

Ecclesiastes

Live without reserve, die without regret

Introduction

Who wrote this book? Solomon

- 1) No one else fully matches the description in 1:1-2:23
- 2) Parallels to other descriptions of Solomon (Barrick)
 - a) His *wisdom*—1:16; cf. 1st Kings 3:12
 - b) His *works*—2:4-6; cf. 1st Kings 5:13-18; 7:1-8; 9:17-19
 - c) His *wealth*—2:7-9; cf. 1st Kings 10:14-20
 - d) His *words*—12:9-10; cf. 1st Kings 4:32

When was this book written? Apparently toward the end of Solomon’s life

- 1) Some see the progression through Solomon’s life of *Song of Solomon* to *Proverbs* to *Ecclesiastes*.

What are some of the themes of this book?

- 1) God is referred to @ 40 times (Barrick)

Theological Topic	Ecclesiastes References
God’s sovereign control over man	1:13 (cf. 3:10); 2:26; 3:1 , 11, 14, 18 ; 5:18-20; 6:1-2; 7:14, 26; 8:15; 9:1, 7
God’s providential grace	2:24-26 ; 3:13; 5:18-20; 8:15
God’s eternity	3:11, 14; 12:5, 7
God’s creatorship	3:11, 14; 7:29; 8:16-17; 11:5; 12:1 , 7
God’s perfection	3:14 ; 7:29; 8:16-17; 11:5
God’s justice and holiness	2:24-26; 3:17 ; 5:4, 6; 7:26, 29; 8:2, 12-13; 11:9; 12:14
God’s abode	5:2
God’s omnipresence and omniscience	5:2 , 6; 8:2, 16-17; 11:5 ; 12:14
God’s omnipotence	7:13 ; 11:5
God’s preservation of His saints	7:26 ; 8:12-13
God requires reverential fear	3:14; 5:7 ; 7:18; 8:12-13; 12:1, 13
God requires obedience before sacrifice	5:1 , 4, 7; 8:2; 12:1, 13
God’s Word	12:13

- God’s names Yahweh and Adonai are never used in Ecclesiastes, only Elohim

2) Three foundational spiritual truths (Barrick)

- a) Mankind searches for happiness and enduring substance (2:24; 3:12, 22; 5:18; 8:15; 9:7-9; 11:7-10). Ecclesiastes present mankind with an invitation to enjoy a life ...
 - i) Unparalyzed by life’s uncertainties, enjoy life as God’s gift (11:1-6)
 - ii) Undepressed by life’s shortness, enjoy life as God’s gift (11:9-10)
 - iii) Showing reverence to and serving God in life, enjoy life as God’s gift (12:1-14)
- b) Divine sovereignty and providence characterize human existence on planet Earth (2:26; 3:14; 7:13-14; 8:16-9:1; 11:5)
 - i) We must believe that God is the Creator with whom we cannot trifle (5:2; 12:1)
 - ii) We must accept that God’s world cannot be changed to our liking (3:1-8; 7:13)
 - iii) We cannot extrapolate the future on the basis of the present, because the pattern keeps changing in accord with God’s plan (7:14; 8:17)

- iv) We must believe that God is the Judge and will bring all wickedness into judgment (3:17; 5:6; 8:12-13; 11:9; 12:7, 14)
- c) The way of wisdom for human conduct requires avoidance of excess.
 - i) Be content with the present (7:10)
 - ii) Be conciliatory (10:12-14)
 - iii) Be cautious (8:1-9; 10:8-11; cf. 7:8-9)
- 3) Three problem truths about humanity (Barrick)
 - a) *The uncertainty of time and chance* (9:11-12) demonstrates that man is not sovereign. It appears that **individuals do not control their own destiny**.
 - b) *The endemic and incurable nature of wickedness* (3:16; 4:1; 5:8; 7:7, 20; 9:3) demonstrates that **man is not inherently good**.
 - c) That *death has the final word in any human enterprise* (2:14-16; 3:18-22; 6:3-12; 8:8, 10; 12:1-7) is proof that **mankind is not immortal**.

What is the general outline? (based on Kaiser)

- 1) Embrace God's plan of man's inability—1:1-2:26
 - a) Refrain # 1: Enjoy God's gift of life
- 2) Understand God's all-encompassing plan—3:1-5:20
 - a) Refrain # 2: Live God's gift of life
- 3) Explain and apply God's plan—6:1-8:15
 - a) Refrain # 3: Enjoy God's gift of life
- 4) Removing discouragements to God's plan—8:16-12:14
 - a) Refrain # 4: Fear God with obedience

Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

The stability of nature and the transience of people
Embrace God's plan of man's inability—1:1-2:26 (part 1)

- 1) Solomon's identity—1:1 ¹ *The words of the Preacher/Teacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.* (cf. 1:12)
- 2) Solomon's initial theme—1:2 ² *"Transition of transitions," said the Preacher, "transition of transitions, everything is transition."*
 - a) The translations "vanity of vanities" of "futility of futilities" trace back through the Latin Vulgate to the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint).
 - b) It emphasizes the insubstantial, transitory nature of things such as mist (cf. James 4:14)
 - c) The phrase "everything is transition" looks like this in Hebrew [הכל הבל]
- 3) In light of the constant transitions in life, what does anyone gain for all their hard work?—1:3
 - a) ³ *What gain does a man have in all his toil in which he toils under the sun?* (cf. 3:9; 5:11, 16; 6:8)
 - i) "Under the sun" used 29 times in this book, and nowhere else in the OT. It refers to mere human existence on planet Earth.
- 4) Transitory people contrasted with stable physical laws of God's creation—1:4-7
 - a) Earth—1:4 ⁴ *A generation goes and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever.*
 - b) Sun—1:5 ⁵ *Also, the sun rises, and the sun goes down; and it pants for the place where it rises.*
 - c) Air—1:6 ⁶ *Going to the south, and turning to the north, round and round goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns.*
 - d) Water—1:7 ⁷ *All the riverbeds run to the sea, yet the sea is not full; to the place where the riverbeds flow, there they flow again.*
- 5) Two principles to describe man's response to the permanence of creation—1:8
 - a) Inability—1:8a ⁸ *All words are wearisome; man is not able to describe it.*
 - i) People fall silent before the wonders of God's creation.
 - b) Marvel—1:8b *The eye is not satisfied with seeing nor the ear satisfied with hearing.*
 - c) And yet ... (cf. Romans 1:20-32)
- 6) "To boldly go where no one has gone before"?—1:9-11
 - a) The thirst for novelty—1:9-10
 - i) Statement—⁹ *What has been is what will be, and that which has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.*
 - ii) Rhetorical question—¹⁰ *Is there anything of which one might say, "See, this is new"? It has already existed in the ages before us.*
 - b) Historical amnesia—1:11 ¹¹ *There is no remembrance of former things; nor will there be any remembrance of the things yet to come by those who will come after.*
 - i) Remember the commands to remember (cf. Psalm 105:5; Ecclesiastes 12:1; Luke 17:32; Ephesians 2:11)

Ecclesiastes 1:12-18
The Search for Wisdom as Our Answer
Embrace God's plan of man's inability—1:1-2:26 (part 2)

- 1) His rightful position—1:12 ¹² *I, the Preacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.*
 - a) Apart from David, this could be said of no other than Solomon. After Solomon, the kingdom divided into Northern (Israel) and Southern (Judah). Therefore, no later king in Israel was ever king in Jerusalem.

