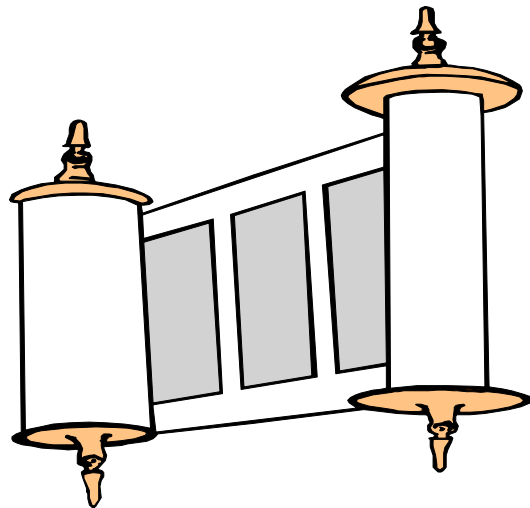


ECCLESIASTES

“The Preacher”



*“I have seen the works that are done under the sun;
and indeed, all is vanity and grasping for the wind.” (Ecclesiastes 1:14)*

*“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and
keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.” (Ecclesiastes 12:13)*

Lessons By: Rob Harbison

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ASSIGNMENT

Read the Book of Ecclesiastes in one sitting.

- What repeated words and phrases do you observe?
- Compare Ecclesiastes 1:2 with 12:8. Since these two similar verses appear at the beginning and the end of the book, what do you suggest as a prominent theme of the chapters in between?
- How does Ecclesiastes 1:1-11 introduce the book?
- How does Ecclesiastes 12:9-14 conclude the book?
- Describe the mood of this book.

Check when you have completed reading the Book of Ecclesiastes.

INTRODUCTION

Lesson 1

KEY VERSE(S)—

OUTLINE—

- I. PROLOGUE: All is Vanity (1:1-11)
- II. THE VANITY OF ALL THINGS (1:12-6:12)
- III. WORDS OF WISDOM (7:1-12:7)
- IV. CONCLUSION: Fear God and Keep His Commandments (12:8-14)

KEY WORDS (Themes)—

BACKGROUND INFORMATION—

Author. Solomon (1:1) Despite some alleged inconsistencies, the internal evidence of the book points to Solomon. The life of the author coincides with the life of Solomon—great wisdom (1:16), extensive building projects (2:4-6), incomparable wealth (2:7-9), and his many proverbs (12:9).

Date. 940 BC. These are the words of a tired man looking back over his lifelong search for meaning and purpose. He made many mistakes and pours out his heart to guide the young who stand at the same crossroad (11:9-12:7).

Name Of The Book. “*Ecclesiastes*” derives its name from the Preacher named in the book (1:1,2,12; 7:27; 12:8,9,10). The Hebrew title is “*Qoheleth*” (a ‘*qoheleth*’ was an official speaker to an assembly of people). When the Old Testament was translated into Greek, this book was given the name “*Ekklesiastes*.” In our English Bibles, the title was transliterated and called “*Ecclesiastes*.” The name of the book translated literally into English would be “*The Preacher*.”

- *What does the title tell you about the book?*

- *What familiar Greek word do you see in that title?*

MESSAGE OF ECCLESIASTES—

Life apart from God is meaningless. All of man’s pursuits and efforts are futile when God is excluded from them. And since the works of God cannot be thwarted, then it is only a life of service to Him that can impart value and purpose to our lives.

“The purpose of the book seems to be to show that self-gratification and successful worldliness do not bring satisfaction to the human heart. Life without a knowledge of and fellowship with God is empty and meaningless. Man has a destiny which calls for cooperation with God in some worthy enterprise, and in this he finds abiding peace of soul...” (H.I. Hester, *The Heart Of Hebrew History*, p.311).

“The basic theme of Qoheleth is the ultimate futility of a life based upon earthly ambitions and desires. Any world view which does not rise above the horizon of man himself is doomed to meaninglessness and frustration. To view personal happiness or enjoyment as life’s greatest good is sheer folly in view of the transcendent value

of God Himself as over against His created universe. Happiness can never be achieved by pursuing after it, since such a pursuit involves the absurdity of self-deification... Transient mortals must realize that they are mere creatures, and that they derive importance only from their relationship to the almighty Creator... In other words Ecclesiastes is really intended to be a tract for the conversion of the self-sufficient individual; it compels him to discard his comfortable, self-flattering illusions and face honestly the instability of all those materialistic props on which he attempts to base his security... Only as one finds a new meaning for life in surrendering to the sovereignty of God and faithful obedience to His will in moral conduct can one find a valid principle and goal for responsible human living.” (Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia Of The Bible, Vol. 2, pp. 187-188).

Solomon Asks Three Probing Questions.

Question—What profit does a man have under the sun (1:3; 3:9)?

Answer—None. He labors for the wind (2:11; 5:16)

Question—What is it good for man to do in life (2:3)?

Answer—Eat, drink, and enjoy the fruit of his labor (2:10,24; 3:22; 5:18)

Question—What is my purpose for existing?

Answer—To serve God (12:13-14)

STYLE OF ECCLESIASTES—

The negative view that Ecclesiastes is a pessimistic, skeptical book is mistaken. It is neither the style of a complainer nor one who has withdrawn himself from the world. It is the contemplation of a man who has experienced everything that man could want (2:10-11) to find meaning and satisfaction.

He does not resign himself to atheism, agnosticism, skepticism, or putting “blind faith” in the place of God. Rather, he firmly holds to the notion that the fear of God is man’s strongest duty (12:13) and the assurance of man’s truest prosperity (2:24-26; 3:13-14; 5:18-20). The writer does not despise the world itself and all of God’s gifts in it. Rather, he insists that the greatest enjoyment of life comes within the limits of the fear of God!!

