

# Ecclesiastes in 13 Topics

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Notes and questions by Gary Copeland, 2018

This topical study cites every verse from Ecclesiastes and includes them in the text below.  
Quotes are from *The Holy Bible, New King James Version*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc.) 1982.  
A comparison with other translations sometimes sheds light on the meaning of a passage.

The verses are distributed across the 13 lessons and are then arranged according to subtopics within each lesson.

Obviously, this is simply one person's attempt to group the passages.

While a few verses appear in more than one lesson, you may choose to rearrange some of the verses.

# Under the Sun: Lesson 1

## Overview: Pessimism or Insight?

*Guiding thoughts:* Most Bible books reason from the top down, i.e., starting with God's perspective. (E.g., "In the beginning God..." Genesis 1:1). Ecclesiastes starts from our perspective and reasons upward.

Pessimism and despair stem from observing the world based only what can be seen and experienced under the sun. Viewed from beyond the sun, we develop a realistic view and find purpose in life.

### Introduction to Ecclesiastes, Notes by Allen Dvorak (ASD), edited

#### I. Author

- A. The author does not state his name, but identifies himself by the following information:
  1. He calls himself Koheleth (*Qoheleth*), a word which is...
    - a. From a root word (verb) that means "to assemble" or "to convoke an assembly."
    - b. Used only seven times in the Bible, all in Ecclesiastes.
    - c. Translated into Greek in the Septuagint as *Ekklesiastes*, and that serves as the book's title and into English as "Preacher," or in some versions "Teacher."
    - d. Related to the Greek word for *assembly* (*ekklesia*; often translated "church").
  2. He was "the son of David, king in Jerusalem" (1:1, 12)
  3. He possessed great wealth and power (1:16; 2:7-10).
  4. He had achieved great things (2:4-6).
- B. Solomon is the person who best fits the description.
  1. Although a number of "sons" (descendants) of David sat on the throne in Jerusalem, Solomon was essentially the only one who reigned over Israel (1:12; 1 Chronicles 29:23-24). After Solomon's death, the kingdom split and future descendants of David ruled over the southern kingdom of Judah.
  2. Solomon was in a class by himself with respect to wealth and wisdom (1 Kings 4:29-34; 1 Chronicles 29:25; 2 Chronicles 1:11-12, 15).
  3. There are some similarities between some of the Proverbs (known to be written by Solomon, Prov. 1:1) and sections of Ecclesiastes (Ecclesiastes 10:8, 9, 12, 13, 18; 12:9).
  4. Early Jewish tradition supports Solomon as the author of Ecclesiastes.
- C. Liberal scholars in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries started saying that Solomon was not the author, opining that all or part of it was written much later.
  1. One commentator summarized the extreme version of this view: "Most scholars conclude this book was written at a later time than most of the Old Testament literature, sometime in the second or third century before Christ."<sup>1</sup>
  2. Challenges to Solomon being the author stem primarily from some language nuances:
  3. The use of the past tense with respect to the author's reign
    - a. Solomon did not abdicate the throne; he died while still in power.

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<sup>1</sup> Ogden, G. S., & Zogbo, L. (1998). *A handbook on Ecclesiastes*. UBS Handbook Series (7). New York: United Bible Societies.

- b. The author uses the *perfect tense* of a verb in 1:12, I the Preacher “was king over Israel in Jerusalem.” (KJV, NKJV, NIV) But that tense applies when a past situation continues into the present. So the verb under question may correctly be translated according to the apparent emphasis in the context. For example: “Thy servants are no spies” (Genesis 42:11, KJV); and “I have been a stranger” (Exodus 2:22, KJV). So several translations, including the NASB, ESV, and Young’s Literal Translation, render Ecclesiastes 1:12, “I have been king.”
4. For responses to other arguments regarding language use (e.g., the presence of apparent Aramaisms in the text, i.e., words that supposedly date much later than the lifetime of Solomon, and the book’s similarities to or dependence on other ancient writings, such as those of the Babylonians, Egyptians, and Greeks), see Kaiser and Garrett.<sup>2, 3</sup>
5. The author clearly represented himself as Solomon. Paul Earnhart expressed the consequences of the liberal scholars’ view: “The problem with some unknown scribe writing this great book is that if he wrote under Solomon’s name to deceive, he is a liar. If he wrote so as to deceive no one, his literary device was pointless and powerless.”<sup>4</sup>