 - 2) His efforts to fill the hole in his heart—1:13-15
 - a) Deliberate effort—1:13 ¹³ *And I applied my heart*
 - i) To do what? *to seek and to carefully examine in wisdom* (cf. 1st Kings 4:33-34)
 - (1) Perhaps Solomon sent out emissaries to other countries to search for answers to life's perplexing questions.
 - (2) Wisdom & wise are referred to @ 50 times in this book.
 - ii) The subject matter? *concerning all that has been done under heaven;*
 - iii) The conclusion? *it is a grievous task* (it's a "lousy job", but not morally evil) *that God has given to the sons of Adam* (but to none of His other creatures) *to be occupied with.*
 - First of approximately 40 mentions of God in the book.
 - (1) "Deep within each human being God implants the urge to seek truth. As sinful human beings, however, the desired result is fraught with frustration and failure. Without God the quest for truth and for eternity is fruitless."
(Barrick)
 - b) Careful observation—1:14 ¹⁴ *I have seen everything that is done under the sun,*
 - i) Elusive—*and behold, everything is transition and striving after wind.*
 - c) Concluding proverb—1:15 ¹⁵ *What (intellectual task) is crooked cannot be straightened, and what (information) is lacking cannot be counted.* (cf. 7:13)
 - i) Someone from outside the broken system must fix it and give it purpose.
 - ii) Unlike his peers from the surrounding kingdoms, Solomon admits his failure and frustration.
 - If Jesus Christ is not the center of my intellectual pursuit, I am headed for disaster.
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- 3) His internal conversation—1:16 ¹⁶ *I spoke with my heart, saying,*
 - a) "Behold, I have made great and increased wisdom more than all who were before me over Jerusalem."
 - i) Referring to all kings in Jerusalem over the centuries, not just David.
 - b) *And my heart has experienced much wisdom and knowledge."*
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- 4) The results of manward wisdom and knowledge—1:17-18
 - a) A broad-spectrum effort—1:17 ¹⁷ *And I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know insanity and foolishness.*
 - i) Conclusion—*I perceived that this also is striving after wind.*
 - b) Grief but no relief—1:18
 - i) Wisdom—¹⁸ *For in an abundance of wisdom there is much frustration;*
 - ii) Knowledge—*and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.*

Take-home truth: Don't squander the wisdom that God gives us.

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11
Searching for Joy
Embrace God's plan of man's inability—1:1-2:26 (part 3)

- 1) The emotion of joy—2:1-8
 - a) Joy and laughter—2:1-2 ¹ *I spoke in my heart, "Come now, I will test you in joy. So enjoy yourself." But behold, this also was illusory. ² Of laughter I said, "It is insanity," and about joy, "What does it accomplish?"*
 - b) Maybe alcohol and foolishness will satisfy—2:3 ³ *I carefully examined in my heart how to cheer my body with wine while guiding my heart in wisdom, and how to embrace folly, until I could see what was good for the sons of Adam to do under heaven during the few days of their lives.*
 - c) Architecture and gardening—2:4-6 ⁴ *I increased my accomplishments: I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself. ⁵ I made gardens and parks for myself, and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. ⁶ I made pools of water for myself from which to irrigate a grove of growing trees.*
 - i) Taking 13 years just to build his own house (cf. 1st Kings 7:1-51; 9:10; 2nd Chronicles 8:3-6)
 - d) Workers and livestock—2:7 ⁷ *I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house. I also abundantly possessed more livestock, both herds and flocks, than any who were in Jerusalem before me.*
 - e) Wealth—2:8a ⁸ *I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and the provinces. (cf. 1st Kings 10:14-29)*
 - f) Pleasure, both musical and sexual—2:8b *I acquired for myself male singers and female singers, and the pleasures of the sons of Adam—a harem. (cf. 1st Kings 11:3)*
- 2) Unrestrained self-indulgence and its results—2:9-11
 - a) Prosperity and objectivity—2:9 ⁹ *So I became great and increased more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom stood for me.*
 - i) His pursuit was not conducted with a lack of self-restraint or reckless abandon.
 - b) I earned it!—2:10 ¹⁰ *And whatever my eyes desired I did not withhold from them. I did not withhold my heart from any joy, for my heart rejoiced in all my toil and this was my reward from all my toil.*
 - i) Cf. 1st Kings 4:20-23
 - c) All of this did not satisfy Solomon's soul—2:11 ¹¹ *Then I considered all my works that my hands had done, and the toil with which I had toiled in doing it, and behold, all was illusory and striving after wind. And there was no advantage (cf. 1:3) under the sun.*

Take-home truth: True, lasting joy neither originates within us nor with the things we possess.

Ecclesiastes 2:12-16
Wisdom, Foolishness, and the Certainty of Death
Embrace God's plan of man's inability—1:1-2:26 (part 4)

- 1) His deliberate pursuit—2:12-14 ¹² *Then I turned to consider ...* (away from the pursuit of joy in 2:1-11)
 - a) The subject matter
 - i) *wisdom*,—skillful living, of which Spirit-enabled awe of God is the beginning (cf. Job 28:28; Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 9:10; Isaiah 11:2)
 - ii) *insanity*,—irrational madness, delusional thinking (cf. 1:17; 7:25; 9:3; 10:13)
 - iii) *and foolishness*;—lacking moral or spiritual sense, often acting rashly out of fear rather than acting wisely out of trust in God (cf. 1:17; 2:3; 7:25; 10:1, 13)
 - b) Why? *because what will the man do who comes after the king except what has already been done?*
 - i) Perhaps a reference to his son Rehoboam (cf. 1st Kings 11:43)?
 - ii) Perhaps a reference to his servant Jeroboam (cf. 1st Kings 12:20)?
 - c) Proverbs—2:13-14
 - i) Wisdom is relatively advantageous—¹³ *Then I myself* (emphatic) *saw that there is advantage to wisdom over foolishness, as the advantage of the light over the darkness.*
 - (1) Advantage (cf. 1:3; 2:11; 3:9; 5:8, 15; 7:12; 10:10-11)
 - ii) But only temporarily—¹⁴ *The wise man has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in the darkness, and yet I perceived that one event happens to all of them.*
 - (1) The wise **can** see where they are going (further ahead and in many directions) by comparison, but wisdom does not insulate us from death.
 - (2) Death may be the great equalizer (seeming to erase all distinctions), but it is not one's final destiny. It is simply an event, not a permanent status.
- 2) His inner conversations—2:15-16
 - a) Two statements—2:15
 - i) No exceptions—¹⁵ *So I said in my heart, "As the event of the fool, so also it will happen to me. Then why have I been exceedingly wise?"*
 - (1) It is far better to prepare for eternity than for advantage only in this life.
 - ii) Nothing permanent—*And I said in my heart, "This also is illusory."*
 - b) Why this conclusion?
 - i) Memories—¹⁶ *For there is no lasting remembrance of the wise as of the fool, seeing that in the coming days all will have been forgotten.*
 - (1) In reality, people begin to forget us before we are even dead!
 - (2) This is one reason why tombstones are made of stone instead of cardboard: we want people to remember us, even in death. Consider the pyramids. Name the Pharaohs who had them built.
 - ii) Death—*And how the wise dies like the fool!*
 - (1) But remember Daniel 12:3

Ecclesiastes 2:17-23

First Summary

Embrace God's plan of man's inability—1:1-2:26 (part 5)

- 1) A subjective response to ubiquitous death—2:17
 - a) ¹⁷ *So I hated life because what is done under the sun seemed bad to me, for all (seeming advantage) is illusory and striving after wind.*
 - i) Cf. 2:10
 - ii) This is not true repentance, though such intense disgust may lead to repentance.
 - b) Death seems to destroy any relative advantage of living wisely versus living foolishly. (cf. 2:14-16)

- 2) A subjective response to “You can’t take it with you”—2:18-21
 - a) I will leave it all behind—2:18-19 ¹⁸ *So I (emphatic) hated all my toil in which I (emphatic) have toiled under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who will come after me (my successor). ¹⁹ And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will be master over all my toil for which I toiled and acted wisely under the sun. This also is illusory.*
 - i) Probably a reference to his son Rehoboam (cf. 1st Kings 11:9-13; 2nd Chronicles 12:1-16)
 - b) I will hand it over to others who didn’t work for it like I did—2:20-21 ²⁰ *So I (emphatic) turned aside my heart (deliberately) to despair (hopelessness) over all the toil for which I had toiled under the sun, ²¹ because there is a man who has toiled in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in skill; yet he must hand over an inheritance to a man who did not toil for it. This also is illusory and a great evil.*
 - i) “There is no guarantee that one’s heir will be wise and be a good steward of this wealth, or be foolish and squander it – in which case, the former man’s entire life’s work would be in vain.” (NET Bible)