*“Throughout the book of Ecclesiastes the author shows two opposite life views. First, he views things around him as the natural man would do, without the light of divine revelation. His conclusion is ‘All is vanity’... But then the author writes as one to whom God has revealed Himself, and now his observations and conclusions have the ring of surety and hope. For example: ‘Everything God does will remain forever’ (3:14). This pattern of alternating perspectives continues throughout the book.” (Irving Jensen, *Jensen’s Survey Of The Old Testament*, p.301).*

QUESTIONS—

1) Summarize the book of Ecclesiastes in one or two sentences.

OBSERVATIONS

Premise (1:1-11)

Observation (1:12-2:23)

Instruction (2:24-26)

Observation (3:1-11)

Instruction (3:12-15)

Observation (3:16-4:8)

Instruction (4:9-5:12)

Observation (5:13-17)

Instruction (5:18-20)

Observation (6:1-12)

Instruction (7:1-14)

Observation (7:15)

Instruction (7:16-8:9)

Observation (8:10-9:6)

Instruction (9:7-10)

Observation (9:11-18)

Instruction (10:1-4)

Observation (10:5-19)

Instruction (10:20-12:8)

Conclusion (12:9-14)

INSTRUCTIONS

-
- 2) *Why do many people consider the book of Ecclesiastes to be a negative, pessimistic book?*
 - 3) *What events in Solomon's life brought him to the perspective of the author of this book (1 Kings 3:3-15; 4:20-34; 5:1-7:12; 10:23; 11:1-13)?*
 - 4) *Why will man never find happiness or meaning apart from God?*
 - 5) *What is the relevance of the book of Ecclesiastes to our generation?*

CHAPTER 1:1-11

Lesson 2

KEY VERSE(S)—

OUTLINE—

- I. **PREMISE:** All is Vanity (1:1-2)
- II. **FUTILITY OF MAN'S LABORS** (1:3-11)
 - A. Monotony of Life (1:3-8)
 - B. Nothing New Comes (1:9-10)
 - C. Nothing Old Remains (1:11)

KEY WORDS (Themes)—

SUMMARY—

The Preacher begins with his judgment of life when it is perceived from a purely world view—it is vain and without profit (1:2). Many of us think the world revolves around us. We think we can make an impact on the world, but our memory dies with the rest of our generation. We are then replaced by another generation who thinks the same thing about itself (1:3). All things are full of labor with no profit (1:3,8) as evidenced by the natural world. Nothing permanent is ever accomplished—either by nature (1:4-7) or by man (1:8).

Man is never content enough to realize his place (1:8). Some call this ambition, achievement, or obsession. The Preacher calls it vanity. Lest we think our generation is different, we are reminded that no generation is different (1:9-10), and the memory of ours will blow away one day like “dust in the wind” (1:11).

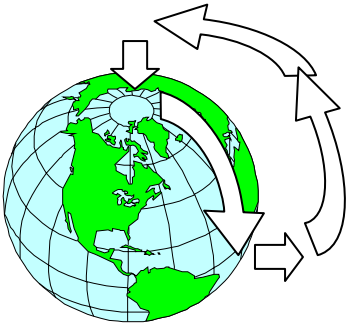
QUESTIONS—

- 1) *Summarize this passage in one sentence.*
- 2) *What is the important lesson we learn when comparing Ecclesiastes 1:3 with Matthew 16:26?*
- 3) *Define the word “forever” (1:4)*
- 4) *How does the scientific knowledge of the Preacher (1:5-7) validate the inspiration of his message?*
- 5) *What is the problem with man looking for satisfaction in things of this world (1:8; cf. Proverbs 27:20)? Where can it be found (Philippians 4:6-7,11-13)?*
- 6) *Man has the ability to discover and to change things, but what is he unable to do (1:9-10)?*
- 7) *How permanent is anything we are able to do in this world (1:4,11; Psalm 39:5)?*

WORTH NOTING—

The writer of Ecclesiastes comprehended two scientific principles that were relatively unknown at the time of his writing. The knowledge of these principles further attests to the divine authorship of this book.

AIR CIRCULATION (1:6)

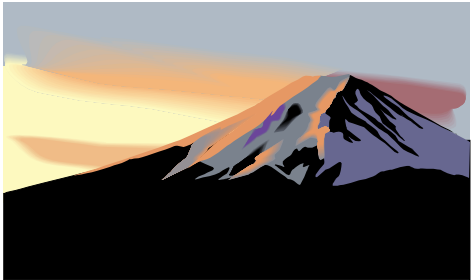


1940AD
As high flying aircraft and special observation balloons provided observations in the upper atmosphere, it was discovered that there is a basic pattern for air circulation. This is caused as the sun warms the ground, the ground heats the air. The sun rays strike obliquely at the poles causing the ground there to heat air less than at the equator. Warm air rises at the equator causing greater pressure at altitude. Air pressure at the ground level is greater at the poles because it is colder and denser. This pressure differential forces the air rising at the equator to flow north at high altitude until it cools and drops down at the pole, at which time it flows southward to fill the space at the equator being emptied by the rising air there.

WATER-VAPOR CYCLE (1:7)

1520AD
Until it was known that the earth was spherical, the common belief was that the rivers flowing into the oceans did not cause the ocean to rise because an equal amount of water was spilling off the ends of the earth. Before Magellan’s discovery no scientist conceived the idea that it was the water of the ocean that was being cycled to provide fresh water of the rivers.

