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain: ³ In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened, ⁴ And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low; ⁵ Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets: ⁶ Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. ⁷ Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it. ⁸ Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity."

There are few pieces so detached and yet so realistic for those who have trekked upon the hill and valleys of life a bit too long. The writer writes of the experience of age in a manner that permits us to reflect upon it, which otherwise is so painful that possibly we could not bear to bring ourselves to consider it in a reasonable fashion. "It is a rule of literature that whenever the subject matter is painful or threatening, writers find ways of distancing it so we can contemplate it with some degree of detachment (Ryken, p.327)." This extra travel time though is important for here our faith in God is so boldly displayed. This is where those that age among us are so important to us. They express while not being able to trust in their own strength, they have learned to be content in the Lord and the evils that befall them does not remove their confidence in the Lord. The irony of all of this presently is that the progress that man has made in the realm of medicine that has permitted the extension in years (we consider this providential and not possible if there was not for the original order to Life by God's hand) really has not diminished the problem of disease and death in its final chorus. Why? We cannot escape that behind all the trek of woe lies sin and wrath that was so unnecessary, if man had not constantly cast his vote for disobedience. In a culture that is so caught up in a one sided view of God, it is far too simplistic, and we cannot expect any objective consideration, that suffering is tied to the wrath of God. To the contrary, this is why the remedial system is so dear to us and why faith, hope and love is our abiding and everlasting anchor. This is why God and Christ is our abiding answer and no other. Words that fit this epic lyric by the preacher cry out from the psalmist.

Psalms 90:7-14 ⁷ For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled. ⁸ Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance. ⁹ For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told. ¹⁰ The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. ¹¹ Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath. ¹² So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom. ¹³ Return, O LORD, how long? and let it repent thee concerning thy servants. ¹⁴ O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days."

It is unfortunate we have the chapter division for it mars the continuity of thought begun in chapter 11. The focus of these verses are be godly. The lead in to this thought 'be godly' is remember. We have here more than a mere mental act. The term involves more than reflection and drawing from the past, it is speaking of a mental action that results in shaping one's conduct.

Deuteronomy 8:2 *"2 And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no."*

Deuteronomy 8:11 *"11 Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day:"*

It has been said this speaks of passionate fidelity and loyalty to the upmost.

Deuteronomy 8:14 *"14 Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage;"*

Deuteronomy 8:17-18 *"17 And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. 18 But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day."*

Remembrance demands shedding your pretense of self-sufficiency and looking beyond yourself and looking to your Creator and Sustainer.

2 Corinthians 12:9 *"9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."*

This degree of loyalty is intense enough to encompass the whole man emotionally and cognitively.

Psalms 137:6 *"6 If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy."*

Jonah 2:7 *"7 When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple."*

There is no place for compromise, no room for half-measures, but rather wholehearted pouring of oneself into the behavior of obedience. The cry we will see in a few more words is from youth through whatever span of years allotted to give whatever degree of energy and strength permitted to the Creator.

This writer of such skill has set the mood and the attitude to now creep forward to consider our mortality. The bible speaks of us on occasion as 'this mortal' and it is a true saying for we are subject to death.

Hebrews 9:27 *"27 And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:"*

How often in Ecclesiastes has the fact man is mortal forced itself back into the picture of life in a rather ugly fashion? But this time it is different, even though the picture of our gradual demise reveals restricted ability to appreciate his repeated phrase 'enjoy life'. This will be his longest and last treatment of life observing youth with its energy and vitality to the too soon limited ability and strength of that same youth. It has been expressed by many these are some of the most beautiful word pictures ever penned describing the descending pathway from the pinnacle of youth to the day when one is no longer 'enlivened dust', but simply dust. Again, the

writer reveals his unmatched skills to blend acceptable (pleasing, delight) words with words of truth (12:10).

When is the time, the season to follow my admonitions? Now. Why now, because 'now' is a time of limited opportunity and what you do now plays a role on what you shall do hereafter.

Ecclesiastes 12:1

Creator: The form is plural, a reflection of greatness of majesty and /or the Godhood's role in creation (Gen. 1:1,2; Jn. 1:4).

Nehemiah 4:14 "14 And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses."

The Creator: The writer turned the corner in chapter 11 and continues to point out it is time to look beyond earth's vanities. It is time to look to God and realize he made us for himself. He alone saw the pattern of the creation, tailored it and he alone sees the whole of the existence pattern.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 "11 He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end. His was the workmanship. How was it spoiled?"

Ecclesiastes 7:29 "29 Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions."