- 3) Summary—2:22-23
 - a) A question of benefits—²² *For what does a man get (acquire) in all his toil and striving of his heart with which he toils under the sun?*
 - i) Assume negative answer
 - ii) Cf. Genesis 3:17-19
 - b) A negative response, not merely neutral—²³ *For all his days are painful, and his occupation is a vexation; even in the night his heart does not rest (literally “does not lie down”). This also is illusory.*
 - i) Cf. Solomon’s words in Psalm 127:1-2
 - ii) “This verse draws out an ironic contrast/comparison between his physical toil/labor during the day and his emotional anxiety at night. Even at night, he has no break!” (NET Bible)

Ecclesiastes 2:24-26

Refrain # 1: Enjoy God's gift of life (cf. 5:18-20; 8:15)
Embrace God's plan of man's inability—1:1-2:26 (part 6)

- 1) The ability to enjoy life from God—2:24-25 (cf. 1st Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19)
 - a) Man's inability to see good—2:24a ²⁴ *There is nothing* (inherently) *good in a man* (to enable him) *to...*
 - i) Inability to enjoy God's provision of food
(1) *eat, and drink,*
 - ii) Inability to enjoy God's provision of responsibilities
(1) *and cause his soul to see good in his toil.*
 - b) God's sovereignty and benevolence—2:24b-25 *This also, I have seen, that this* (ability to experience good) *is from the hand of God,*
 - i) No one can truly appreciate the basics of life apart from being a right relationship with the living God: ²⁵ *for who can eat and who can experience joy apart from Him* (lit. "Me")?
 - ii) "All the things that we call the 'goods' of life—health, riches, possessions, position, sensual pleasures, honors, and prestige—slip through one's hands unless they are received as a gift from God. Unless God gives persons the ability to enjoy them and obtain satisfaction from them, they simply cannot in and of themselves compensate for the joy that comes from fearing God and knowing Him." (Kaiser)
- 2) Three-fold gifts—2:26
 - a) God's gifts to those who are righteous according to His standard—²⁶ *For to the man who pleases* (lit. "is good before") *Him, God has given ...* (3 things)
 - i) *Wisdom*—skill of living
 - ii) *and knowledge*—knowledge gained by the senses
 - iii) *and joy*,—the feeling and expression of joy, gladness, and pleasure
 - b) God frustrates the sinner—*but to the sinner He has given the task of gathering and collecting, only to give it to the man who pleases* (lit. "is good before") *God.*
 - i) *This* (task of the sinner) *also is illusory and striving after wind.*
 - ii) Cf. Proverbs 13:22; 28:8

Discussion: (Barrick)

- How can you balance work and recreation to the glory of God?
- What does Scripture say about a person's work/employment?
- What distinguishes the death of the wise and the death of the foolish?
- What characterizes a godly attitude toward possessions?

Ecclesiastes 3:1-15
God's plan embraces all of reality
Understanding God's All-encompassing Plan—3:1-5:20

- 1) The contrasting times of life—3:1-9
 - a) Theme—3:1 ¹ *For everything there is an appointed time, and a time for every event under heaven.*
 - b) Polar opposites in life often related to the decisions of people—3:2-8 (Merisms)
 - i) Life spans
 - (1) ² *A time to give birth, and a time to die;*
 - (2) *a time to plant, and a time to uproot what was planted;*
 - ii) Constructive behavior
 - (1) ³ *a time to kill, and a time to heal;*
 - (2) *a time to break down, and a time to build up;*
 - iii) Emotional responses
 - (1) ⁴ *a time to weep, and a time to laugh;*
 - (2) *a time to mourn, and a time to dance;*
 - iv) Relationships
 - (1) ⁵ *a time to throw stones, and a time to gather stones;*
 - (2) *a time to embrace and a time to avoid embracing;*
 - v) Possessions
 - (1) ⁶ *a time to search and a time to lose;*
 - (2) *a time to keep and a time to throw away;*
 - vi) Grief
 - (1) ⁷ *a time to rip and a time to sew;*
 - (2) *a time to keep silent, and a time to speak;*
 - vii) Relationships
 - (1) ⁸ *a time to love, and a time to hate;*
 - (2) *a time of war, and a time of peace.*
 - c) Rhetorical question—3:9 ⁹ *What advantage does the worker have from his toiling?*
(assumed negative answer; cf. 1:3; 2:11, 13)
- 2) God's sovereignty on display—3:10-15 ¹⁰ *I have seen the task that God has given to the sons of Adam to occupy themselves with.*
 - a) Skillfully precise—3:11a ¹¹ *He has made everything beautiful in its time.*
 - b) Wisely inscrutable—3:11b *He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that the man cannot find out the work that God has done from the beginning to the end.*
 - c) Tenderly gracious—3:12-13 ¹² *I know that there is nothing better for them than ...*
 - i) ① *to rejoice and* ② *to do good in his life;* ¹³ *and* ③ *also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—it is the gift of God.*
 - d) Awesomely unchangeable—3:14 ¹⁴ *I know that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken away from it. God has made it this way so that people should be in awe before Him.*
 - e) Relentlessly connected—3:15 ¹⁵ *That which is has already been, and that which is to be has already been (cf. 1:9); and God seeks what has been driven away.*

Ecclesiastes 3:16-22
Unrighteousness in Government and the Universality of Death
Anomalies do not deny God's plan—3:16-4:16
Understanding God's all-encompassing plan—3:1-5:20

- 1) Does unrighteousness in our rulers deny God's plan?—3:16-17
 - a) Distortions
 - i) In the hall where justice is expected—¹⁶ *And yet again I saw under the sun that in the place of judgment there was wickedness,* (cf. 5:8; 8:9)
 - ii) In the hall where righteousness is expected—*and in the place of righteousness there was wickedness.*
 - b) God will ultimately judge the judges—¹⁷ *I myself said in my heart, "God will judge the righteous and the wicked, because there is a time* (cf. 3:1-8, 11) *for every matter and for every work."* (cf. 11:9; 12:14)
 - i) Remember Proverbs 17:15
 - ii) Be thankful God's justice is not immediately implemented.

- 2) Does the universality of death deny God's plan?—3:18-22
 - a) People tend to think of themselves as invincible—3:18 ¹⁸ *I myself said in my heart concerning the sons of Adam, "God tests them to show them that they are like animals."*
 - b) But death is inevitable—3:19-21
 - i) All creatures die—3:19 ¹⁹ *For the event that happens to the sons of Adam also happens to the beasts; one event belongs to them; as one dies, so dies the other; both have the same breath. Man has no advantage over the beast, because all is illusory.*
 - ii) All creatures share the same future—3:20 ²⁰ *All go to the same place. All are from the dust, and all return to the dust.* (cf. Genesis 1:24-31; 2:7, 18-19; 3:19)
 - iii) People are ignorant apart from God's revelation—3:21 ²¹ *Who knows,* (it may be possible) *that the spirit of the sons of Adam goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down to the earth?* (cf. 3:17; 12:7)
 - c) Recommendation—3:22
 - i) Man can enjoy this life while it lasts—3:22a ²² *I saw that there is nothing better than that the man should enjoy his activities, for that is his allotted portion.*
(1) Don't let what you don't understand destroy what you can enjoy.
 - ii) Man does not have the answer in himself—3:22b *For who will bring him to see what will happen after him?* (i.e. after he dies)

- Cynicism confuses us and can give us temporary Scripture-amnesia.
- Thank God that He uses such circumstances of injustice, etc. to humble us, to make us more dependent on Him, and to be thankful for what He has given us to enjoy.