1770AD
It was not observed until the 18th century that clouds can transport moisture away from the area in which they were formed. From observations at only a few points, Benjamin Franklin was the first to recognize that individual storms move from place to place over the earth’s surface. The river-to-sea-to-river water cycle was published by Benjamin Franklin from his observations, thus greatly aiding the study of weather by men.



Source: *Has God Spoken*, A.O. Schnabel, pp.39-44

READING SCHEDULE—

Read this passage every day before the upcoming class (check the box after each day that you read the passage)

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CHAPTER 1:12-2:11

KEY VERSE(S)—

OUTLINE—

- I. **OBSERVATION:** Search for Meaning (1:12-2:23)
 - A. Conclusion Of His Search (1:12-15)
 - B. Objects of His Search (1:16-2:23)
 1. Knowledge and Worldly Wisdom (1:16-18)
 2. Pleasure and Mirth (2:1-3)
 3. Wealth and Accomplishments (2:4-9)
 4. Everything Man Desires (2:10-11)
 5. Inequity of Life (2:12-17)
 6. Labor and Toil (2:18-23)
- II. **INSTRUCTION:** Enjoy Good in One's Labor (2:24-26)

KEY WORDS (Themes)—

SUMMARY—

The Preacher sets out on a search for meaning and purpose in life. He is in a unique position which allows him to test all those things for which men yearn when searching for satisfaction. It is a frustrating and exasperating task because the search is vain. The Preacher begins his discussion, about all the objects of man's quest for meaning, with his conclusion (1:12-15).

He then summarizes the futility of each of these things that men pursue. Knowledge and worldly wisdom are vain because their acquisition results in greater grief and sorrow because of our inability to do anything about many of the things we learn (1:16-18). Pleasure and mirth are vain because of their inability to positively accomplish anything. They are merely escapes from problems, not solutions (2:1-3).

Wealth and accomplishments are vain because they are "*grasping for wind*"—when we catch the wind in our grasp, we open our hand and have nothing (2:4-9). He withheld nothing from himself in his quest, and nothing was withheld from him (2:10). His conclusion was that there was no profit to any of them (2:11).

QUESTIONS—

- 1) *Summarize this passage in one sentence.*
- 2) *Why is the search for worldly wisdom an endless circle (1:13; 8:16-17)?*
- 3) *Why is the pursuit of knowledge vain?*
 - *verse 13—*
 - *verse 15—*
 - *verse 18—*

-
- 4) Explain the phrase “grasping for wind”.
 - 5) What was the purpose of the Preacher’s quest (2:3)?
 - 6) What remained with the Preacher throughout all of these things he pursued (2:3,9)? Why is that significant?
 - 7) What do we need to realize about the Preacher before we start thinking that he never experienced the kind of things we do, as we search for meaning (2:10-11)?
 - 8) In which of these things have you searched for fulfillment?

ASSIGNMENT—

There are four paths that men choose when they are looking for happiness that can only be found in this world. In the first column identify the path which the Preacher mentions. Then in the second column record the result of his quest.

	Path Men Follow To Happiness	Final Result Of The Quest	
1:12-18			1:16-18
2:1-11			2:10-11
4:13-16			4:15-16
5:10-16			5:10,15-16

READING SCHEDULE—

Read this passage every day before the upcoming class (check the box after each day that you read the passage)

Sunday
 Monday
 Tuesday
 Wednesday
 Thursday
 Friday
 Saturday

CHAPTER 2:12-26

Lesson 4

KEY VERSE(S)—

OUTLINE—

- I. **OBSERVATION:** Looking for Meaning (1:12-2:23)
 - A. Conclusion of His Search (1:12-15)
 - B. Objects of His Search (1:16-23)
 1. Knowledge and Worldly Wisdom (1:16-18)
 2. Pleasure and Mirth (2:1-3)
 3. Wealth and Accomplishments (2:4-9)
 4. Everything Man Desires (2:10-11)
 5. Inequity of Life (2:12-17)
 6. Labor and Toil (2:18-23)
- II. **INSTRUCTION:** Enjoy Good In One's Labor (2:24-26)

KEY WORDS (Themes)—

SUMMARY—

The Preacher continues to discuss the objects of his search for meaning and fulfillment in life. He saw that wisdom far excelled madness and folly (2:12-13) but that wisdom brought him knowledge of a depressing truth—that death pays no deference to the wise over the fool. Therefore, it seems that even the pursuit of wisdom over folly is vanity (2:14-16). And the truth it reveals is vexation (2:17).

Now he looks at all his labor and toil in a different light—the burdens that he bears, the skill that he exhibits, the sacrifices that he makes are all in vain (2:18-23). The instruction he gives us based on his observation of all these other things is this: find contentment and joy in our labors, and enjoy that as our reward from God (2:24-26). Of all the things man seeks for fulfillment, this is the thing that God gives!!

QUESTIONS—

- 1) *Summarize this passage in one sentence.*
- 2) *He concludes that wisdom is far greater than folly (2:12-13). But why does he reject that as having any lasting importance (2:14)?*
- 3) *What two things happen to both the wise and the fool (2:15-16)?*
- 4) *What were some of the reasons that the Preacher despaired of all his hard work and labor?*
 - *verses 18-19—*
 - *verse 21—*
 - *verses 22-23—*

-
- 5) *What quickly causes the pride of our accomplishments to pale (2:18; Psalm 39:5-6; 49:10)?*
 - 6) *What does the Preacher conclude is good for man to do (2:24-26)? Why?*
 - 7) *The Preacher finally answers the question he asked in 2:3. What is his answer in 2:24-26? (cf. Philippians 4:6-7; Matthew 6:25-34)*
 - 8) *How can his conclusions about work and labor be considered consistent with the admonition to work hard to the best of our abilities (9:10; Colossians 3:23)?*

ASSIGNMENT—

Here is where the frustrated Preacher’s search finally finds an answer to his question about “*what was good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives*” (2:3). What are some of the conclusions he reaches in the following verses?