How was it corrected?

Ephesians 2:4-10 "4 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, 5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) 6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: 7 That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

We are confident that God can do whatever needs to be done. Why? Look at what he already has done and we know that he will finish it. Our gratitude should surely rest in God as our Creator (Ecc 11:5) and as our judge (Ecc 11:9). This is true, even though we do not know all of the future.

Ecclesiastes 11:5 "5 As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all."

Ecclesiastes 11:9 "9 Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment."

Ecclesiastes 6:12 "12 For who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow? for who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?"

The admonition is to remember the Creator in the days of thy youth. The immediate concern is youth will not be forever, i.e.; the vitality, strength and flexibility associated with younger years will fail us in due season. Our activity levels becomes less. The recommendation is acquire godliness as a habit in your youth. It is the best investment and compensation for the natural cessation of the energy and happiness of youth. It will help to dampen the evil of the days that comes with old age. The thought is to maximize the time of full capability, so godliness can do her greatest possible work. This is one of the facets of redeeming time.

Ephesians 5:16 *"¹⁶ Redeeming the time, because the days are evil."*

The evil days to come is a marked reference to the season of old age. Life involves transition and that transition is less promising as the days of our youth pass. Evil days has no connotation of moral or sinful here, but conveys the thought of less pleasurable years. The days come and go with their slights and aggravations, but as age plods along sometimes not too slowly the days become years and the slights and aggravations of the body and mind become constant companions. We move from days of trouble to years of trouble. These are the years that are often saddled with pain, sundry afflictions and the troubles of an aged body. One barely overcomes one ailment, until another knocks at the door. It speaks of limitations to come that in reality are beyond your control. These days bring burdens, even though they are years we are encouraged to rejoice in (Ecc 11:8). The pleasure of the day is short lived for fragility strikes us at every turn. These words are goads to the youthful mind to make him consider infirmities that would not otherwise inflict his reasoning, until forced upon him by their undeniable presence. All of this is to make one consider the essential foundation of true joy that escapes the vanity of life is with God.

The writer now cautiously launches out on to one's of life's common and natural seas called 'age'. This sea is filled with unexpected troughs and waves for the bark called 'body and mind' has become weathered and worn, so it can no longer ride on the waves, as she once did. The best way to capture the essence of this masterful writing is to simply take the description in its entirety without over analyzing its parts.

The two non-metaphorical book-ends that begin and end the description are 'no pleasure in them' and 'the dust returning to the earth'. A whole series of descriptive phrases that elevate the experiences of life including death in vivid living color are found between these two weighed book ends. We read these best not as a mere sober check list of failing body parts, but with some marked identifications to not leave us simply frantically thrashing our arms about without progress of thought. The language is absolutely staggering, so poignant, so real, so uncompromising, but never harsh. We learn of acceptance of the unacceptable, of control in the midst of lost control, and we learn of dignity where dignity appears lost.

Ecclesiastes 12:2

The writer beckons our attention to a general description of the marks of age. The purpose is to alert and encourage us to use our days well, since a time will come when our strength to do so will falter. The verse speaks of the general oblivion to the flow of the ordinary events once enjoyed and anticipated. The many activities, people and hope once embraced slowly disappear without hope of renewal. Circumstances become more challenging, yet there is less and less resilience to cope with the inevitable changes. The other thing is the time between difficulties becomes less (hardly time to catch your breath). The events once considered

temporary setbacks (speed bumps) are no longer temporary, but constant burdens (bump, bump, bump). The dilemmas of age do not lessen, but begin to increase not allowing time to recover, when recovery time has naturally become longer.

Age is the period of fading things. The keenness of being begins to darken, as perceptions and cognitions become blurred and blunted. The strength of constitution that once arose to meet each new challenge and made it even stronger can't rise to meet the new levels of challenge. Our rule of our own being begins to fade, the clouds after the rain are quick to return and what used to pass quickly in youth from pain to laughter is now from affliction to affliction. The comments on darkness and light probably signify the fading of joy and the clouds and the rain of repeated sorrow. A sample of the symbolic nature of such language is often found in OT. writing.

[Ezekiel 32:7-8](#) ⁷ And when I shall put thee out, I will cover the heaven, and make the stars thereof dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light. ⁸ All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over thee, and set darkness upon thy land, saith the Lord GOD."