Ecclesiastes 4:1-6
Oppression of God's People and Envy from Others
Anomalies do not deny God's plan—3:16-4:16
Understanding God's all-encompassing plan—3:1-5:20

Introduction: from 4:1-10:20 Ecclesiastes looks very similar to Proverbs

- 1) Oppression does not deny God's all-encompassing plan—4:1-3
 - a) Observation of sin—4:1a ¹ *So I turned again and saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun.*
 - b) An apparent absence of comfort for the abused—4:1b
 - i) The hopeless abused—*And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one comforting [nacham] them;*
 - ii) The unrestrained bully—*and on the side of their oppressors was power, and there was no one comforting [nacham] them.*
 - iii) But remember:
 - (1) The Triune God comforts His people—Acts 9:31; 2nd Corinthians 1:3-7
 - (2) God cares for the abused—Psalm 9:9; 10:17-18; 103:6; 146:7
 - c) Manward response to oppression—4:2-3
 - i) Death trumps living—4:2 ² *And I commended the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still living.*
 - ii) Better to have never been born—4:3 ³ *But better than both of them is the one who has never existed, who has not seen the evil activity that is done under the sun.*
 - (1) He is not advocating suicide. He is simply saying that, from a manward perspective, non-existence is better than suffering unrestrained oppression.
 - iii) Cf. Job 3:3-19; Jeremiah 20:14-18
- 2) Envy from others does not deny God's all-encompassing plan—4:4-6
 - a) Extreme # 1: miserable competitor—4:4 ⁴ *And I saw all the toil and all the skillful activity is due to a man's envy of his neighbor. This also is illusory and striving after wind.*
 - i) Cf. Saul with David—1st Samuel 18:7-8
 - b) Extreme # 2: self-destructive dropout—4:5 ⁵ *The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh.*
 - i) Cf. Proverbs 6:10; 24:33
 - c) Balanced contentment—4:6 ⁶ *Better a (open) handful of quietness [nachath] than two (clenched) hands full of toil and a striving after wind.*
 - i) Cf. Proverbs 15:16-17; 16:8; 17:1; Philippians 4:10-13; 1st Timothy 6:6

Ecclesiastes 4:7-16
Isolation and Temporary Popularity
Anomalies do not deny God's plan—3:16-4:16
Understanding God's all-encompassing plan—3:1-5:20

- 1) Social loneliness does not deny God's plan—4:7-12
 - a) Working alone versus working with others—4:7-8
 - i) Observation—⁷ *Then I turned again and I saw transition under the sun.* ⁸ *There is one and there is not a second, he has no son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eye is not satisfied with riches.*
 - ii) Rhetorical question—*“And for whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?”*
 - (1) Assumed negative answer
 - iii) Conclusion—*This also is illusory and a grievous task.*
 - b) Rugged individualism is dangerous—4:9-12
 - i) Better production when working with others—⁹ *Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their toil.*
 - ii) Why?
 - (1) Illustrations of mutual assistance when vulnerable—4:10-11
 - (a) When traveling—¹⁰ *For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who falls down when there is no one to lift him up.*
 - (b) When sleeping—¹¹ *Moreover, if two lie down together, they are warm; but how can one be warm by himself?*
 - (2) Illustration of mutual protection when vulnerable—4:12a
 - (a) ¹² *Though one may overpower one person, two can resist him.*
 - iii) Three people are better than two—4:12b *And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.*
 - c) Cf. the example of Elijah in 1st Kings 19
- 2) Political revolution does not deny God's plan—4:13-16
 - a) Comparison of the revolutionary to the establishment—4:13-14
 - i) Time for political change—4:13 ¹³ *Better is a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who does not know how to receive advice.* (cf. Job 32:9)
 - ii) Why is the current celebrity so popular?—4:14 ¹⁴ *For he came out of prison to the throne, even though he was born poor in his kingdom.*
 - b) Temporary popularity of the revolutionary—4:15-16a ¹⁵ *I saw all the living who walk about under the sun, as well as the second youth who would stand in his place.* ¹⁶ *There was no end to all the people, to all who were before them, yet those who came later will not rejoice in him.*
 - c) Conclusion—4:16b *This also is illusory and striving after wind.*
 - i) Ideal social justice must wait for the arrival of Yahweh Tsidkenu (cf. Jeremiah 23:6; 33:16; Matthew 6:33)

Ecclesiastes 5:1-17
Implications: warnings and cautions
Understanding God's all-encompassing plan—3:1-5:20

- 1) God will judge our worship—5:1-7
 - a) Go to listen to God rather than to lecture God—5:1-3 ¹ *Guard your foot as you go to the house of God; and to approach to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil.* ² *Do not be rash with your mouth, and do not let your heart be impetuous to utter a word in the presence of God, because God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your words be few.*
 - i) Why? ³ *For a dream comes through much effort, and a fool's voice through many words.*
 - b) Don't attempt to manipulate God with reckless promises—5:4-7 ⁴ *When you vow a vow to God, do not delay to complete it, for He has no pleasure in fools. Complete what you have vowed. ⁵ *It is better that you do not vow than that you vow and not complete it.* ⁶ *Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin, and do not say in the presence of the messenger that it was unintentional. Why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands?* (cf. Deuteronomy 23:21-23)
 - i) Why? ⁷ *For in the abundance of dreams there are futilities, and in many words. Rather, fear God.* (cf. 12:13)
 - ii) Fearing God involves: trusting God (Psalm 115:11), experiencing God's forgiveness (Psalm 130:4), taking pleasure in God's Word (Psalm 112:1), obeying God's Word (Psalm 119:63), hating evil (Proverbs 8:13), and anticipating God's loyal love (Psalm 147:11).*
- 2) Corrupt bureaucracy is better than anarchy—5:8-9
 - a) Corruption—⁸ *If you see the oppression of the destitute and the perversion of justice and righteousness in the province, do not be astonished at the matter; for the higher official is watched by a higher, and there are higher ones over them!*
 - b) Benefit—⁹ *The profit of the land is for all; the king for the tilled field.*
- 3) Possessions will never satisfy the soul—5:10-17
 - a) Wealth dawdles behind desire—5:8 ¹⁰ *The one who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with produce. This also is illusory.*
 - b) Wealth attracts parasites—5:11 ¹¹ *In the increase of good things, those who consume them increase; and what advantage to the owners but to see with his eyes?*
 - c) Wealth leads to insomnia—5:12 ¹² *The sleep of the workingman is pleasant, whether he eats little or much; but the fullness of the rich will not permit him to sleep.*
 - d) Wealth is not eternal—5:13-17 ¹³ *There is a great harm that I have seen under the sun: wealth kept by their owner to his harm. ¹⁴ *But that wealth perished in a bad venture; although he fathered a son, there was nothing in his hand. ¹⁵ *Just as he came from his mother's womb, naked will he turn to go as he came, and he will take nothing from his toil that he may carry away in his hand. ¹⁶ *This also is a great harm: just as he came, so will he go. And what is the advantage to him who toils for the wind? ¹⁷ *Moreover, all his days he eats in darkness, and he is greatly vexed, and sickness, and wrath.* (cf. Luke 12:13-21)****

Ecclesiastes 5:18-20
Refrain # 2: Live God's gift of Life
Understanding God's all-encompassing plan—3:1-5:20

Note: the keyword is “God” (4 times in 3 verses). He is the focal point.