What Is Good For The Sons Of Men To Do?	
2:24	
3:12-13	
3:22	
5:18-20	
8:15	
9:9	
12:13	

READING SCHEDULE—

Read this passage every day before the upcoming class (check the box after each day that you read the passage)

Sunday
 Monday
 Tuesday
 Wednesday
 Thursday
 Friday
 Saturday

CHAPTER 3:1-15

Lesson 5

KEY VERSE(S)—

OUTLINE—

- I. **OBSERVATION:** To Everything There is a Time (3:1-11)
 - A. Time for Every Purpose Under Heaven (3:1-8)
 - B. God's Purpose for Man Under Heaven (3:9-11)
 - 1. Occupy Himself with Eternity (3:9-11)
 - 2. Be Satisfied Without Having Answers (3:11)
- II. **INSTRUCTION:** Rejoice in the Good Which God Gives (3:12-15)
 - A. Nothing Better Than God's Gift of Life (3:12-13)
 - B. Nothing Can Hinder God's Work (3:14-15)

KEY WORDS (Themes)—

SUMMARY—

The Preacher, having concluded that whatever happiness there is in life is dependent on God, next observes that even the most minute details of life have been ordered and set in motion by God. They have not been foreordained, but they work within the sphere of God's control (3:1,17).

He then cites 14 contrasting issues of life (3:2-8). The implication is that man's happiness and greatest good is found from operating within the laws of God and not by trying to control these things ourselves—something we are powerless to do anyway. Since there is a distinguishable system to everything, the conclusion is that this must also be true of man, even though it cannot always be seen or fully comprehended.

Man is created for eternity and his innermost yearnings cannot be filled with temporal, earthly things (3:9-11). Acceptance of God's works and gifts brings man his greatest contentment (3:12-13). Much of man's frustration in life comes from trying to control that which is beyond his control. God does it this way so we will fear Him and recognize our dependence on Him (3:14-15).

QUESTIONS—

- 1) *Summarize this passage in one sentence.*
- 2) *In a book which many people consider to be fatalistic and skeptical, how is God's providence illustrated in 3:1-8?*
- 3) *Explain the phrase "He has put eternity in their hearts" (3:11).*
- 4) *How must we respond to those works of God that we cannot comprehend (2 Corinthians 5:7)?*

5) *Since it is obvious that man can neither accelerate nor retard God's work in this world, how should man respond to God (3:14-15)?*

ASSIGNMENT—

Quickly reread the Book of Ecclesiastes and identify some of the statements made about the vanity and folly of what man does, and about the permanence of what God does. Record them, along with the verses where you find them, in the chart below.

Works Of Men The Vanity Of Man's Works	Verse	Works Of God The Permanence of God's Works	Verse

Underline or circle the word "God" in your Bible every time you read it in this book. How many times did you find Him mentioned? What does that tell you about one of the themes of this book?

READING SCHEDULE—

Read this passage every day before the upcoming class (check the box after each day that you read the passage)

Sunday
 Monday
 Tuesday
 Wednesday
 Thursday
 Friday
 Saturday

CHAPTER 3:16-4:16

Lesson 6

KEY VERSE(S)—

OUTLINE—

- I. **OBSERVATION:** Inequities of Life (3:16-4:8)
 - A. Injustice (3:16-17)
 - B. Unfairness of Death (3:18-22)
 - C. Oppression (4:1-3)
 - D. Selfishness (4:4-8)
- II. **INSTRUCTION:** Vain and Valuable Things (4:9-5:12)
 - A. Value of Friends (4:9-12)
 - B. Vanity of Popularity and Power (4:13-16)
 - C. Value of Prudence Before God (5:1-7)
 - D. Vanity of Oppression (5:8-12)

KEY WORDS (Themes)—

SUMMARY—

The Preacher observes that life is full of inequity and unfairness. There is injustice in the house of judgment where we expect to find justice and fairness (3:16-17). Even though this wrong will ultimately be righted, it is still unfair. There is death, which takes the lives of all men without partiality—and to those who only have a “this world” view of things, apart from God, it makes us no better than the beast (3:18-22).

There is oppression, as those who have the power to oppress, mistreat those who do not have the power to resist (4:1-3). There is selfishness, which leaves the laborer with nothing he can enjoy or retain, along with the loneliness of his selfishness (4:4-8). He never asks who he is working for—he is never satisfied and he has no one to share his labors with.

Companionship is more profitable than such selfishness (4:9-12). Even the highest places of power and honor that men occupy offer no real assurance or security. Popularity and popular opinion are too fickle (4:13-16). Even the highest pinnacle of success is marred by the knowledge that “this too shall pass away.”

QUESTIONS—

- 1) *Summarize this passage in one sentence.*
- 2) *What consolation do we have in spite of the injustice that prevails (3:17)?*
- 3) *In what sense is man no better than the beasts (3:18-20)? In what sense is man different than the beasts (3:21; cf. 12:7)?*
- 4) *Why does the Preacher praise the dead over the oppressed (4:1-3)?*

5) Which is fuller, one handful with quietness or two hands full—one with toil and the other with wind (4:6)?

6) What are the benefits of having friends and companions?

- verse 9—
- verse 10—
- verse 11—
- verse 12—

ASSIGNMENT—

Locate these other passages in Ecclesiastes which affirm that death comes to all men. *What does he say about death in all of these passages?* Place your answers in the chart next to each passage.

