

Directions

This is a booklet to aid you in your personal study of this book. Read through the text first, discovering God's precious truths for yourself. Write down the main point of each section of text in the space provided. The text is provided for you to mark, color, and highlight things you find interesting and important. Use the margins on each side of the text and the backside of the page to make notations of the truths you discover and passages you do not understand. When you believe you have seen all there is in text, read and answer the questions in the booklet pertaining to that section of text. The questions are not an exhaustive list of things to look for in the text. The questions are to help you consider the points that the author was trying to convey to his audience. Be prepared to share your findings in class.

Background

The traditional English title comes from the book's heading in the Latin Vulgate translation (Liber Ecclesiastes) and is an Anglicized version of the Greek and Latin renderings of the speaker's designation in Ecclesiastes 1:1 (Gk. *ekklēsiastēs*; Hb. *Qoheleth*). The Hebrew word is related to the term for "assembly" (Hb. *qahal*) and may be a title for someone who addresses an assembly (hence it is often translated "Preacher"). It could also refer to someone who possesses some other leadership role within an assembly. Scholars have debated whether *Qoheleth* is best understood as a personal name or a title, though the latter seems more likely in view of 12:8, where the definite article ("the") precedes the word.

Strictly speaking, then, the book is anonymous, given that no personal name is attached to it. Nevertheless, traditional Jewish and Christian scholarship has often ascribed authorship to Solomon (10th century b.c.), since the book describes the Preacher as the "son of David, king in Jerusalem" (1:1) and as someone who was surpassingly wise (1:16) and had a very prosperous reign (2:1–9; cf. 1 Kings 3–4). However, such arguments for Solomonic authorship have been called into question on several grounds: (1) The phrase "son of David" could refer to any legitimate Davidic descendant, as it does in Matthew 1:20 with reference to Joseph and frequently throughout the NT with reference to Jesus Christ. (2) The distinctive nature of the Hebrew language used in the book is widely believed to be indicative of a date much later than the 10th century b.c. (though some scholars explain the linguistic evidence in terms of other factors, such as a later modernizing of the language, the influence of foreign languages such as Phoenician or Aramaic, or the possibility of a regional dialect). (3) The Preacher's remarks imply a historical setting that seems in tension with the Solomonic era, such as the fact that many have preceded him as king in Jerusalem (e.g., Eccles. 1:16; 2:7, 9—though these may include non-Israelite kings), that injustice and oppression are openly practiced (3:16–17; 4:1–3; 8:10–11), and that he has observed firsthand the foolishness of kings (4:13–16; 10:5–6) and their abuse of royal power (8:2–9).

On the other hand, other proposals also have difficulties, for it is difficult to find any later "king in Jerusalem" (1:1) who is a better candidate than Solomon for being able to claim that he had "acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me" (1:16), or that he had great possessions, "more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem" (2:7). In light of the book's anonymity and the difficulty in using linguistic evidence to establish its date of composition, it is best simply to recognize that some interpreters have concluded the author was Solomon, while others think it was some other writer later than Solomon. Regardless, the book claims that its wisdom ultimately comes from the "one Shepherd" (12:11), i.e., from God (Gen. 48:15; Ps. 23:1; 28:9; 80:1). (ESV Study Bible)

Theme

Ecclesiastes is one of the OT wisdom books, along with Proverbs and Job. Wisdom literature emphasizes the role of the individual in pleasing God beyond the requirements of the law. The instructions in these books identify ways for God's people to be successful as individuals, and in so doing to enhance the general success of Israelite society. The Teacher in Ecclesiastes speaks of wisdom as a general understanding of how God and the world work, learned through lifelong investigation. The conclusions to his research are the subject of his lecture.

In this discourse, the Teacher addresses the broadest and most significant question of life: Is anything ultimately meaningful? As a momentary shadow or a fleeting breath, how can our lives have meaning? The Teacher contextualizes this philosophical matter within the real world of government and everyday life through which administrators and ordinary citizens must navigate. (NLT Study Bible)

ECCLESIASTES

1:1-11

1 The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem.

2 “Absolute futility,” says the Teacher. “Absolute futility. Everything is futile.” 3 What does a man gain for all his efforts that he labors at under the sun? 4 A generation goes and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever. 5 The sun rises and the sun sets; panting, it returns to its place where it rises. 6 Gusting to the south, turning to the north, turning, turning, goes the wind, and the wind returns in its cycles. 7 All the streams flow to the sea, yet the sea is never full. The streams are flowing to the place, and they flow there again. 8 All things are wearisome; man is unable to speak. The eye is not satisfied by seeing or the ear filled with hearing. 9 What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun. 10 Can one say about anything, “Look, this is new”? It has already existed in the ages before us. 11 There is no remembrance of those who came before; and of those who will come after there will also be no remembrance by those who follow them. (HCSB)

Main point: _____

Make additional notes at left and below:

1. Read 1:1-11. From this text, what is your overall impression of LIFE? Can you give a one word description?
2. Consider verse 4. Knowing that the Lord has promised that the earth will one day be destroyed (2 Peter 3:10), from what perspective is the Teacher saying “the earth remains forever?”
3. Verse 8 compares the observations about nature in verses 4-7 to the labor of man. In what way are they the same?