(see also Job. 3:9; Isa. 25:30; 2 Sam. 23:4,5)

[2 Samuel 19:31-39](#) ³¹ And Barzillai the Gileadite came down from Rogelim, and went over Jordan with the king, to conduct him over Jordan. ³² Now Barzillai was a very aged man, even fourscore years old: and he had provided the king of sustenance while he lay at Mahanaim; for he was a very great man. ³³ And the king said unto Barzillai, Come thou over with me, and I will feed thee with me in Jerusalem. ³⁴ And Barzillai said unto the king, How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king unto Jerusalem? ³⁵ I am this day fourscore years old: and can I discern between good and evil? can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink? can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women? wherefore then should thy servant be yet a burden unto my lord the king? ³⁶ Thy servant will go a little way over Jordan with the king: and why should the king recompense it me with such a reward? ³⁷ Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, and be buried by the grave of my father and of my mother. But behold thy servant Chimham; let him go over with my lord the king; and do to him what shall seem good unto thee. ³⁸ And the king answered, Chimham shall go over with me, and I will do to him that which shall seem good unto thee: and whatsoever thou shalt require of me, that will I do for thee. ³⁹ And all the people went over Jordan. And when the king was come over, the king kissed Barzillai, and blessed him; and he returned unto his own place."

Ecclesiastes 12:3

We move from facets of nature (light, sun, moon stars, nightfall and storms) for illustration purposes to an aged house in decline and the contents of the house no longer hold the glory of the past in them. The likening of the body to a house or tent is common in the scriptures (Job. 4:19; Isa. 38:12; 2 Cor. 5:1; 2 Pet. 1:13,14). The aged body is like a decaying house.

An event taken from John Quincy Adams eightieth year as he walked slowly along Boston street. He was accosted by a friend who said, "And how is John Quincy Adams today?" The former president of the United States replied graciously, "Thank you, John Quincy Adams is well, sir, quite well, I thank you. But the house in which he lives at present is becoming dilapidated. It is tottering upon the foundations. Time and the seasons have nearly destroyed it. Its roof is pretty well worn out, its walls are shattered, and it trembles with every wind. The old tenement is becoming almost uninhabitable, and I think John Quincy Adams will have to move out of it

soon; but he himself is quite well, sir, quite well.” And with that the venerable statesman, leaning heavily upon his cane, continued his slow walk down the street.

Kidner’s words probably should be well heeded, while at the same time let us take a pinch of liberty just to provoke a little chewing. He said. “The picture to my mind, is best taken in its entirety, not laboriously broken down into the constituent metaphors for human arms, legs, teeth, and so on, which doubtless underlie it-as though the poet had expressed himself inadequately. The dying house reveals us to ourselves as no mere catalogue or inventory could (p.102)”.

The keepers of the house bring to mind protection (Mt.24:23; Lu.11:21; Ps. 121:4,5). The aged body and mind loses its protective power and must sadly rely upon others for protection, while losing precious freedom and self-confidence. Many writers do think portions of the body are referenced the arms, the legs, the teeth and the eyes. Do we have the trembling keepers of the house noting the quaking arms and hands once so steady in their task? Do we have the bent and weaken legs once a foundation of strength, now barely bearing the stooped frame of a man in the faltering strong man? Do we have the worn teeth in the grinders that have ceased and are few? Do we have impaired eye sight in the darken windows?

Ecclesiastes 12:4

No longer does one go to and fro at their own beckoning. The events of the world about us fade further from our view and our interest, as our time is spent in longing care for what once was shortly done. The sounds that once provoked our attention or warned us of danger no longer are heard. The phrase the ‘sound of the grinders is low’ has received numerous interpretations. The more common views are no longer hearing the grinding of corn by the women in the house; loss of teeth and the digestive system failing. Possibly it indicates no longer being active in the endeavors of the business of everyday life. The rising up at the voice of the song is variously interpreted, but we would place it with the disturbed sleep patterns of the aged. We find songs possibly no longer engaged in by the aged or possibly the singing can no longer be enjoyed. The melodies so immensely enjoyed and the stimulator of pleasantries is beyond the grasp of voice and ear. The overall degree of activity once a full part of one’s life style is slowly eroding, as the faculties of the body become more incapable to perform their normal functions.

Ecclesiastes 12:5

The first phrase seems free of metaphorical tinge and simply notes the fact that the aged must shun the places of danger. There was a time when height or cluttered paths were of no concern. Now, a fall once smiled at can become the source of much suffering. The ascents once welcomed with vigor, now are exhausting and avoided. The flourishing almond tree is considered an apt description of the changing shades of hair from its dark color to its shades of white. The reference to the grasshopper (locust) is thought to depict the erratic and labored gait of the aged or the grasshopper (locust) suggests a weight far too heavy for the strength of the aged to lift. Desire fails probably encompasses a number of areas of life, where once one’s motivation aroused involvement, but now is slackened. The desires have lost their quickening power, where once they were flames, now, it is even hard to stir a little glow from the embers.