- 1) The poor individual should enjoy God's gift—¹⁸ *Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting/beautiful* (cf. 3:11):
 - a) Three activities (cf. 2:24; 3:13)
 - i) *to eat,*
 - ii) *and to drink,*
 - iii) *and to find enjoyment in all the toil that he toils under the sun during the days of his life that God has given him,*
 - iv) cf. 1st Kings 4:20
 - b) Why? *for this is his allotment* (from God). (cf. 3:22; 9:9)

- 2) The wealthy individual should enjoy God's gift—¹⁹ *Furthermore, every man to whom God has given ...* (cf. 2:24-26)
 - a) Three gifts from God
 - i) *Riches*
 - ii) *and possessions,*
 - iii) *and given him the authority*
 - (1) Enjoy the benefits of your hard work—*to eat from it,*
 - (2) Enjoy your rightful share—*to receive his portion,*
 - (3) Enjoy your work—*and to rejoice in his toil;*
 - b) Restated: *this* (the ability to enjoy all that God gives) *is the gift of God.*

- 3) Contentment—5:20 ²⁰ *For he will not* (negatively) *reflect much on the days of his life,*
 - a) Why is this? *because God keeps him preoccupied with the joy of his heart.*
 - i) We should be soberly aware of our own mortality, but not obsessed with it. Don't brood over the past or worry about the future.
 - b) Cf. Psalm 4:5-8

“How sad that mortals spend all their days working and sweating to receive the enjoyment that God offers as a gift if people would only seek it in the manner that He, in His excellent and beautiful plan, has chosen to give it. Happiness, enjoyment, pleasure, and a knowledge of how the whole substance of life is integrated into a meaningful pattern in the plan of God are all linked in the living God.” (Kaiser, 120)

Ecclesiastes 6:1-12

Prosperity is not always or necessarily good

Evaluating outward fortunes—6:1-7:15

Explain and Apply God's Plan—6:1-8:15

- 1) Don't assume those who "have it made" are satisfied—6:1-6
 - a) God-given wealth without God-given enablement to enjoy it—6:1-2 (cf. 5:18-19)
 - i) ¹ *There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, and it weighs heavily on people: ² a man to whom God gives riches and wealth and honor (cf. 2nd Chronicles 1:11-12) so that he lacks nothing for himself of all that he desires, yet God does not enable him to enjoy them, but a stranger enjoys them. This is illusory and a grievous evil.*
 - b) Hyperbole/exaggerations—6:3-6
 - i) Regarding offspring—6:3-5 ³ *If a man fathers a hundred children (cf. Judges 8:30; 2nd Kings 10:1; 2nd Chronicles 11:21) and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many, but his soul is not satisfied with good things, and he also has no burial, I say, "A stillborn child (cf. Job 3:16) is better off than he," ⁴ for it came into futility and departs into darkness, and its name is shrouded in darkness. ⁵ Moreover it has not seen the sun or known anything; yet it finds more rest than he.*
 - ii) Regarding long life—⁶ *Even though he lives a thousand years twice and has not seen good—are not all going to one place?*
 - b) A proverb on the relentless pursuit of gratification—6:7 ⁷ *All the toil of a man is for his mouth, yet his soul is not satisfied.*
 - c) A pair of proverbial questions—6:8
 - i) ⁸ *For what advantage does the wise man have over the fool?*
 - ii) *What does the poor man have, knowing how to walk before the living?*
 - d) A proverb on contentment—6:9a ⁹ *What the eyes see is better than the wandering of the soul.*
 - e) The principle—6:9b *This also is illusory and striving after wind.*
 - 2) Recognize the elusiveness of satisfaction—6:7-9
 - a) A proverb on the relentless pursuit of gratification—6:7 ⁷ *All the toil of a man is for his mouth, yet his soul is not satisfied.*
 - b) A pair of proverbial questions—6:8
 - i) ⁸ *For what advantage does the wise man have over the fool?*
 - ii) *What does the poor man have, knowing how to walk before the living?*
 - c) A proverb on contentment—6:9a ⁹ *What the eyes see is better than the wandering of the soul.*
 - d) The principle—6:9b *This also is illusory and striving after wind.*
 - 3) Remember God-designed inability of people—6:10-12 (note the 4 uses of "man" [adam])
 - a) God's sovereign design—¹⁰ *Whatever has come to be has already been named (by God), and it is known what man is; and he is not able to contend with the one (God?) who is more powerful than he is.*
 - i) Why? ¹¹ *For the more words, the more futility.*
 - b) A series of questions on man's inability apart from God—6:11b-12
 - i) To notice advantages in life—*What is the advantage to a man?*
 - ii) To discern genuine good—¹² *For who knows what is good for a man while he lives the few days of his illusory life, which he passed like a shadow?*
 - iii) To know the future—*Who can tell a man what will be after him under the sun?*
- ❖ "Satisfaction comes only through obedience to His will and in accepting with thanksgiving and joy all things He grants to us." (Barrick, 110)

Ecclesiastes 7:1-15

Adversity is not always or necessarily evil

Evaluating outward fortunes—6:1-7:15

Explain and Apply God's Plan—6:1-8:15

1) Proverbs to grasp concerning adversity—7:1-13

a) Contrasts—7:1-9

- i) Good reputation or accumulation of wealth—7:1 ¹ *A good name [shem] is better than a good ointment [shemen] (for burial?), and the day of death than the day of one's birth.* (cf. Proverbs 22:1)
- ii) Grief or festivity—7:2-4 ² *Better to go to the house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, because this is the end of every person, and the living should take it to heart.* ³ *Grief is better than laughter, because in sadness of face the heart is made better.* ⁴ *The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure.*

iii) Wisdom or fools—7:5-9

- (1) Listening—7:5 ⁵ *It is better to listen to the rebuke of the wise than for one to be listening to the song [shir] of fools.*
 - (a) "We become that to which we listen." (Barrick, 122)
- (2) Taking the long look—7:6 ⁶ *For as the crackling of thorns [sirah] under the pot [sir], so is the laughter of the fool: this also is illusory.*
- (3) Responding to pressure—7:7 ⁷ *For oppression makes a wise person irrational, and a bribe corrupts the heart.*

iv) Procrastination or patience—7:8-9 ⁸ *The end of a matter is better than its beginning; patience (length) of spirit is better than a proud (height) spirit.* ⁹ *Do not be quick in your spirit to be vexed, for vexation rests in the bosom of fools.*

b) The benefits of wisdom—7:10-12

- i) ¹⁰ *Do not say, "Why were the former days better than these?" because it is not from wisdom that you ask about this.*
- ii) ¹¹ *Wisdom is good along with an inheritance, and an advantage to those who see the sun.*
- iii) Why? ¹² *For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money, but the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of him who possesses it.*
- iv) Biblical wisdom involves **right teaching** (from Scripture) that produces **right thinking** resulting in **right choices** that make for **right living**. (Barrick, 125)

c) Summary command—7:13 ¹³ *Consider the work of God, for who is able to straighten what He has bent (the afflictions of our life)?*

- i) Cf. Job 2:10; Romans 8:28; 1st Thessalonians 5:18; Philippians 4:11-12

2) Rejoice in and consider God's sovereignty over your days—7:14 ¹⁴ *In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that one may not discover anything that will be after him.*

3) The appearance of injustice—7:15 ¹⁵ *I have seen everything in my illusory days; there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs in his evil doing.*

Ecclesiastes 7:16-29
Evaluating Inward Character
Explain and Apply God's Plan—6:1-8:15