	Death
2:14-16	
3:2	
3:19-20	
6:3-6	
7:1-4	
8:8	
9:2-6	
12:6-7	

READING SCHEDULE—

Read this passage every day before the upcoming class (check the box after each day that you read the passage)

Sunday Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday

CHAPTER 5:1-20

KEY VERSE(S)—

OUTLINE—

- I. **OBSERVATION:** Vanity of Increase (5:8-17)
 - A. Vanity of Oppression (5:8-9)
 - B. Vanity of Abundance (5:10-12)
 - C. Vanity of Miserliness (5:13-17)
- II. **INSTRUCTION:** The Gift of God (5:18-20)

KEY WORDS (Themes)—

SUMMARY—

The Preacher next observes that when man finds no comfort or security in any of these other things, he must beware of a motivation that would turn to religion, thinking that religion is the solution to his problems. If he approaches religion looking for meaning—with the same attitude he approached wealth, fame, knowledge, etc.—then he will not find what he is looking for in ritualism and ceremony any more than he found it in those other things.

When we approach God, we must approach Him in a prudent manner rather than an evil one (5:1). We must come to hear God (5:1), come to pray (5:2-3), and come to pay our vow (5:4-7). Any other purpose for approaching God is vain! “Just as life in all its forms is vain without God, even so religion without God is vain also.” (Dee Bowman).

The oppressor oppresses in vain because there is one over him (5:8), and because he is served by the very people whom he oppresses (5:9).

Riches and abundance are futile because they cannot satisfy a man. Labor is its own reward whether we have little or much (5:10-12). The content man is richer than the rich man. Even more futile is the miser who hoards his riches to himself (5:13-17). Man’s heritage—his gift from God—is contentment. In this way He can enjoy God’s blessings, and thus be satisfied with joy, peace, and tranquility (5:18-20; cf. Psalm 126:5).

QUESTIONS—

- 1) *Summarize this passage in one sentence.*
- 2) *Why is it important for us to be sincere and serious in our worship to God (5:1; cf. Matthew 6:7; 15:9; Isaiah 1:10-17)?*
- 3) *Why is the pursuit of religious ceremonialism a vain attempt to find fulfillment (5:1-7)? What does it actually become (5:1)? What is the proper motivation behind religion (5:7)?*
- 4) *Why can the man who loves wealth never be satisfied with wealth (5:10)?*

5) *Why can't we find the security we seek in the wealth we accumulate in our own effort to provide that security (5:11-12)?*

6) *How can it be evil to hoard our wealth (5:13)?*

- *verse 13—*
- *verse 14—*
- *verse 15—*
- *verse 17a—*
- *verse 17b—*

Describe the life of this miser.

7) *What does it mean that God has “given him power to eat of it” (5:19)? How is that man different from the man whom God “does not give him power to eat of it” (6:2)?*

8) *How is a little bit with contentment, able to give man peace and tranquility(5:18-20)?*

ASSIGNMENT—

Do some research on vows under the Old Testament law. Study the following passages and then write down some of your observations about the nature, purpose, and other qualities pertaining to vows.

- Leviticus 27:1-13—
- Numbers 6:1-21—
- Numbers 30:2-14—
- Deuteronomy 23:21-23—
- 1 Samuel 1:11—
- Psalm 50:14—
- Psalm 56:12-13—
- Psalm 61:5-8—
- Psalm 76:11—
- Psalm 116:12-14—
- Proverbs 20:25—
- Ecclesiastes 5:4-5—
- Acts 18:18—
- Acts 21:23—

READING SCHEDULE—

Read this passage every day before the upcoming class (check the box after each day that you read the passage)

Sunday Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday

CHAPTER 6:1-7:14

KEY VERSE(S)—

OUTLINE—

- I. **OBSERVATION:** When Pockets are Full but the Soul is Empty (6:1-12)
 - A. The Man who Does Not Benefit from His Wealth (6:1-2)
 - B. Tragedy of the Empty Soul (6:3-6)
 - C. What We Have is Better than What We Want (6:7-9)
 - D. Contending with God is Vanity (6:10-12)
- II. **INSTRUCTION:** Things That are Better for the Soul (7:1-14)
 - A. Good Name (7:1)
 - B. House of Mourning (7:2-4)
 - C. Rebuke of the Wise (7:5-7)
 - D. Accomplishment (7:8a)
 - E. Patience (7:8b-9)
 - F. Living in the Present Not the Past (7:10)
 - G. Wisdom (7:11-12)
 - H. Prosperity and Adversity (7:13-14)

KEY WORDS (Themes)—

SUMMARY—

The Preacher returns to the vanity of wealth—this time to the man who has acquired great wealth, but is denied the enjoyment of it (6:1-2). He lacks nothing that he desires, but his problem is he doesn't desire what he has—his soul is still empty (6:3). If he is not satisfied with what God provides him in abundance, then his very existence is cursed (6:3-6). The problem is that he is trying to fill the wrong appetite—and it is not just the wealthy man who makes this mistake (6:7-9).

For man to even think he knows what will fill himself is futile—God knows. It is even greater vanity to contend with the one who knows (6:10-12; cf. Jeremiah 10:23).

All of the things he mentions that are better, here in chapter 7, are better because of the effect they have on man's soul (cf. 6:3,7)—these lesser things in the comparison only affect his physical existence.