Consider the words of verse 8, “eye is not satisfied with seeing, or the ear filled with hearing” as a statement referring the world full of activity. There is no seeing it all and there is no hearing it all.

4. Is there anything new in life? According to the text, why do we think these things are new?
5. How does verse 11 apply to the thoughts of this paragraph?
6. Now, answer the question proposed by the author in verse 3. How should the concepts you have learned in this prologue change your life? Can you give some specific ways this should change your life?

ECCLESIASTES

1:12-18

12 I, the Teacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. 13 I applied my mind to seek and explore through wisdom all that is done under heaven. God has given people this miserable task to keep them occupied. 14 I have seen all the things that are done under the sun and have found everything to be futile, a pursuit of the wind.

15 What is crooked cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted.

16 I said to myself, "Look, I have amassed wisdom far beyond all those who were over Jerusalem before me, and my mind has thoroughly grasped wisdom and knowledge." 17 I applied my mind to know wisdom and knowledge, madness and folly; I learned that this too is a pursuit of the wind.

18 For with much wisdom is much sorrow; as knowledge increases, grief increases. (HCSB)

Main point: _____

Make additional notes at left and below:

Solomon is on a search (1:13). As Solomon searches various areas of life, he explains the various ways one may be disappointed. The fact that there will be inevitable disappointments in each of these areas is what proves the futility of all things earthly.

1. Does Solomon ever search out sin to see if it will provide gain? Explain.
2. From 1:15, what disappointments does life under the sun offer? How does this knowledge help us live in this world?
3. From 1:16-18, explain the disappointments of understanding and gaining great wisdom and knowledge:

1 I said to myself, “Go ahead, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy what is good.” But it turned out to be futile. 2 I said about laughter, “It is madness,” and about pleasure, “What does this accomplish?” 3 I explored with my mind how to let my body enjoy life with wine and how to grasp folly—my mind still guiding me with wisdom—until I could see what is good for people to do under heaven during the few days of their lives.

4 I increased my achievements. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. 5 I made gardens and parks for myself and planted every kind of fruit tree in them. 6 I constructed reservoirs of water for myself from which to irrigate a grove of flourishing trees. 7 I acquired male and female servants and had slaves who were born in my house. I also owned many herds of cattle and flocks, more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. 8 I also amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I gathered male and female singers for myself, and many concubines, the delights of men. 9 So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem; my wisdom also remained with me. 10 All that my eyes desired, I did not deny them. I did not refuse myself any pleasure, for I took pleasure in all my struggles. This was my reward for all my struggles. 11 When I considered all that I had accomplished and what I had labored to achieve, I found everything to be futile and a pursuit of the wind. There was nothing to be gained under the sun. (HCSB)

Main point: _____

Make additional notes at left and below:

1. From 2:1-2, explain the disappointment of pleasure and laughter:
2. From 2:3-11, what positive reward did Solomon get from all he accomplished? What was the disappointment?
3. How should what Solomon discovered in 2:3-11 change the way we as Christians think about life and success? Compare Luke 12:15.

12 Then I turned to consider wisdom, madness, and folly, for what will the man be like who comes after the king? He will do what has already been done. 13 And I realized that there is an advantage to wisdom over folly, like the advantage of light over darkness.

14 The wise man has eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. Yet I also knew that one fate comes to them both. 15 So I said to myself, "What happens to the fool will also happen to me. Why then have I been overly wise?" And I said to myself that this is also futile. 16 For, just like the fool, there is no lasting remembrance of the wise man, since in the days to come both will be forgotten. How is it that the wise man dies just like the fool? 17 Therefore, I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was distressing to me. For everything is futile and a pursuit of the wind. (HCSB)

Main point: _____

Make additional notes at left and below:

1. From 2:12-16, what is the benefit of wisdom over folly? What is the disappointment?
2. Knowing that the Teacher is not recommending us to forsake wisdom, what is his point?
3. From 2:17-23, what disappointments are connected with diligent labor?
4. Again, the Teacher is not recommending that we forsake diligent labor. Instead, understanding these disappointments, what should our attitude be toward our labor?
5. Notice the despondency that is expressed in 2:17. The key to this is in the phrase "under the sun." What do you learn from living under the sun?

18 I hated all my work that I labored at under the sun because I must leave it to the man who comes after me. 19 And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will take over all my work that I labored at skillfully under the sun. This too is futile. 20 So I began to give myself over to despair concerning all my work that I had labored at under the sun. 21 When there is a man whose work was done with wisdom, knowledge, and skill, and he must give his portion to a man who has not worked for it, this too is futile and a great wrong. 22 For what does a man get with all his work and all his efforts that he labors at under the sun? 23 For all his days are filled with grief, and his occupation is sorrowful; even at night, his mind does not rest. This too is futile.