## II. Date of writing

- A. Solomon’s reign can be dated at 970-930 B.C., placing the date of authorship within that forty-year period.
- B. Although Solomon began his reign in a godly way, he fell into apostasy (1 Kings 11:1-13). The questions then, are, “At what point in his life did he write it?” and “Did he repent?”
  1. Jewish tradition suggests that Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes late in life.
  2. “The difference of its style, as compared with Proverbs and Song of Solomon, is due to the difference of subjects, and the different period of his life in which each was written; the Song, in the fervor of his first love to God; Proverbs, about the same time, or somewhat later; but Ecclesiastes in late old age, as the seal and testimony of repentance of his apostasy in the intervening period: Ps 89:30, 33 proves his penitence.”<sup>5</sup>
    - a. I am less confident Psalm 89:30, 33 proves Solomon’s penitence, but whoever wrote Ecclesiastes was not of the same mind as the Solomon who built temples to false gods in the very vicinity of Jerusalem!
    - b. “To affirm that Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes is to affirm ... that David’s son at last repented of the grievous folly of his latter life. Yet we believe that to be the great likelihood and this great book a reflection of it. Ecclesiastes is certainly not the work of a young man or of an impenitent one. ... What a powerful testimony to the vanity of life under the sun would come from the likes of Solomon. Who could understand that great truth more profoundly than he?”<sup>6</sup>

## III. Purpose

- A. A key word in the book is “vanity.”
  1. The Hebrew word translated vanity means “vapour, breath.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Ecclesiastes: Total Life*, The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, 1979, pp. 28-40

<sup>3</sup> Garrett, p. 256.

<sup>4</sup> *Christianity Magazine*, August/1998, p. 27.

<sup>5</sup> Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

<sup>6</sup> *Christianity Magazine*, September/October/1998, p. 31.

<sup>7</sup> Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (2000). *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (electronic ed.) (210). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems.

- a. “In Ecclesiastes it suggests the idea of the emptiness ... of things. Often this vanity arises from their temporary and unfulfilling nature and in other cases from their inequity and unfairness.”<sup>8</sup>
  2. The English word vanity is defined by Webster as follows:
    - a. “That which is vain or empty, idle, or useless; a vain or futile thing or things.”
    - b. “Quality or fact of being vain, or devoid of worth, use, truth, etc.; emptiness; falsity, futility.”  
Synonym, “futility.”
  3. Vanity is used with respect to the “greater picture.” For example, it is not totally worthless or futile to work to provide for oneself (2:18ff).
- B. Ecclesiastes can come across as pessimistic and fatalistic if the author’s purpose is not considered.
1. The author's thesis is stated in 1:2 and restated in 12:8 and is made from the perspective of one considering that which is “under the sun,” i.e., earthly. “Under heaven”, “on earth”, and “under the sun” appear in the NKJV three, six, and 29 times, respectively.
  2. “The pronouncements that Solomon makes about life will seem wholly erroneous and even exceedingly cynical unless we remember that he is speaking of life as viewed from beneath the sun.”<sup>9</sup>
  3. His intention is to examine life apart from God and show its emptiness. In so doing, he occasionally gives a glimpse of truths understood only from a heavenly perspective. This leads to his conclusion of 12:13, the whole duty of man.
  4. The Jews read Ecclesiastes at the Feast of Tabernacles, the most joyous feast of the year. The purpose of the Feast was to remind the Israelites of their dependence upon God after their deliverance from Egypt (Leviticus 23:33-43; see also Exodus 23:16 where the feast is called the feast of ingathering [it came at the conclusion of the harvest]). How fitting!
- C. Other summaries of the author’s purpose include:
1. “The theme of Ecclesiastes is a search for satisfaction.”<sup>10</sup>
  2. “The purposes of Ecclesiastes...are to show the futility of pursuing materialistic, earthly goals as an end in themselves, and to point to God as the source of all that is truly good.”<sup>11</sup>
  3. “The Scope of Ecclesiastes is to show the vanity of all mere human pursuits, when made the chief end, as contrasted with the real blessedness of true wisdom, that is, religion...It is objected that sensual epicurism seems to be inculcated (Eccl. 3:12, 13, 22, &c.); but it is a contented, thankful enjoyment of God’s present gifts that is taught, as opposed to a murmuring, anxious, avaricious spirit, as is proved by Eccl. 5:18, compare with Eccl. 5:11–15, not making them the chief end of life; not the joy of levity and folly; a misunderstanding which he guards against in Eccl. 7:2–6; 11:9; 12:1.”<sup>12</sup>
  4. “The purpose of the writer of Ecclesiastes is to reflect upon his own futile efforts to find ultimate meaning and purpose amidst life’s perplexities, and to warn those who would come after him (especially the young, 12:1) that nothing ‘under the sun’ will ever fulfill the eternal longing which God has put in the heart of man (3:11).”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Christianity Magazine*, November/1998, p. 27.