What do we make of all these changes? They are the signs in life that one is approaching his eternal home. The mourners are near at hand (2 Ch. 35:25) for they have been forewarned that death lingers near, as these marked changes manifest themselves with clarity that cannot be denied.

Ecclesiastes 12:6

Now, the gradual path of erosion brings us to death. The termination of earthly life and death is brought before us with solid metaphors involving four expressions of death presented in two pairs. These metaphors seem to touch on the beauty of man and the fragility of man. What creature is more intricate in makeup than man and what creature is more fragile in makeup than man?

We begin with household objects. We have a household lamp with a golden bowl that serves as the reservoir for fuel that nourishes the light from the lamp. It is suspended from the ceiling and held by a silver cord or chain. [[(We are not moved with the interpretation of spinal cord (silver cord) and brain (golden bowl) interpretation often given by more modern commentators. It has never aroused one synapse within me to further my appreciation of the verse)]]]. The silver and the gold possibly is indicative of the precious value of human life. The suspending chain fails and the golden bowl crashes to the surface and is ruined in function and beauty. Think of the expressions when the splattered fuel and broken pieces of the lamp are discovered and the questions asked. Think of the activities when gathering and cleaning the ruined pieces. Think now of the death of a man and the activities that embrace such an occasion. How feasible a figure, man on the one hand is like a masterpiece of art and on the other hand is as breakable as any earthen ware. How eloquent and yet how common is man in a world subject to vanity?

The writer again draws upon a scene that is quick to our vision. A well settled in its common setting and has served untold blessings of portions of water to many a hand that was the activating energy to the windlass. The earthen pitch that was the collecting vessel of water is now shattered. Did it strike the harden wall of the cistern on the way down or on the way up? Did the fatal blow come by a careless hand, while pouring the life giving substance into a carrying container? The wheel that for so long had been turned in earnest to get to the refreshing vigor of liquid or to retrieve the moist liquid for parched lips now sits broken. The once protruding stem so firmly set in the wooden mount is now unattached and hangs limply about the gaping opening into the depths. The message is clear, whether she still sets atop the cistern or is seen somewhat submerged in the waters below. There had once been diligent and fruitful use, but wear conquered, serious deterioration developed and then collapsed. It was not without expectation, but when it occurred it was not free of consternation. The continual process of letting down and drawing up finally brought the end of its function. Man is his years of getting up and getting down finally comes to his end. He breaks down and the body goes to the pit. The lamp bowl no longer supplies light and the broken pitcher and windlass no longer supplies water. Life and its supplies have been removed in death. In fact, in my mind's eye other signs of such is close by the old well, for half hidden in weeds is the broken axle and a rotting bed of an old hay wagon. The marker of its demise is a broken coupling pole sticking above the bowed weeds bearing testimony to loads once bore, but no more.

Ecclesiastes 12:7

We have been led to this statement, as the cord or chain snapped, the echo of the broken bowl, the shattered pitcher and the collapsed wheel leaves nothing, except to put the body in the grave.

Ecclesiastes 3:20 *"²⁰ All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again."*

This announcement does not catch us off guard. The fact has been with us for a long time.

Genesis 2:7 *"⁷ And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."*

Genesis 3:19 *"¹⁹ In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."*

Psalms 104:29 *"²⁹ Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust."*

Job 10:9 *"⁹ Remember, I beseech thee, that thou hast made me as the clay; and wilt thou bring me into dust again?"*

Psalms 103:14 *"¹⁴ For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust."*

We know why the dust had to cover us, for this world is subject to vanity. We also know why it is subject to vanity. The Genesis account is not hidden and we have no reason to doubt the account. The preacher himself said, "Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions (Ecc 7:29)."

It appears faith has won out over the view of 'under the sun' for two aspects of man are noted. The dust is the earthly origin of the body, but the spirit's origin rests with God. He notes different locations for the body and the spirit. We recall Ecclesiastes 3:21.

Ecclesiastes 3:21 *"²¹ Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?"*

The context left us with two very possible explanations of the verse, but now we surely have a more full answer. It is true, and we shall not deny what follows, is not fully developed, but at this point enough is said. It is vague, but at the same time not in error. The hint given shall have a day of fuller light and so we will not try to make the preacher say more than he has said.