24 There is nothing better for man than to eat, drink, and enjoy his work. I have seen that even this is from God's hand, 25 because who can eat and who can enjoy life apart from Him? 26 For to the man who is pleasing in His sight, He gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy, but to the sinner He gives the task of gathering and accumulating in order to give to the one who is pleasing in God's sight. This too is futile and a pursuit of the wind. (HCSB)

Main point: _____

Make additional notes at left and below:

1. Why did the Teacher hate his labors? Why is it futility?
2. Do all our labors improve our lives (2:21-23)? What is the problem?
3. Read 2:24-26. You should notice a distinct contrast between these verses and the Teacher's words up to this point. What contrast do you see?
4. There are a number of thoughts and applications that should come to your mind from the principle of verse 24. Examine the verse carefully and write down as many conclusions you can think of. You should consider such things as, (1) If there is nothing better than eating and drinking, how should I live my life? (2) What does God think about His people enjoying life? (3) Since all of this is from the hand of God, how should I view these pleasures?
5. Verse 26 gives us the reason for being content with what God has given and to realize that there is nothing better for a man to do. Look at what God has given the sinner! In his discontentment he does nothing but gather and collect. But since he cannot hold on to all that his hands produce, he ends up gathering and collecting for the benefit of those who are good in God's sight. To see this illustrated, just look at all the people who work long hours building big corporations in order to amass great wealth. As 5:11 points out, their wealth provides jobs and prosperity for others. Their sin (loving money, not building a company) is used by God to provide for those who are good in His sight.

1 There is an occasion for everything, and a time for every activity under heaven: 2 a time to give birth and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to uproot; 3 a time to kill and a time to heal; a time to tear down and a time to build; 4 a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance; 5 a time to throw stones and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace and a time to avoid embracing; 6 a time to search and a time to count as lost; a time to keep and a time to throw away; 7 a time to tear and a time to sew; a time to be silent and a time to speak; 8 a time to love and a time to hate; a time for war and a time for peace. (HCSB)

Main point: _____

Make additional notes at left and below:

1. Fourteen pairs of contrasts are presented. They are contrasting uncertainties. These are things over which a person has little or no control and therefore there is "no gain" in his labor to manipulate these events in his life to his own advantage. If you and I could control these events, we would avoid the ones that we considered negative or distasteful (such as a time of war, time to die, etc). But since we are not in control, how should we handle these uncertainties?
2. What lessons do we learn from these contrasts?

9 What does the worker gain from his struggles? 10 I have seen the task that God has given people to keep them occupied. 11 He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also put eternity in their hearts, but man cannot discover the work God has done from beginning to end. 12 I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and enjoy the good life. 13 It is also the gift of God whenever anyone eats, drinks, and enjoys all his efforts. 14 I know that all God does will last forever; there is no adding to it or taking from it. God works so that people will be in awe of Him. 15 Whatever is, has already been, and whatever will be, already is. God repeats what has passed.

16 I also observed under the sun: there is wickedness at the place of judgment and there is wickedness at the place of righteousness. 17 I said to myself, "God will judge the righteous and the wicked, since there is a time for every activity and every work." 18 I said to myself, "This happens concerning people, so that God may test them and they may see for themselves that they are like animals." 19 For the fate of people and the fate of animals is the same. As one dies, so dies the other; they all have the same breath. People have no advantage over animals since everything is futile. 20 All are going to the same place; all come from dust, and all return to dust. 21 Who knows if the spirit of people rises upward and the spirit of animals goes downward to the earth? 22 I have seen that there is nothing better than for a person to enjoy his activities because that is his reward. For who can enable him to see what will happen after he dies? (HCSB)

Main point: _____

Make additional notes at left and below:

Verse 11 is somewhat difficult in its wording. The idea seems to be that God has appointed all of these times. It is His will that life have these uncertainties (see 7:13-14). Man on the other hand has eternity in his heart, that is, he sees everything continuing day by day endlessly and is unable to foresee the changes from bad times to good times or from good times to bad times. Thus he cannot find out the work of God from beginning to end. This fact provides another reason why there is nothing better for a man to eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor.

1. Verse 16 basically asks the question, "If God is in control, then why do I see wickedness where there ought to be righteousness?" This is similar to the question often asked today, "If there is a God, why does He allow all the wickedness in the world?" What is the Teacher's answer in verse 17?
2. Verses 18-21 offers an observation by the Teacher of a way that man is like the animal and a way that man is not like the animal. Actually, the Teacher is complaining that men do not live with this knowledge. Verse 21 is not a question that the Teacher does not know the answer to, but a complaint that few have this knowledge and therefore live their lives accordingly. What does the Teacher mean by these phrases?
3. You will notice in verse 22 that the Teacher repeats his key advice, but then asks a rhetorical question. The obvious answer is that no one will take us to see what will happen after us. That being so, what then is the Teacher trying to get his people to do in their life?
4. Take a moment to think about your own life. Do the admonitions of 2:24, 3:12-13 and 3:22 describe how you feel about your life, and especially, how you live your life?

1 Again, I observed all the acts of oppression being done under the sun. Look at the tears of those who are oppressed; they have no one to comfort them. Power is with those who oppress them; they have no one to comfort them. 2 So I admired the dead, who have already died, more than the living, who are still alive. 3 But better than either of them is the one who has not yet existed, who has not seen the evil activity that is done under the sun.

4 I saw that all labor and all skillful work is due to a man's jealousy of his friend. This too is futile and a pursuit of the wind.