- 1) The balanced life of fearing God—7:16-18 (cf. 2:15)
 - a) Excess benefits no one—7:16-17
 - i) Avoid self-righteous—7:16 ¹⁶ *Do not be excessively righteous [tsaddiq] and do not make yourself excessively wise. Why should you ruin yourself?* (cf. Proverbs 3:7)
 - ii) Avoid foolish sinning—7:17 ¹⁷ *Do not be excessively wicked and do not be a fool. Why should you die before your time?*
 - iii) This is **not** saying, “Sin in moderation” or “Hail mediocrity.”
 - b) Live in awe of God—7:18 ¹⁸ *It is good that you take hold of this (true wisdom), and do not withhold your hand from that,* (cf. 7:16-17)
 - i) Why? *because the one who fears God comes forth with both of them.* (cf. 3:14; 5:7)
- 2) No one is exempt from sin, including you—7:19-22
 - a) Wise men are needed in society because of the universality of sin—¹⁹ *Wisdom strengthens the wise man more than ten rulers that are in a city,* (cf. Proverbs 24:5-6; Ecclesiastes 9:13-16)
 - i) Why? ²⁰ *because there is not a righteous [tsaddiq] man on earth who does good and never sins.* (cf. 1st Kings 8:46)
 - b) The prevalence of sinful speech—²¹ *Also, do not take to heart everything that people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you,*
 - i) Why? ²² *because your heart knows that you also have cursed others many times.* (cf. 10:20)
- 3) The elusiveness of wisdom and uprightness to fallen man—7:23-29
 - a) Undiscovered wisdom—7:23-24 ²³ *I tested all this in wisdom. I said, “I will be wise,” but it was far from me. ²⁴ What exists is remote, and exceedingly deep. Who can discover it?*
 - b) Deliberate pursuit—7:25-29
 - i) The Selfward pursuit—7:25 ²⁵ *I myself turned my heart ① to know and ② to search out and ③ to seek wisdom and an explanation for things, and ④ to know the wickedness of folly, even the foolishness of insanity.*
 - ii) The results—7:26-28
 - (1) Temptation is dangerous—7:26 ²⁶ *And I found more bitter than death the woman (is this Proverbs 9? or Proverbs 2:16-19; 5:1-14; 6:24-29; 7:1-27?) whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are chains. The one who is good before God escapes from her, but the sinner is captured by her.*
 - (2) Things don't always add up for us—7:27-28 ²⁷ *Behold, this is what I found, says the Preacher, by adding one thing to another to find the explanation, ²⁸ which my soul has repeatedly sought but I have not found. I have found one man among a thousand, but I have not found a woman among all these.*
 - (a) What godly woman would willingly place herself in Solomon's godless harem? (cf. 1st Kings 11:1-8)
 - iii) We are accountable for our sin—7:29 ²⁹ *Behold, this only have I found, that God made man upright [yashar], but they have sought out many schemes.* (cf. Genesis 6:5)
 - (1) God is not to blame for the lack of man's wisdom. Man abuses his freedom.

Ecclesiastes 8:1-15
God's Providence Evidenced in Righteous Government + Refrain # 3
Explain and Apply God's Plan—6:1-8:15

- 1) Wisdom in situations beyond your control—8:1-9
 - a) Be wise concerning the king—8:1-6 (cf. Proverbs 14:35; 16:14; 20:2; 24:21-22)
 - i) The benefits of wisdom—8:1 ¹ *Who is like the wise man and who knows the interpretation of a matter? The wisdom of a man makes his face shine and the hardness of his face is changed.* (i.e. he will show favor/grace; cf. Numbers 6:25)
 - ii) Obey the king—8:2 ² *I say, keep the king's command and that because of the oath of God.* (i.e. your pledge before God of your loyalty to the king; cf. 1st Chronicles 29:24)
 - iii) Live wisely with the king—8:3-4 ³ *Do not be in a hurry from his presence. Do not stand in an evil cause, for he does whatever he pleases.* ⁴ *Since the word of the king is authoritative, who will say to him, "What are you doing?"*
 - iv) Exercise discernment with the king—8:5-6 ⁵ *Whoever keeps a command (of the king) will not experience anything harmful, and the heart of a wise person knows the right time and decision,* ⁶ *because for every matter there is a time and a decision, though the trouble of a man is heavy upon him.*
 - b) Be wise concerning uncertainty—8:7-9 ⁷ *Since he does not know what is to be, who can tell him what will happen?* ⁸ ^① *No man has authority over the wind to restrain the wind, and* ^② *no one has authority over the death of death. And* ^③ *there is no discharge in the time of war, and* ^④ *wickedness will not rescue those who are owned by it.* ⁹ *All this I have observed while applying my heart to every deed that is done under the sun, at a time when a man dominates over a man to his harm.*
- 2) The importance of living in awe of God—8:10-13
 - a) The brevity of life—8:10 ¹⁰ *Then I observed the wicked buried, and they came and went from the holy place, and they were forgotten in the city where they had done such things. This also is illusory.*
 - b) The sinfulness of people—8:11 ¹¹ *Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the heart of the sons of Adam is full in them to do evil.*
 - c) It is well with whose soul?—8:12-13 (Fearing God includes awe, fear, love, and trust)
 - i) ¹² *Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who are fearing God, who fear before Him.*
 - ii) ¹³ *But it will not be well with the wicked, and he will not prolong his days like a shadow, who do not fear before God.*
- 3) An enigma—8:14 (justice is not always addressed as we think it should be)
 - a) ¹⁴ *There is an enigma that occurs on the earth, that there are righteous people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I said, "This also is an enigma."*
- 4) Refrain # 3: Enjoy Life—8:15
 - a) Commendation—8:15a ¹⁵ *So I commend enjoyment, there is nothing better for a man under the sun but to eat and to drink and to enjoy himself.*
 - b) Companion—8:15b *And this will accompany him in his toil through the days of his life that God has given him under the sun.*

Ecclesiastes 8:16-9:6
Mystery must not diminish our joy
Removing Discouragements to God's Plan—8:16-12:14

- 1) We must recognize our incomplete understanding—8:16-17
 - a) The pursuit—8:16 ¹⁶ *When I applied my heart* (cf. 1:13, 17; 7:2, 21; 8:9, 16; 9:1) *to know wisdom and to see the business that has been done on the earth—even though no one sees sleep with their eyes in the day or in the night—*
 - b) The result—8:17 ¹⁷ *then I saw all the work of God, that a man is not able to find out the work that has been done under the sun.*
 - i) Despite relentless efforts—*Even though a man may toil to seek it, yet he will not find it.*
 - ii) Despite respectable claims—*Even though the wise man claims to know, he is not able to find it.*
- 2) We can have joy in the face of death—9:1-6
 - a) The sovereign providence of God—9:1a ¹ *So I applied all this to my heart to examine it, how the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God.* (cf. 2nd Timothy 2:19)
 - b) The ignorance of mankind—9:1b *Whether (God's) love or hatred, man does not know everything before them.*
 - i) We cannot always accurately interpret God's providence in our lives (or in the lives of others). Remember Job's friends!
 - ii) Five types of suffering: (Kaiser, 151-152)
 - **Educational**—Job 34:32; 35:11; 36:10, 15, 22; **Doxological**—John 9:1-3; **Probationary**—Habakkuk 1-3; **Revelational**—Hosea 1-14; **Sacrificial**—Isaiah 42; 49-50; 53
 - c) The sameness of mankind—9:2 ² *Everything is the same to everyone; one event—to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and to the clean and to the unclean, to him who sacrifices and to him who does not sacrifice. As is the good man so is the sinner; and he who swears an oath as he who is afraid to swear an oath.*
 - d) The reality of death—9:3a ³ *This is an evil (misery) in all that has been done under the sun, that there is one event to everyone.*
 - e) The sin-filled, irrational heart of mankind—9:3b *And moreover the hearts of the sons of Adam is full of evil and insanity is in their hearts while they live, and afterwards they go to the dead.*
 - f) The benefit of life over death—9:4-6
 - i) The reality of hope and the significance of life—9:4 ⁴ *But to him who is joined with all the living, there is hope (certainty); for a living dog is better than a dead lion.*
 - (1) Why? # 1—9:5 ⁵ *For the living know they will die, but the dead do not know anything, and they have no further reward [sakar], for the memory [zeker] of them is forgotten.* (cf. John 9:4b)
 - (2) Why? # 2—⁶ *Their love, and their hatred, and their envy (rivalry) have already perished, and they will no longer have a share in all that is done under the sun.*
 - (a) “How sad it would be to have lost all opportunity to share in doing anything significant to the glory of God.” (Kaiser, 154)

Ecclesiastes 9:7-10
Joy, the gift of God and the grace of life
Removing Discouragements to God's Plan—8:16-12:14

- 1) Three commands concerning joy—9:7
 - a) What?—9:7a
 - i) Be active ⁷ *Go*,
 - (1) Don't sit around moping, worrying, etc.
 - ii) Celebrate with contentment
 - (1) *eat your bread with pleasure*,—
 - (2) *and drink your wine with a cheerful heart*,—
 - b) Why?—9:7b
 - i) *because God has already approved your works*.
 - ii) Those who have been justified by God need not worry about their relationship with God. He is not indifferent or antagonistic toward them. He has already approved them.