The return to God finds its equivalent in the statement of a coming judgment, so there is more than nothing. This would demand a person of responsibility being present.

Ecclesiastes 3:17 *"¹⁷ I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work."*

Ecclesiastes 8:5-6 *"⁵ Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing: and a wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment. ⁶ Because to every purpose there is time and judgment, therefore the misery of man is great upon him."*

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 *"¹³ Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. ¹⁴ For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."*

Psalms 36:9 *"⁹ For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light. The return to God as the life giver surely implies life after death."*

Exodus 3:6 *"⁶ Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God."*

Mark 12:27 *"²⁷ He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living: ye therefore do greatly err."*

We quote: "The inference that the soul loses its personality and is absorbed into something else....has no warrant in this or any other statement in this book, and would be inconsistent with the announcement of a judgment after death which as Knobel acknowledges, is implied in v.14. "The spirit of every man after death, good or bad, in some sense goes to God either as a Father or as a Judge, to be kept somewhere under the custody of His almighty power, in order to the receiving of His final sentence at the last judgment either of happiness or misery (Cook, p.661, quoting others there listed)".

The spirit of man reflects the very image of God and spirit is eternal. The light to come from above will clarify the case and affirm prepare for beyond the grave there is a God that brings all things to their end. He is just and righteous. The spirit withdraws from the body at death and returns to God, but not to dust for it never was from dust nor ever shall be.

Psalms 22:15 *"¹⁵ My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death."*

Psalms 104:29 *"²⁹ Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. We know where the body shall go, but when it does the spirit is not present."*

Genesis 2:7 *"⁷And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."*

James 2:26 *"²⁶ For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."*

Ecclesiastes 5:2 *"² Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few."*

Spirit: (Heb. 12:9; Zech. 12:1; Num. 16:22; (Life when – Gen. 2:7); Ja. 2:26). (Lu. 16:19-31; 22:42,43; Jn. 5:28,29; 1 Th. 5:16; 1 Cor. 15:51-53; 2 Cor. 5:10).

Ecclesiastes 12:8

I have proven my point life viewed 'under the sun' is limited and every avenue it suggests is vanity. Man is fragile and mortal viewed from 'under the sun'. But we have learned there is a God beyond the sun and he is in control. He is just and he will bring all things to their proper end. There is no argument against such, for in the beginning he brought them into being. Surely, if he had the power to do one, he has the power to do the other. "(...even God who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were; Rom 4:17)". The God of heaven and earth will do right, as the Bible has fully revealed. This is where man must place his trust, for all else has been proven to be vanity. We can see from what has been presented viewing things 'under the sun' the only prospect for the ungodly is the demise with age and then death. The 'under the sun' view can't answer the question of vanity now or consider the judgment to come. What must be realized is death will be followed by judgment and it can be faced without fear.

1 John 4:17-18 *"¹⁷ Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love."*

Therefore, we say make your peace now in the days of your youth, remember your Creator for this will aid you well in the years of little pleasure and prepare you for death and the judgment to come. There is no greater comfort and there is no greater hope in a world subject to vanity.

1 Corinthians 15:19-22 *"¹⁹ If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. ²⁰ But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. ²¹ For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."*

1 Corinthians 15:57-58 *"⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."*

2 Corinthians 5:4-8 *"⁴ For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. ⁵ Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. ⁶ Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: ⁷ (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) ⁸ We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord."*

Philippians 1:22-24 *"²² But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. ²³ For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: ²⁴ Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you."*

Psalms 116:15 *"¹⁵ Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints."*

Revelation 14:12-13 *"¹² Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus. ¹³ And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them."*

Let the aged saint never pine away due to the change of tattered limbs and body, for your example to carry on in the faith when the pleasures of life have dwindled and evil days have befallen, is the crowned culmination of a faith remembered in your youth. It is an extreme example of faith to be content with your lot, when you must accept what must be accepted and still carry on walking by faith and not by sight. Your presence in the assembly of the saints is a permanent pillar of strength often beyond the other activities that preside there.

Many times all about us are those who are not content with what they could change, while ever molesting others with their discontentment. While you continue onward content with what you can't change declaring without voice his grace is sufficient, your faith in Him is not shaken due to evil days and your hope anchors you in the midst of the storms knowing there is an eternal shore just beyond the final crashing wave that lifts you up. You accept the irony the spirit will escape the body before the body is blanketed by the very element from which it has been made. This does not surprise you for you have walked by faith and not by sight. It is reserved for you and should be...