5 The fool folds his arms and consumes his own flesh. 6 Better one handful with rest than two handfuls with effort and a pursuit of the wind.

7 Again, I saw futility under the sun: 8 There is a person without a companion, without even a son or brother, and though there is no end to all his struggles, his eyes are still not content with riches. "So who am I struggling for," he asks, "and depriving myself from good?" This too is futile and a miserable task.

9 Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their efforts. 10 For if either falls, his companion can lift him up; but pity the one who falls without another to lift him up. 11 Also, if two lie down together, they can keep warm; but how can one person alone keep warm? 12 And if someone overpowers one person, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not easily broken.

13 Better is a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer pays attention to warnings. 14 For he came from prison to be king, even though he was born poor in his kingdom. 15 I saw all the living, who move about under the sun, follow a second youth who succeeds him. 16 There is no limit to all the people who were before them, yet those who come later will not rejoice in him. This too is futile and a pursuit of the wind. (HCSB)

Main point: _____

Make additional notes at left and below:

1. The Teacher, indeed, describes a terrible circumstance in which one might find himself (4:1-3). But what is his point in bringing it up? What does he want us to do about it? (Hint: The key is again found in the phrase, "under the sun.")
2. Read 4:4-6. What is disappointing about doing "skillful work"? Can you verify the truth of this principle in your own life?
3. Verses 5-6 give the proper wisdom in response to the "crookedness" of verse 4. Summarize the two admonitions:

4. Consider your own life. Are you adhering to the admonition, "Better is a handful with quiet than both handfuls with toil"? What makes submitting to this admonition difficult?

5. Read 4:7-12. What exactly is there about this man's actions that is foolish?

6. The wisdom offered to remedy the problem is companionship. What are some of the benefits of companionship?

7. Read 4:13-16. The illustration of the king represents any promotion to a higher position. The point is that if it is true with the king, it will also be true about any position one might hold in life. To better understand this illustration, describe all you can about each king:

The first king:

The second king:

8. What wisdom should we follow in our own lives in light of these facts about high position?

1 Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Better to draw near in obedience than to offer the sacrifice as fools do, for they ignorantly do wrong. 2 Do not be hasty to speak, and do not be impulsive to make a speech before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few. 3 For dreams result from much work and a fool's voice from many words. 4 When you make a vow to God, don't delay fulfilling it, because He does not delight in fools. Fulfill what you vow. 5 Better that you do not vow than that you vow and not fulfill it. 6 Do not let your mouth bring guilt on you, and do not say in the presence of the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry with your words and destroy the work of your hands? 7 For many dreams bring futility, so do many words. Therefore, fear God. (HCSB)

Main point: _____

Make additional notes at left and below:

1. Read 5:1-7. Even religion or the worship of God under certain circumstances can be disappointing. Religious fervor is certainly is not the answer to life's disappointments when it is mishandled. Give a brief explanation of each of the following admonitions:

"Guard your steps...":

"To draw near in obedience is better than to the offer the sacrifice as fools do...":

"Do not be hasty to speak...":

"When you make a vow to God..."

"Do not let your mouth bring guilt to you..."

2. Verse 3 basically means that just as a lot of activity in this life produces dreams which are not reality and produce nothing, so the many words and promises of a fool are not reality and produce nothing. Verse 7 is similar. The many words of a fool are like dreams, both have fleeting significance and no profit.
3. How ought our personal approach to worship change in light of these principles?
4. Do these words help explain why some Christians are not happy in their Christianity?

8 If you see oppression of the poor and perversion of justice and righteousness in the province, don't be astonished at the situation, because one official protects another official, and higher officials protect them. 9 The profit from the land is taken by all; the king is served by the field.

10 The one who loves money is never satisfied with money, and whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with income. This too is futile. 11 When good things increase, the ones who consume them multiply; what, then, is the profit to the owner, except to gaze at them with his eyes? 12 The sleep of the worker is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the abundance of the rich permits him no sleep.

13 There is a sickening tragedy I have seen under the sun: wealth kept by its owner to his harm. 14 That wealth was lost in a bad venture, so when he fathered a son, he was empty-handed. 15 As he came from his mother's womb, so he will go again, naked as he came; he will take nothing for his efforts that he can carry in his hands. 16 This too is a sickening tragedy: exactly as he comes, so he will go. What does the one gain who struggles for the wind? 17 What is more, he eats in darkness all his days, with much sorrow, sickness, and anger.

18 Here is what I have seen to be good: it is appropriate to eat, drink, and experience good in all the labor one does under the sun during the few days of his life God has given him, because that is his reward. 19 God has also given riches and wealth to every man, and He has allowed him to enjoy them, take his reward, and rejoice in his labor. This is a gift of God, 20 for he does not often consider the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with the joy of his heart. (HCSB)

Main point: _____

Make additional notes at left and below:

1. Read 5:8-9. Since these verses do not fit with the previous section and are therefore at the beginning of a rather large section dealing with riches, we understand the oppression of the poor and perversion of justice to be for the monetary benefit of the various governing officials. What two encouragements that the Teacher offers those in such a condition?