QUESTIONS—

- 1) *Summarize this passage in one sentence.*
- 2) *Are riches, wealth, and honor evil things? What is the evil affliction associated with them (6:2)?*
- 3) *How is the stillborn child better than this man (6:3-6)?*
- 4) *What must a man learn in order to be happy with the things that he has (6:7)?*

-
- 5) Answer the question the Preacher asked, “For what more has the wise man than the fool?” (6:8). Refer to verses in previous chapters to support your answer.
 - 6) How is man’s life like a shadow (6:12; cf. Psalm 144:4)?
 - 7) Why would the man be considered wise who recognizes the value of those things mentioned in chapter 7, when everyone else thinks that they are foolishness?
 - 8) What is the value of wisdom (7:11-14)?

ASSIGNMENT—

Man’s limited vision and understanding of life (6:10-12) gives him a distorted view of the worth of various things in his life. God is able to show us which is better and why it is better.

Using a concordance, or reading back through the book of Ecclesiastes, record each of the verses where you find the word “better”.

Using the chart below record those things in chapters 6 and 7 that are better than their counterparts. Then explain how each is better for the soul of man than the other.

Verse	The Better Thing	Better Than What?	How Is It Better?
6:3			
6:9			
7:1a			
7:1b			
7:2			
7:3			
7:5			
7:8a			
7:8b			
7:10			

READING SCHEDULE—

Read this passage every day before the upcoming class (check the box after each day that you read the passage)

Sunday
 Monday
 Tuesday
 Wednesday
 Thursday
 Friday
 Saturday

CHAPTER 7:15-8:9

Lesson 9

KEY VERSE(S)—

OUTLINE—

- I. **OBSERVATION:** Man Won't Always Reap what he Sows Instantly (7:15)
- II. **INSTRUCTION:** Benefit of Wisdom in Dealing with Inequities (7:16-8:9)
 - A. Wisdom Overdone is not Wisdom (7:16-18)
 - B. Wisdom Strengthens the Wise (7:19-22)
 - C. Wisdom Finds out the Reason (7:23-29)
 - D. Wisdom Makes the Face Shine (8:1-9)

KEY WORDS (Themes)—

SUMMARY—

Many of the statements in this section appear disjointed, but they summarize some of the observations he has already made in previous chapters. He sought out understanding (7:25) and added one thing to another (7:27).

Wisdom views the inequities of life realistically and soberly (7:15). It does not try to overcome them all by being overly righteous to compensate for the unfairness of life, neither does it throw up its hands and give in to wickedness because there is no use in being righteous (7:16-18). We must hang on to righteousness while we accept the fact that life is unfair and we cannot do much to change that! Wisdom gives us a more insightful view of living, more than ten noble statesmen (7:19-22). Wisdom recognizes and accepts the fact that others are not perfect—because it sees that it is not perfect either. Such a view makes us more tolerant of other people.

Wisdom seeks after reasons and causes (7:23-25). This kind of insight is far from us and impossible to obtain on our own. The way to find it is to look to God's plans and purposes (7:29). One of the greatest things that tormented the Preacher was the inability to find anyone who was worthy of praise—he could accept that wisely (7:20) or bitterly (7:26-29).

Wisdom is enlightening. Who else understands like the wise man does (8:1)? Wisdom counsels us how to walk before, and be subject to the king, and how to understand the end of even the most unjust rulers (8:2-8). The mishandling of his God-given authority will bring him into judgment over it (8:9).

QUESTIONS—

- 1) *Summarize this passage in one sentence.*
- 2) *How could a person be overly righteous or overly wicked (7:16-18)? Why might he go to either extreme?*
- 3) *What two realizations about ourselves, and our fellowman, should make us more tolerant and patient with others (7:20-22)?*
- 4) *Why is there wisdom in searching out to find “the reason of things” (7:25,27)?*

5) *Of all the things Solomon sought, what did he have a hard time finding (7:26-29)? Could Solomon really say that or was he just exaggerating (1 Kings 11:3-11)?*

6) *Answer the Preacher’s question, “Who is like a wise man?” (8:1).*

7) *How does he counsel us to act before our rulers?*

- *verse 2—*
- *verse 3a—*
- *verse 3b—*

8) *What will wisdom tell us about the king and his position?*

- *verse 4—*
- *verses 5-6—*
- *verse 7—*
- *verse 8—*

ASSIGNMENT—

Many statements in this section seem unrelated. Yet, many of these observations summarize those that the Preacher has previously made (cf. 7:27). Identify the observation found in the verses in the left-hand column—record that observation in the middle column—then record similar verses found earlier in the book in the right-hand column.

Verse(s)	Observation	Previous Verse(s)
7:18		
7:23-24		
7:23-25		
8:6		
8:7		
8:8		
8:9		

READING SCHEDULE—

Read this passage every day before the upcoming class (check the box after each day that you read the passage)

Sunday
 Monday
 Tuesday
 Wednesday
 Thursday
 Friday
 Saturday

CHAPTER 8:10-9:10

Lesson 10

KEY VERSE(S)—

OUTLINE—

- I. **OBSERVATION:** One Event Happens to All (8:10-9:6)
 - A. Life is Unfair (8:10-14)
 - B. Yet Life is Still in God's Hands (8:15-9:1)
 - C. Death Happens to All (9:2-6)
- II. **INSTRUCTION:** Positive Ways to Respond to this Truth (9:7-10)

KEY WORDS (Themes)—

SUMMARY—

Even though there is inequity in death because it strikes everyone alike, there is also an unfairness in *life* that is certain, and that death finally evens up. The sinner may not immediately reap what he has sown, but he eventually does (8:10-13). "It should not be forgotten, however, that the earth is a place for sowing and eternity is a place for reaping." (Dee Bowman).

The best way to deal with this injustice is to enjoy life's simple pleasures and not fret over the other (8:14-15). God's work and plans will be accomplished whether we ever understand them or not (8:16-17). Everything is in the hands of God (9:1).