- 2) A two-fold blessing—9:8
 - a) May you have perpetual **celebration**—⁸ *Let your clothes be white all the time*,
 - b) May you have perpetual **comfort**—*and never let oil be lacking on your head*.

- 3) Two additional commands concerning joy—9:9-10
 - a) In your marriage—9:9 ⁹ *Enjoy* (literally “see”) *life with the wife whom you love all the days of your illusory life that He has given to you under the sun, all your illusory days*;
 - i) Why? *because this is your allotted portion in life and in your toil in which you toil under the sun*.
 - ii) To refuse to enjoy life is to dishonor the sovereign God Who allotted these things to us during the time we have on this earth.
 - b) In your work—9:10 ¹⁰ *Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your capability*, (cf. Colossians 3:23)
 - i) Why? *because there is no work or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol to which you are going*.
 - ii) To refuse to work with all our capability is to dishonor the sovereign God Who allotted these things to us during the time we have on this earth.

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- “Be joyful, then, and receive God's gifts and His ability to enjoy them. Why should anyone who truly fears God have the joy of life stolen out from under them because of the unresolved perplexities still remaining in the partially disclosed plan of God?” (Kaiser, 158)
 - “Therefore, while the resources of life are still at hand—ability to *do* work, faculties to *devise*, or brainstorm, new ideas, and ability to use the almost daily accumulation of knowledge and *wisely* apply it to the situations of life (9:10)—put your whole self and strength into each task.” (Kaiser, 162)

Ecclesiastes 9:11-18
The importance of Godward work
Mystery must not prevent appropriate human effort—9:11-11:6
Removing Discouragements to God's Plan—8:16-12:14

- 1) Be faithful in your work, regardless—9:11-12
 - a) The irony of human ability—9:11 ¹¹ *I returned, and saw under the sun that ...*
 - Bible examples suggested by Kaiser
 - i) *the race is **not** to the swift*, (cf. 2nd Samuel 2:22-23)
 - ii) ***nor** the battle to the strong*, (cf. Judges 16:19)
 - iii) ***nor** bread to the wise*, (cf. 1st Kings 11:1-25)
 - iv) ***nor** wealth to the discerning* (cf. 2nd Samuel 16:23; 17:5-14)
 - v) ***nor** favor to the men of skill*, (cf. Exodus 2:11-15; Acts 7:22)
 - vi) Commonalties for all
 - (1) *but time and events happen to all of them.*
 - b) The ignorance of man—9:12
 - i) Stated—¹² *For man does not know his time.*
 - ii) Trouble never comes at a good time—*Like fish that are taken in a treacherous net [matsod] and like birds that are caught in a snare, so are the sons of Adam ensnared at an evil time, when it falls upon them suddenly.*
- 2) The value of wisdom—9:13-18
 - a) Wisdom is illustrated—9:13-15
 - i) No guarantee of personal benefit—¹³ *I also observed this wisdom under the sun, and it is significant to me: ¹⁴ there was a little city with few men in it, and a great king came against it and besieged it and built great siege-works [matsod] against it. ¹⁵ Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that poor man.* (cf. 2:16; 9:5)
 - b) Wisdom is compared—9:16-17
 - i) Wisdom is better than strength—¹⁶ *So I said, “Wisdom is better than strength,*
 - (1) *But wisdom is not always heeded—though the poor man’s wisdom is despised, and his words are not heeded.”*
 - ii) Wisdom is better than powerful status alone—9:17 ¹⁷ *The words of the wise heard in quietness are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools.*
 - (1) *“Thus, the words of the wise spoken quietly or calmly possess value and ought to be taken seriously.”* (Barrick)
 - c) Wisdom can, at times, be thwarted by sin—9:18 ¹⁸ *Wisdom is better than weapons of war but one sinner can destroy much good.*

Ecclesiastes 10:1-20
Foolish and Wise Works Contrasted
Mystery must not prevent appropriate human effort—9:11-11:6
Removing Discouragements to God's Plan—8:16-12:14

- 1) Understand the value of being soberminded—10:1-4
 - a) Regarding fools—10:1-3 ¹ *Dead flies make a perfumer's ointment stink, so a little foolishness is weightier (has more influence) than wisdom and honor.* ² *A wise man's heart goes toward the right (protection), but a fool's heart toward the left (leaves him vulnerable).* ³ *Even when the fool walks on the road he lacks sense, and he says to everyone that he is a fool. (his reputation as a fool is known by all)*
 - b) Regarding rulers—10:4 ⁴ *If the spirit of the ruler rises against you, do not abandon (give rest to) your position, because composure causes great sins to rest.*

- 2) Remember the influence of foolishness—10:5-15
 - a) Government officials sometimes make bad judgments—10:5 ⁵ *There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, like an error proceeding from the ruler.*
 - b) Inappropriate honor for the fool—10:6-7 ⁶ *Folly is set in many high places, while the rich sit in the low place.* ⁷ *I have seen slaves on horses, and princes walking on the ground like slaves.*
 - c) Wisely avoid potential risk—10:8-11 ⁸ *He who digs a pit may fall into it, and a snake may bite the one who breaks through a wall.* ⁹ *The one who quarries stones may be hurt by them, and the one who splits logs may be endangered by them.* ¹⁰ *If the iron axe is dull and one does not sharpen its edge, he must exert more strength; however, wisdom has the advantage of giving success.* ¹¹ *If the serpent bites before it is charmed, there is no advantage for the charmer.*
 - d) The unteachable fool—10:12-15 ¹² *The words of a wise man are gracious, but the lips of a fool consume him.* ¹³ *The beginning of the words of his mouth is folly and the end of his talk is evil madness.* ¹⁴ *Yet the fool multiplies words. No man knows what will happen, and who can tell him what will be after him?* ¹⁵ *The toil of the fools wearies him, for he does not know how to go to a city.*

- 3) Respond wisely to foolish government—10:16-20
 - a) Contrasts—10:16-17
 - i) ¹⁶ *Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child and your princes feast in the morning.*
 - ii) ¹⁷ *Blessed are you, O land, when your king is the son of nobles, and your princes feast at the proper time—for strength and not for drunkenness.*
 - b) Illustrations of foolishness—10:18-19
 - i) Laziness—¹⁸ *Through extreme laziness the roof beams sag, and through the lowering of the hands the house leaks.*
 - ii) Priorities—¹⁹ *They prepare bread for laughter, and wine gladdens life, and money is the answer to everything.*
 - c) Be soberminded in your speech concerning the government—10:20 ²⁰ *Moreover do not curse the king even in your thought (cf. Exodus 22:28; Romans 13:1-7; 1st Timothy 2:1-2; 1st Peter 2:13-17), and do not curse the rich in your bedroom; for a bird of the air might carry the sound, or some winged creature might report the matter. (i.e. “a little bird told me ...”)*