2. Read 5:10-17. These verses give a list of the problems of desiring and possessing riches. Give an explanation of the disappointment or harm in riches from each segment:

Verse 10:

Verse 12:

Verse 11:

Verses 13-17:

3. Read 5:18-20. These verses offer wise counsel in light of the harm that wealth can create. There are two admonitions given so that material possessions will not harm the owner. The first admonition is directly stated, the second is implied. When one adheres to these admonitions, he will then receive the result of the peace spoken of in verse 20. Give a brief explanation of the two admonitions and the result:

Here is what I have seen to be good:

"This is a gift of God, for he does not often consider the days of his life...":

"God keeps him occupied with the joy of his heart":

ECCLESIASTES

6

1 Here is a tragedy I have observed under the sun, and it weighs heavily on humanity: 2 God gives a man riches, wealth, and honor so that he lacks nothing of all he desires for himself, but God does not allow him to enjoy them. Instead, a stranger will enjoy them. This is futile and a sickening tragedy. 3 A man may father a hundred children and live many years. No matter how long he lives, if he is not satisfied by good things and does not even have a proper burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he. 4 For he comes in futility and he goes in darkness, and his name is shrouded in darkness. 5 Though a stillborn child does not see the sun and is not conscious, it has more rest than he. 6 And if he lives a thousand years twice, but does not experience happiness, do not both go to the same place?

7 All man's labor is for his stomach, yet the appetite is never satisfied.

8 What advantage then does the wise man have over the fool? What advantage is there for the poor person who knows how to conduct himself before others? 9 Better what the eyes see than wandering desire. This too is futile and a pursuit of the wind.

10 Whatever exists was given its name long ago, and it is known what man is. But he is not able to contend with the One stronger than he. 11 For when there are many words, they increase futility. What is the advantage for man? 12 For who knows what is good for man in life, in the few days of his futile life that he spends like a shadow? Who can tell man what will happen after him under the sun? (HCSB)

Main point: _____

Make additional notes at left and below:

1. Read 6:1-6. You will notice in this text that even though a person may be rich, have honor, or live a thousand years twice over, his wealth may still disappoint him. What is the disappointment of wealth in this segment?

2. Read 6:7-9. In this segment, verses 7-8 addresses another disappointment that has to do with wealth, while verse 9 gives an admonition in light of this disappointment. Give a brief explanation of the disappointment and then the admonition:

Disappointment:

Admonition:

What makes this admonition difficult for us to fulfill?

3. Read 6:10-12. This segment is reminding us of the weakness of man. The Teacher is telling us why it is useless for us to strive after riches. Think of your future and of all the things that you may need in the coming years to survive and maintain a happy life other than riches. Make a list of these below:

4. Now, having completed the above exercise, give an explanation of verse 12:

1 A good name is better than fine perfume, and the day of one's death than the day of one's birth. 2 It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, since that is the end of all mankind, and the living should take it to heart. 3 Grief is better than laughter, for when a face is sad, a heart may be glad. 4 The heart of the wise is in a house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in a house of pleasure. 5 It is better to listen to rebuke from a wise person than to listen to the song of fools, 6 for like the crackling of burning thorns under the pot, so is the laughter of the fool. This too is futile. 7 Surely, the practice of extortion turns a wise person into a fool, and a bribe destroys the mind. 8 The end of a matter is better than its beginning; a patient spirit is better than a proud spirit. 9 Don't let your spirit rush to be angry, for anger abides in the heart of fools. 10 Don't say, "Why were the former days better than these?" since it is not wise of you to ask this. 11 Wisdom is as good as an inheritance and an advantage to those who see the sun, 12 because wisdom is protection as money is protection, and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of its owner. 13 Consider the work of God, for who can straighten out what He has made crooked?

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 man cannot discover anything that will come after him. (HCSB)

Main point: _____

Make additional notes at left and below:

1. Read 7:1-4. This segment is the first of three paragraphs in which the Teacher emphasizes how much better it is to concentrate on the growth of the inner man than the outward frivolities of life. Notice especially in verse 1 how there is a contrast between a good name and precious ointment as well as between the day of death and the day of birth. There are also parallels to be seen between a good name and the day of death and between precious ointment and the day of birth. Jot down your observations concerning these things below:
2. Read 7:5-7. Again the Teacher speaks of better things, this time as specifically relates to being wise or foolish. How is the song or laughter of a fool like the crackling of thorns under a pot? Why is the rebuke of the wise better than the song of fools?
3. Verse 7 gives us two ways in which a wise man can become a fool. Explain how these things cause a wise man to become a fool:

4. Read 7:8-10. As the Teacher completes his trilogy of better things we notice that all three paragraphs have a close connection though emphasizing different points. In this third paragraph he stresses patience, the contrast which would be anger and impatience.
5. What is the mistake the Teacher is warning us against?
6. What connection do you see between the three paragraphs?
7. Read 7:11-14. First consider verses 11-12. Notice that both wisdom and an inheritance or money are of value to a person. Both of them are a defense or a protection to a person in times of adversity. But the Teacher tells us that wisdom has a value that money does not have.
8. What is the value of wisdom over money?
9. Verses 13-14 tell us how to handle the adversities that inevitably will come.
10. Who is in control of crooked/unfair things that happen in life? What should we do with this knowledge?
11. In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider. What are we supposed to learn from the fact that God has appointed one as well as the other so that we will not find out what will happen after us?