Revelation 14:13 *"¹³ And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them."*

Does the departure of the aged saint bring us sorrow – yes, yes indeed, but; but it can be properly received. Why?

1 Thessalonians 4:13 *"¹³ But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope."*

Our sorrows are calmed first and foremost by the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but then in turn by the faith the aged saint has demonstrated throughout the years; the years the aged saint took pleasure in and the years the aged saint could not take pleasure in, but still enjoyed them as best they could in the Lord. Indeed such lives are not vanity of vanity, but a demonstration of lives made by Him for Him and thus fulfill the glory of the Lord.

The aged saint has a perspective of death that only comes from faith founded on the evidence from above the sun revealed in the word of God. The following verses are hardly ever mentioned, but let us consider for the moment.

1 Corinthians 3:18-23 ¹⁸ *Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.* ¹⁹ *For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness.* ²⁰ *And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain.* ²¹ *Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours;* ²² *Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours;* ²³ *And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.*

All things are yours and among the things listed: the world – God's creation is for your benefit. Life is the term for life in its principle and the term that speaks of spiritual life and immortal life. You have looked at life through the wisdom of God (above the sun) and not the wisdom of men (under the sun) so you have shown yourself wise. You haven't spent your life chasing meaningless things. You have understood what it means to enjoy life, for in Christ is the only life that eventually will be manifested to not be simply vanity.

Death strikes the ear 'under the sun', but the sound is strange indeed, for we have seen that 'under the sun' man's insight into death is basically nil. In stark contrast, what does it mean that in Christ death is yours? We found Barnes comments of worth.

"Death - They have an "interest," or "property" even in death, usually regarded as a calamity and a curse. But it is theirs:

- (1) Because they shall have "peace" and support in the dying hour.
- (2) Because it has no terrors for them. It shall take away nothing which they are not willing to resign.
- (3) Because it is the avenue which leads to their rest; and it is theirs just in the same sense in which we say that "this is our road" when we have been long absent, and are inquiring the way to our homes.
- (4) Because they shall triumph over it. It is subdued by their Captain, and the grave has been subjected to a triumph by his rising from its chills and darkness.
- (5) Because death is the means - the occasion of introducing them to their rest. It is the "advantageous circumstance" in their history, by which they are removed from a world of ills, and translated to a world of glory. It is to them a source of inexpressible advantage, as it translates them to a world of light and eternal felicity; and it may truly be called theirs."

It is probably without controversy that only the child of God can say death is his servant. The death of the saint is precious indeed for it permits him to take the next step in his long road home. We must be unclothed before we can be dressed in finer array and death is part of that process. We don't simply desire to be unclothed, but we understand it is part of the process in being redressed in a far more suitable body for our spirit.

2 Corinthians 5:4 *"4 For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life."*

Why is this true that death is yours? It is true because you belong to Christ. We are the property of Christ and none question Christ would care for his property...simply by considering the price he paid.

1 Corinthians 6:20 *"20 For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."*

Acts 20:28 *"28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."*

1 Peter 1:18-19 *"18 Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; 19 But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:"*

2 Peter 2:9 *"9 The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished:"*

Revelation 7:9-17 *"9 After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; 10 And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. 11 And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, 12 Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen. 13 And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? 14 And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. 16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. 17 For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."*

Revelation 21:1-7 *"1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. 2 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. 4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. 5 And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. 6 And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. 7 He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son."*

Thus it is in Christ, that death rather than being viewed as the end is seen as the beginning. We realize it is only because of Christ we can rejoice in it being a beginning. The truth is without Christ one would desire death to be the end, but the truth is death is not the end (the body is the clothing of the spirit and a spirit is forever). Therefore, from the days of your youth...

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 ¹³ *Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. ¹⁴ For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.*

Yes, it is indeed a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. God made us to be greater than what we have been (Ecc 7:29), but when we failed, he did not forsake us but sent his Son to die for us. Therefore, in his love for us and our love for him expressed in an obedient faith we can find the love that casteth out the fear to stand before him. The righteous realize they stand before him not for condemnation, but to be examined by him to vindicate his righteousness.

Romans 8:33 ³³ *Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.* Satan shall not be present. Oh, how the cross changed things! The death, burial and resurrection changed things. Foremost, Satan no longer has his standing position at the right hand of God to resist the forgiveness of sin (Zech. 3:1-8) for the people of God.

Revelation 12:9-11 ⁹ *And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. ¹⁰ And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. ¹¹ And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.*

Romans 8:34 ³⁴ *Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.*