Man's moral condition does not alter some things—God's rain falls on the just and the unjust (9:2) and death strikes down everyone (9:3). Even for the wicked there remains hope as long as they are living (9:4), but when they die, they are cut off from everything they built their life upon—all that which is "*under the sun*" (9:5-6). The Preacher concludes this section by instructing us on some positive things to do in order that "*it will be well with those who fear God*" (9:7-10; cf. 8:12).

QUESTIONS—

- 1) *Summarize the passage in one sentence.*
- 2) *Not only is it unfair that wickedness is not immediately punished, but how does the wicked reason in response to that fact (8:11)? What will eventually happen anyway (8:12-13)?*
- 3) *What is true about the work of God (8:17)? What should be our response to His work then?*
- 4) *Death comes to all men. How can that be both fair and unfair (9:2-3)?*
- 5) *Does the Preacher tell us that there is no existence beyond this life (9:4-6)? From what does he say death removes us?*

6) What are some of the good things we can enjoy in the midst of such unfairness (9:7-10)?

ASSIGNMENT—

Find the number of times the phrase “under the sun” is found in this passage.

- Define what it means.
- What are some of the things he says in this passage about “life under the sun”?
- Find the number of times “God” is found in this passage.

What are the contrasts between our works “under the sun” and those works that are “in the hand of God”? Record some of your observations in the chart below.

“Under The Sun”	“In The Hand Of God”

READING SCHEDULE—

Read this passage every day before the upcoming class (check the box after each day that you read the passage)

Sunday Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday

CHAPTER 9:11-10:4

KEY VERSE(S)—

OUTLINE—

- I. **OBSERVATION:** Wisdom is Best Even if it is Uncertain (9:11-18)
 - A. Time and Chance Happen to All (9:11-12)
 - B. Wisdom is Superior to Strength (9:13-18)
- II. **INSTRUCTION:** Wisdom is Superior to Folly (10:1-4)

KEY WORDS (Themes)—

SUMMARY—

The Preacher assures us that wisdom is far superior and more desirable, even though time and chance happen to all (9:11-12), and wisdom often goes unrecognized (9:13-18). The fact that life is uncertain, is one of the few certainties of life—Ironic isn't it? Although popularity may be more attractive, wisdom is more important.

Even though man is taught about such things, he still rushes headlong into snares and traps (9:12). The Preacher tells a parable to illustrate the value of wisdom—how it is even superior to strength (9:13-18). Wisdom does much good, but one sinner can destroy much good (9:18). He can cause something beautiful to become ugly and smelly (10:1).

A wise man uses his wisdom as his strength—the seat of his power (10:2). On the other hand, the fool is like the left hand for most people—awkward, sluggish, and slow to move (10:2-3). Even the power of one's wisdom can prove itself to be greater than the strength of a ruler—because it can bring him under control (10:4).

QUESTIONS—

- 1) *Summarize this passage in one sentence.*
- 2) *With life being so uncertain, where should we place our trust and confidence (9:11)?*
- 3) *How should we prepare for the unavoidable uncertainty of death (9:12)?*
- 4) *What is so tragic about this story of the wise man?*
 - *verse 16b—*
 - *verse 16c—*
 - *verse 17—*
 - *verse 18—*
- 5) *List some Bible examples where one wise man made a great impact, or where one foolish man brought about great destruction.*

6) *How can such a small thing spoil such a beautiful thing (9:18; 10:1; cf. James 3:5; 1 Corinthians 5:6)?*

7) *How does the fool announce his folly (10:3; Proverbs 13:16; 18:2)?*

ASSIGNMENT—

Wisdom has been a consistent theme from chapter 7 through this section of chapter 10. Either by using a concordance, or by reading through the book of Ecclesiastes again, identify how many times the words “*wise*” and “*wisdom*” are used.

- *What characteristics are stated about wisdom?*
- *What is the benefit of having wisdom?*
- *What limitations does wisdom have? (What is it not able to do?)*

READING SCHEDULE—

Read this passage every day before the upcoming class (check the box after each day that you read the passage)

Sunday Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday

CHAPTER 10:5-11:8

Lesson 12

KEY VERSE(S)—

OUTLINE—

- I. **OBSERVATION:** Foolish Rulers (10:5-19)
 - A. Rulers Take Unfair Advantage of Their Position (10:5-7)
 - B. How You Deal with this Situation (10:8-15)
 - 1. Wisdom Brings Success (10:8-10)
 - 2. Foolish Words Destroy (10:11-15)
 - C. Folly of the Morally Foolish King (10:16-19)
- II. **INSTRUCTION:** Deal Wisely with Such Rulers (10:20-11:8)
 - A. Proper Response to a Foolish King (10:20)
 - B. Always Do the Best you Can (11:1-8)

KEYS WORDS (Themes)—

SUMMARY—

The Preacher shows us that power and wisdom do not always coincide. The powerful are not always wise—they may even exalt folly (10:5-7). He has already observed that to be true (cf. 9:11). This is obviously not a fair situation, but wisdom helps us cope with this fact.

Next he emphasizes that there are consequences to certain actions (10:8-10). At first glance it may seem he is reassuring us that such a ruler will “*get what he deserves*,” but he ends by saying “*wisdom brings success*” (10:10). Likely this is enjoining wisdom in the man who sees such injustice—he must be careful how he responds or trouble can come to him (10:4,8-14,20). Be careful what you say about such a man—being “right” is little consolation when the evil man destroys you because of it (10:11-14).

The entire nation suffers when rulers are ungodly—drinking, reveling, and bribing others (10:16-19). The challenge is for us to hold our tongues lest the wrong people hear our disapproving speech (10:20). That would be a foolish thing to do considering the kind of person this king is, and the way he will take advantage of his position to harm or silence you permanently.