15 In my futile life I have seen everything: there is a righteous man who perishes in spite of his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who lives long in spite of his evil. 16 Don't be excessively righteous, and don't be overly wise. Why should you destroy yourself? 17 Don't be excessively wicked, and don't be foolish. Why should you die before your time? 18 It is good that you grasp the one and do not let the other slip from your hand. For the one who fears God will end up with both of them.

19 Wisdom makes the wise man stronger than ten rulers of a city. 20 There is certainly no righteous man on the earth who does good and never sins.

21 Don't pay attention to everything people say, or you may hear your servant cursing you, 22 for you know that many times you yourself have cursed others.

23 I have tested all this by wisdom. I resolved, "I will be wise," but it was beyond me. 24 What exists is beyond reach and very deep. Who can discover it? 25 I turned my thoughts to know, explore, and seek wisdom and an explanation for things, and to know that wickedness is stupidity and folly is madness. 26 And I find more bitter than death the woman who is a trap, her heart a net, and her hands chains. The one who pleases God will escape her, but the sinner will be captured by her. 27 "Look," says the Teacher, "I have discovered this by adding one thing to another to find out the explanation, 28 which my soul continually searches for but does not find: among a thousand people I have found one true man, but among all these I have not found a true woman. 29 Only see this: I have discovered that God made people upright, but they pursued many schemes." (HCSB)

Main point: _____

Make additional notes at left and below:

1. Read 7:15-18. Here, the Teacher first makes a disturbing observation of how the righteous many times perish in spite of the righteousness and the wicked prolong their life in spite of their wickedness, and then gives a warning to those who would respond poorly to this fact. In verses 16-18, the Teacher warns against two extremes, while the person who "fears God will escape" both extremes. We therefore cannot understand "overly righteous" to imply the need to add a little sin in one's life. Instead, understand "righteous" to mean a superficial or outward righteousness such as the Pharisees had without the inward "fearing God." With this in mind, what are some lessons we learn from these verses?
2. What great lessons do we learn from verses 19-22?
3. Read 7:23-29. At this point the Teacher seems to pause to inform us of the difficulty for a mere human to have complete wisdom. It becomes too hard to obtain and too deep to reach. This further stresses reliance on God's revealed wisdom and trusting Him even when we do not understand. However, the Teacher proclaims that there are some things that he has discovered. What has the Teacher discovered?

The Teacher's comment that he has not found one woman in a thousand has caused some to believe that he did not have a very high opinion of women. Actually he did not have a very high opinion of mankind in general. Apparently in the Teacher's day women had been denied her proper position, being degraded, uneducated, and a plaything of her lord to be flung aside at any moment. The women during the Persian period were especially in this condition. This caused women of this period (as many women do today) to gain attention and self-worth through physical appearance and seduction. Therefore finding a godly man, much less a godly woman, was difficult. One thing he knew, God had not intended this. God had made man upright, but he had sought out many schemes.

1 Who is like the wise person, and who knows the interpretation of a matter? A man's wisdom brightens his face, and the sternness of his face is changed.

2 Keep the king's command because of your oath made before God. 3 Do not be in a hurry; leave his presence, and don't persist in a bad cause, since he will do whatever he wants. 4 For the king's word is authoritative, and who can say to him, "What are you doing?" 5 The one who keeps a command will not experience anything harmful, and a wise heart knows the right time and procedure. 6 For every activity there is a right time and procedure, even though man's troubles are heavy on him. 7 Yet no one knows what will happen because who can tell him what will happen? 8 No one has authority over the wind to restrain it, and there is no authority over the day of death; there is no furlough in battle, and wickedness will not allow those who practice it to escape. 9 All this I have seen, applying my mind to all the work that is done under the sun, at a time when one man has authority over another to his harm.

10 In such circumstances, I saw the wicked buried. They came and went from the holy place, and they were praised in the city where they did so. This too is futile. 11 Because the sentence against a criminal act is not carried out quickly, the heart of people is filled with the desire to commit crime. 12 Although a sinner commits crime a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I also know that it will go well with God-fearing people, for they are reverent before Him. 13 However, it will not go well with the wicked, and they will not lengthen their days like a shadow, for they are not reverent before God.

14 There is a futility that is done on the earth: there are righteous people who get what the actions of the wicked deserve, and there are wicked people who get what the actions of the righteous deserve. I say that this too is futile. 15 So I commended enjoyment because there is nothing better for man under the sun than to eat, drink, and enjoy himself, for this will accompany him in his labor during the days of his life that God gives him under the sun.

16 When I applied my mind to know wisdom and to observe the activity that is done on the earth (even though one's eyes do not close in sleep day or night), 17 I observed all the work of God and concluded that man is unable to discover the work that is done under the sun. Even though a man labors hard to explore it, he cannot find it; even if the wise man claims to know it, he is unable to discover it. (HCSB)

Main point: _____

Make additional notes at left and below:

1. Read 8:1-9. In this first segment, the Teacher instructs us on how to deal with an oppressive ruler. You will notice that the Teacher begins by again encouraging his audience to wisdom. After this, he gives two reasons why we should not rebel against a ruler, especially an oppressive ruler (see verse 6, 8, & 9). Finally, the Teacher encourages us to this wisdom because of certain consequences that are inevitable for those who rule wickedly.