Ecclesiastes 11:1-6

Active Involvement is Always Proper

Mystery must not prevent appropriate human effort—9:11-11:6

Removing Discouragements to God's Plan—8:16-12:14

- 1) Know your ignorance regarding the possibilities—11:1-4
 - a) Not having total control over the risk in investments can paralyze you—11:1-2
 - i) Financially?—
 - (1) Make the investment—11:1 ¹ *Send your bread upon the waters surface of the waters, for after many days you will find it.* (cf. 1st Kings 9:26-28; 10:22)
 - (2) But don't put all your grain in one ship—11:2 ² *Give a portion to seven or even to eight, for you do not know what evil may happen on the earth.*
 - ii) Charity?—some interpret this verse as showing mercy to a variety of people
 - b) Not having control over some inevitabilities can paralyze you—11:3
 - i) Regarding foreseeable weather—³ *If the clouds are full of rain, they will empty themselves on the earth;*
 - ii) Regarding common events in creation—*and if a tree falls to the south or to the north, wherever the tree falls, there it will lie.*
 - c) Being overly hesitant can paralyze you—11:4 ⁴ *The one paying attention to the wind will not sow, and the one observing the clouds will not harvest.* (i.e. don't bother separating your peas and carrots. Life doesn't always fit into nice categories.)
- 2) Know your ignorance of the Creator—11:5
 - a) Regarding unforeseeable weather—⁵ *As you do not know the path of the wind* (cf. John 3:8)
 - b) Regarding pregnancy—*and how bones form in the womb of pregnant woman,* (cf. Psalm 139:13-16)
 - c) Regarding God's providence—*so you do not know the work of God who makes everything.* (cf. 8:17)
- 3) Know your ignorance of final outcomes—11:6
 - a) Do a full day's work—⁶ *In the morning sow your seed and in the evening do not let your hand rest,* (i.e. don't lean on your shovel while praying for a hole)
 - b) Do your work in spite of your ignorance of the final results—*for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good.*

Ask ourselves: Am I one of those paralyzed people who demand certainty of guaranteed success before I act? Being spiritual "OCD" will only lead to frustration. Solving the enigmas of life is beyond us.

N.T parallels

Matthew 25:14-30; 2nd Corinthians 9:6; Galatians 6:9

Ecclesiastes 11:7-10

Enjoy the present, look forward to the future
Reminder of our imminent death and meeting God—11:7-12:7
Removing Discouragements to God's Plan—8:16-12:14

- 1) Young people should realize it is good to be alive—11:7-8
 - a) ⁷ *Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun.*
 - i) Young people tend to think they will enjoy life when:
 - (1) They have the things they've always wanted
 - (2) They have the other person they've always wanted
 - (3) They have achieved their goals and realized their dreams
 - ii) Depression and suicide rates are high among young people
 - b) Why? ⁸ *For if a man lives many years,*
 - i) *let him rejoice in them all;*
 - ii) *and let him remember the days of darkness* (difficult days, old age, the grave),
 - (1) *for they will be many.*
 - c) *All that comes is illusory.*
- 2) Young people should enjoy life and keep perspective—11:9
 - a) Enjoy life—⁹ *Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth.*
 - b) Do what you enjoy and what you know is right—*Walk in the ways of your heart and in the sight of your eyes*, (cf. 3:12-13)
 - c) Remember God will evaluate your life by His standards—but *know that for all these things God will bring you into the judgment.* (cf. 12:14)
- 3) Young people should enjoy life while they are young—11:10
 - a) Two commands to not focus on the negatives of life
 - i) Remove unnecessary stress—¹⁰ *Remove vexation from your heart,*
 - ii) Remove unnecessary self-deprivation—*and put away pain from your body,*
 - b) Why? Because life is short—*for youth and the prime of life* (lit. “blackness”, most like a reference to the color of one's hair in youth) *are illusory.*

Ecclesiastes 12:1-7
Live a Godward life before Sunset
Reminder of our imminent death and meeting God—11:7-12:7
Removing Discouragements to God's Plan—8:16-12:14

Introduction: This is one long sentence in Hebrew. Judgment before God is the context (cf. 11:9; 12:14)

- 1) Let reflections of God decisively impact your actions—12:1 ¹ *And remember your Creator^{pl} (plural of intensity) in the days of your youth,* (cf. 3:11; 7:13-14, 29; 11:5)
- 2) The timing of the obedience of the young person—12:1b-7
 - a) Before unpleasant days—**before** ...
 - i) Our miserable days—*the difficult days come,* (cf. 11:8)
 - ii) The end of our days—*and the years draw near when you say, “I have no pleasure in them”;*
 - b) Before old age—² **before** ...
 - i) Loss of vision—*the sun and the light, the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain;*
 - ii) Loss of strength in arms and hands—³ *in the day when the watchmen of the house tremble,*
 - iii) Loss of strength in legs—*and strong men stoop over,*
 - iv) Loss of teeth—*and the grinders cease because they are few,*
 - v) Loss of vision—*and those who look through the windows grow dim;*
 - vi) Loss of hearing—⁴ *and the doors on the street are shut when the sound of the grinding mill is low,*
 - vii) Lack of sound sleep—*and one rises at the sound of a bird,*
 - viii) Loss of vocal ability—*and all the daughters of song are brought low.*
 - ix) Loss of courage—⁵ *Moreover they are afraid of heights and of terrors on the road;*
 - x) White hair—*and the almond tree blossoms,*
 - xi) Loss of strength—*and the grasshopper drags itself along,*
 - xii) Loss of sexual desire—*and the caperberry is ineffective,*
 - xiii) Why? Because of our eventual death
 - (1) *because man goes to his eternal [olam] home [beth],* (the Jews still refer to a cemetery as *Beth Olam*)
 - (2) *and the mourners go about the street;*
 - c) Before death—⁶ **before** ...
 - i) Death is irreversible
 - (1) Loss of valuable life—*the silver cord is removed, or the golden bowl is crushed,*
 - (2) Loss of abilities to do the basic necessities of life—*or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain, or the wheel at the cistern is crushed;*
 - ii) Return
 - (1) Physical body—⁷ *and the dust returns to the earth as it was* (cf. Genesis 2:7a; 3:19)
 - (2) Spirit—*and the spirit returns to the God who gave it.* (cf. 3:19; Genesis 2:7b; 6:17; 7:22; Luke 23:46; Acts 7:59)

Ecclesiastes 12:8-14
Refrain # 4: Fear God with Obedience
Removing Discouragements to God's Plan—8:16-12:14

- 1) Restating his opening premise—12:8 ⁸ *“Most transitory,” says the Preacher, “all is transitory.”* (cf. 1:2)
- 2) Credibility of King Solomon's work—12:9-10
 - a) Wise—⁹ *In addition to the Preacher being wise,*
 - b) Knowledgeable—*he also taught the people knowledge;*
 - c) Careful—*and he weighed, and studied and arranged many proverbs.* (cf. 1st Kings 4:32; Proverbs)
 - d) Pleasant—¹⁰ *The Preacher sought to find delightful words*
 - e) Dependable—*and he accurately wrote words of truth.*
- 3) Reminders to his son—12:11-12
 - a) Pay attention to what father Solomon has written—12:11
 - i) Stimulating—¹¹ *The words of the wise are like goads,*
 - ii) Reliable—*and the collected sayings are like firmly fixed nails;*
 - iii) Divine authorship—*they are given by one Shepherd* (i.e. God; Psalm 23; 80:1).
 - b) Don't spend too much time away from the real world—12:12 ¹² *And beyond this, my son, be warned: of making many books there is no end, and much study is wearying to the body.*
- 4) God's judgment of His image-bearers—12:13-14 ¹³ *The conclusion of the matter, when all has been heard:*
 - a) What?
 - i) fear **God** (emphatic)
 - (1) Fearing God involves: trusting God (Psalm 115:11), experiencing God's forgiveness (Psalm 130:4), taking pleasure in God's Word (Psalm 112:1), obeying God's Word (Psalm 119:63), hating evil (Proverbs 8:13), and anticipating God's loyal love (Psalm 147:11).
 - ii) and keep **His commandments** (emphatic),
 - b) Why?
 - i) We are responsible to God—*because this is the whole of man.*
 - (1) This is the essence of God's design for people. These commands apply to all people of all time. This is the “gain” referred to in 1:3.
 - (2) “Humanity sought to be like God in disobeying him, but instead they lost the one thing that made them truly human.” (Garret)
 - ii) Everything matters—12:14 ¹⁴ *For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it is good or evil.* (cf. 11:9)
 - (1) Believers—2nd Corinthians 5:10
 - (a) Specifically pastors—1st Corinthians 3:10-15
 - (2) Unbelievers—Revelation 20:11-15
 - c) Your lifestyle reveals what and whom you worship. God's evaluation of you is the final word.