What is the best way to respond to all this? Don’t let this inequity stop you from doing what wisdom dictates regarding those who are in need (11:1-2) or your work (11:3-4). Remember that all this is in God’s hands anyway, not the king’s (11:5-6). Therefore, do not withhold good when you can do it. Even though you get to experience the good that God bestows, don’t forget that these “*days of darkness will be many*” (11:7-8). In each of these selections the conclusion is that you “reap what you sow.”

QUESTIONS—

- 1) *Summarize this passage in one sentence.*

- 2) *Why won’t an unjust ruler respond fairly to your criticism of him (10:8-10,20)?*

-
- 3) *In what ways are the words of the wise and the words of the fool contrasted in this section (10:11-14)?*
 - 4) *Why is there a time to keep silent (10:20; cf. 3:7)?*
 - 5) *Are good deeds worth performing if we are not repaid for them (11:1-2)?*
 - 6) *How should we react to the things we cannot change or control (11:3-6)? Is anyone in control?*
 - 7) *Who causes the wind to blow (11:5), the baby to grow (11:5), and the seed to grow (11:6)? So where does our trust need to be... in the weather or in God (11:4-5)?*

ASSIGNMENT—

All through this book the Preacher has been comparing things in life which are vain and things which are good. Review each chapter in this book. Use the chart below to list everything in that chapter that is vain alongside everything that is called good.

	Vain Things	Good Things
Chap 1		
Chap 2		
Chap 3		
Chap 4		
Chap 5		
Chap 6		
Chap 7		
Chap 8		
Chap 9		
Chap 10		
Chap 11		
Chap 12		

READING SCHEDULE—

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 Monday
 Tuesday
 Wednesday
 Thursday
 Friday
 Saturday

CHAPTER 11:9-12:14

Lesson 13

KEY VERSE(S)—

OUTLINE—

- I. **REMINDERS** (11:9-12:7)
 - A. Young People (11:9-12:5)
 - B. Older People (12:6-7)
- II. **CONCLUSION** (12:8-12)
 - A. Now We Have Come Full Circle (12:8)
 - B. The Words of the Wise (12:9-12)
 - C. The Conclusion of the Search (12:13-14)

KEY WORDS (Themes)—

SUMMARY—

In his reminders to young people, the Preacher tells them of the “three R’s of youth”—rejoice in your youth (11:9), remove sorrow from your heart (11:10), and remember now your Creator (12:1). The older Solomon warns the younger man to always remember God in youth before reaching the same point of regret for his wasted years that Solomon did. The time comes in an older man’s life when he no longer takes pride in himself, and realizes what a fool he has been without God in his life!

Then he gives an interesting description of growing old (12:2-5) and death (12:6-7).

Based on the wisdom the Preacher had, along with the ability he had to test everything in his quest for fulfillment (cf. 2:10-11), his final advice is to listen to his advice (12:9-11). A man making the same search need not go any further (12:12). The indisputable conclusion is to “*Fear God and keep His commandments*” for that is what life is all about (12:13-14).

QUESTIONS—

- 1) *Summarize this passage in one sentence.*
- 2) *What good are the words of the wise?*
 - *verse 9—*
 - *verse 10—*
 - *verse 11a—*
 - *verse 11b—*
- 3) *How will the wisdom of the wise benefit us like goads and nails (12:11)? What does each thing do? How are each of these like wisdom?*
- 4) *What more benefit could additional books about man’s quest for meaning be (12:12)?*

-
- 5) *What kind of advantage do we have by listening to the Preacher's instruction?*
- 6) *Is his conclusion just a matter of opinion or a well-researched, wise, and open-minded observation?*
- 7) *What else should we remember now that we have learned the purpose of life (12:14)? Will anything be left out?*

ASSIGNMENT—

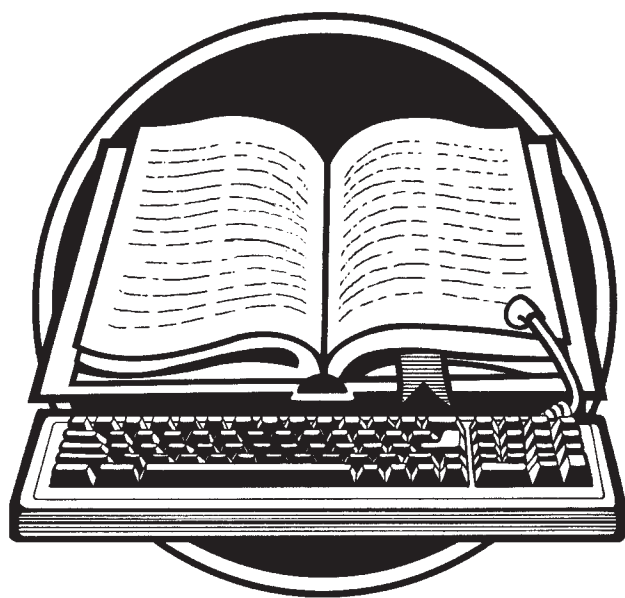
The conclusion of the Preacher's search is to *"Fear God and keep His commandments for this is the whole duty of man"* (12:13). All through the book he has been leading up to that conclusion by speaking of the *"fear of the Lord."* Use a concordance, or read back through the text of Ecclesiastes, and identify these phrases. Then explain how each statement shows the *"fear of the Lord."*

Verse	The Fear Of The Lord

READING SCHEDULE—

Read this passage every day before the upcoming class (check the box after each day that you read the passage)

Sunday
 Monday
 Tuesday
 Wednesday
 Thursday
 Friday
 Saturday



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