What is the benefit of following wisdom in this matter?

What are two reasons we should not rebel against an evil ruler?

What encouragement are we given in verses 6-9 concerning the final outcome of this ruler?

2. Read 8:10-13. There is another problem that arises from a society in which wickedness is widespread. It is the problem of praising a wicked man and forgetting the wickedness. The result of this "forgetfulness" is even more devastating to society.

Notice in verse 10 that even though this person was wicked, he put on an appearance of_____.

What do you imagine the Teacher said at the funeral for this man?

3. The fact that the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, may not only refer to man's courts but also God's judgment. Why does this principle cause the hearts of men to turn to evil?

In spite of the fact the wicked at times seems to be rewarded, verses 13-14 assure us that even if a sinner gets away with evil a hundred times and his days are prolonged, we know that it will be well with those who fear God and the wicked will have a life like a shadow (without substance).

4. Explain verses 16-17.

1 Indeed, I took all this to heart and explained it all: the righteous, the wise, and their works are in God's hands. People don't know whether to expect love or hate. Everything lies ahead of them. 2 Everything is the same for everyone: there is one fate for the righteous and the wicked, for the good and the bad, for the clean and the unclean, for the one who sacrifices and the one who does not sacrifice. As it is for the good, so it is for the sinner; as for the one who takes an oath, so for the one who fears an oath. 3 This is an evil in all that is done under the sun: there is one fate for everyone. In addition, the hearts of people are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live—after that they go to the dead. 4 But there is hope for whoever is joined with all the living, since a live dog is better than a dead lion. 5 For the living know that they will die, but the dead don't know anything. There is no longer a reward for them because the memory of them is forgotten. 6 Their love, their hate, and their envy have already disappeared, and there is no longer a portion for them in all that is done under the sun.

7 Go, eat your bread with pleasure, and drink your wine with a cheerful heart, for God has already accepted your works. 8 Let your clothes be white all the time, and never let oil be lacking on your head. 9 Enjoy life with the wife you love all the days of your fleeting life, which has been given to you under the sun, all your fleeting days. For that is your portion in life and in your struggle under the sun. 10 Whatever your hands find to do, do with all your strength, because there is no work, planning, knowledge, or wisdom in Sheol where you are going.

11 Again I saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, or the battle to the strong, or bread to the wise, or riches to the discerning, or favor to the skillful; rather, time and chance happen to all of them. 12 For man certainly does not know his time: like fish caught in a cruel net or like birds caught in a trap, so people are trapped in an evil time as it suddenly falls on them.

13 I have observed that this also is wisdom under the sun, and it is significant to me: 14 There was a small city with few men in it. A great king came against it, surrounded it, and built large siege works against it. 15 Now a poor wise man was found in the city, and he delivered the city by his wisdom. Yet no one remembered that poor man. 16 And I said, "Wisdom is better than strength, but the wisdom of the poor man is despised, and his words are not heeded."

17 The calm words of the wise are heeded more than the shouts of a ruler over fools. 18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner can destroy much good. (HCSB)

Main point: _____

Make additional notes at left and below:

1. The second thing the righteous ought to do in responding to this vanity is given in 9:3-6. The key to this message is found in verse 4, "a living dog is better than a dead lion." In other words, it is better for the righteous to accept being a living dog than a dead lion. Explain this advice:

What personal applications can we make from this section of text?

2. Read 9:7-10. Here is a more detailed description of 8:15 and the course the righteous ought to take. Give a brief explanation of and/or a statement of the importance of the following commands:

“Eat your bread with pleasure, and drink your wine with a cheerful heart”

“For God has already accepted your works”

“Let your clothes be white, and never let oil be lacking on your head”

“Enjoy life with the wife you love all the days of your fleeting life...”

“For that is your portion in life and in your struggle under sin”

“Whatever your hand finds to do, do with your strength...”

3. Read 9:11-12.
How are these verses a comfort to the righteous?

How are these verses a warning to the righteous?

4. Read 9:13-18.
What should the story of the poor wise man teach us?

What are we to learn from verse 17?

What are we to learn from verse 18?

4. Read 10:16-20. In spite of the fact that there are ways that the righteous can learn to survive wicked rulers, a government still suffers severely during this time.

"Woe to the land when..." What is the problem with these governing officials that will cause destruction to the land?

Verse 19 is best understood as the motto of foolish rulers.

Verse 20 gives a warning to those who live under a corrupt wicked government. What is the main point of this warning?

1 Send your bread on the surface of the waters, for after many days you may find it. 2 Give a portion to seven or even to eight, for you don't know what disaster may happen on earth. 3 If the clouds are full, they will pour out rain on the earth; whether a tree falls to the south or the north, the place where the tree falls, there it will lie. 4 One who watches the wind will not sow, and the one who looks at the clouds will not reap. 5 Just as you don't know the path of the wind, or how bones develop in the womb of a pregnant woman, so you don't know the work of God who makes everything. 6 In the morning sow your seed, and at evening do not let your hand rest, because you don't know which will succeed, whether one or the other, or if both of them will be equally good. 7 Light is sweet, and it is pleasing for the eyes to see the sun. 8 Indeed, if a man lives many years, let him rejoice in them all, and let him remember the days of darkness, since they will be many. All that comes is futile. 9 Rejoice, young man, while you are young, and let your heart be glad in the days of your youth. And walk in the ways of your heart and in the sight of your eyes; but know that for all of these things God will bring you to judgment. 10 Remove sorrow from your heart, and put away pain from your flesh, because youth and the prime of life are fleeting. (HCSB)

Main point: _____

Make additional notes at left and below:

1. Read 11:1-8. There is a tendency during difficult times for individuals to become so pessimistic about the future that they hoard what they have and put forth little or no productive labor or investment. These verses warn against that mistake.

From verses 1-2, give two reasons why we ought to be charitable and productive even in bad times:

Verse 3 gives us the principle that the future conforms to laws that are beyond our control. Therefore, what should we do when we neither know the future nor can control the future? Verses 4-8 give the answer. What is the admonition of verses 4-6?

2. There are at least two lessons to be learned from verses 7-8. First, there are many good things in life that are sweet and pleasant and worth rejoicing in. Second, even if one were able to rejoice in all of his days, remember that there will be many dark days. How does one deal with these dark days? "All that is coming is vanity." How does this last phrase help us deal with dark days?
3. The words in verse 9, "walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes..." does not imply that a young man ought to "sow his wild oats" but remember he will be judged.
4. What lessons do we learn from this chapter?

1 So remember your Creator in the days of your youth: Before the days of adversity come, and the years approach when you will say, "I have no delight in them"; 2 before the sun and the light are darkened, and the moon and the stars, and the clouds return after the rain; 3 on the day when the guardians of the house tremble, and the strong men stoop, the women who grind cease because they are few, and the ones who watch through the windows see dimly, 4 the doors at the street are shut while the sound of the mill fades; when one rises at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song grow faint. 5 Also, they are afraid of heights and dangers on the road; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper loses its spring, and the caper berry has no effect; for man is headed to his eternal home, and mourners will walk around in the street; 6 before the silver cord is snapped, and the gold bowl is broken, and the jar is shattered at the spring, and the wheel is broken into the well; 7 and the dust returns to the earth as it once was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

8 "Absolute futility," says the Teacher. "Everything is futile."

9 In addition to the Teacher being a wise man, he constantly taught the people knowledge; he weighed, explored, and arranged many proverbs. 10 The Teacher sought to find delightful sayings and write words of truth accurately. 11 The sayings of the wise are like goads, and those from masters of collections are like firmly embedded nails. The sayings are given by one Shepherd.

12 But beyond these, my son, be warned: there is no end to the making of many books, and much study wearies the body. 13 When all has been heard, the conclusion of the matter is: fear God and keep His commands, because this is for all humanity. 14 For God will bring every act to judgment, including every hidden thing, whether good or evil. (HCSB)

Main point: _____

Make additional notes at left and below:

1. Ecclesiastes 12:3-7 gives a marvelous poetic description of old age and death. We are reminded to remember our Creator before these days come. Each of the following metaphors refer to the failing of different parts of the body as old age advances. To understand these you will need a good imagination! Hints are in parentheses:

"When the guardians of the house tremble" (the parts of the body you use to protect yourself against attack or a fall):

"The strong men stoop" (the biggest, strongest muscles in the body are on these):

"The grinders cease because they are few" (ESV) (if you don't take care of these, they will fall out):

"Those who look through the windows see dimly":

"When the doors on the street are shut, and the sound of the mill fades" (what did you say? I didn't hear anything):

"And one rises at the sound of a bird":

"All the daughters of song grow faint" (ability and appreciation for this are lost):

"They are afraid of heights and dangers on the road":

"The almond tree blossoms" (almond tree blossoms are white)

"The grasshopper loses its spring" (picture a grasshopper walking):

"And the caper berry has no effect": (the caper berry is a stimulant)

The following are descriptions of death.

"The silver cord is snapped and the golden bowl is broken" (This refers to the lamp which hangs from the ceilings of oriental homes. The golden bowl is the lamp which is suspended by the cord. When either the cord loosed or the bowl breaks, the light is put out. Thus the light of one's life is snuffed out.)

"The jar is shattered at the spring, and the wheel broken into the well" (This is a similar picture. The wheel at the well cranks up the pitcher which holds the water. When either is broken the sustenance for life is cut off.)

2. In verse 8 the Teacher returns to his cry of vanity that he pronounced in the beginning of the book. Now that you have studied the whole book, what is your understanding of "Absolute futility. Everything is futile?"

3. Read 12:9-12. This is the first part of the epilogue of the book. The Teacher gives two benefits of the words of the wise. Explain these:

"Like goads":

"Like firmly embedded nails":

4. What is the source of the "words of the wise"?

5. What is the warning in verse 12?

6. Read 12:13-14. What are your observations concerning this conclusion?

7. List some final lessons and applications that you have learned from this book.

ECCLESIASTES

Life Under The Sun



A SELF-STUDY WORKBOOK

by: Brent Kercheville