<sup>9</sup> *Christianity Magazine*, December/1998, p. 27.

<sup>10</sup> Geisler, *Popular Survey*, p. 213.

<sup>11</sup> Irving Jensen, *Jensen's Survey*, p. 301.

<sup>12</sup> Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

<sup>13</sup> *Christianity Magazine*, December/1998, p. 27.

#### IV. Organization

- A. As Solomon searches for the meaning of life, he cycles through several topics, returning to them in waves of thought. In doing so, he displays more cyclical than linear thinking.
1. For an introduction to those concepts, see <http://chuckslamp.com/index.php/2009/04/11/non-linearthinking/>, retrieved 11/21/2018, or <https://2wkblog.com/2017/11/03/are-you-a-circular-or-a-linear-thinker-2/>, retrieved 11/21/2018.
  2. Cyclical thinking can be a helpful way to view history, economics, and even time.
  3. Solomon begins the book asking “What profit has a man from all his labor?” and notes the cycles of generations (v. 4), the sun (v. 5), the wind (v. 6), the rivers (v. 7), and even history, famously coining the phrase “there is nothing new under the sun” (vv. 9-11).
- B. Therefore, like Proverbs, the book of Ecclesiastes resists a typical, hierarchal, linear outline.
1. “Part biography, part poetry, part proverbs and wisdom statements, and part diatribe, it invites us to savor its various chapters as separate points in an overall argument for transcendent living.”<sup>14</sup>
  2. “Ecclesiastes is more than a group of meditations loosely strung together, it is less than a group of paragraphs symmetrically balanced and arranged.”<sup>15</sup>
  3. “The structure of Ecclesiastes is . . . a kind of wandering among several topics. Contrary to some, therefore, it is not utterly without structure; but contrary to others, it follows no elaborate or symmetrical scheme. Even so its ‘wandering’ is not purposeless but moves steadily toward a final destination.”<sup>16</sup>
- C. Because our Western culture tends toward linear thought, here are some outlines to consider:
1. By Eaton (abbreviated form):<sup>17</sup>
    - a. Pessimism: Its Problems and Its Remedy (Ch. 1 – 3)
    - b. Life “Under The Sun” (Ch. 4 – 10)
    - c. The Call to Decision (11:1-12:8)
    - d. Epilogue (12:9-14)
  2. By Leupold (abbreviated form):<sup>18</sup>
    - a. Prologue: “All is Vanity” (1:1-11)
    - b. The Vanity of all Things (1:12-6:12)
    - c. Counsel for Days of Suffering (7:1-12:7)
    - d. Epilogue (12:8-14)
  3. By Kaiser (shortening the fourth section’s title)
    - a. Enjoying Life as a Gift from God (Ch. 1 – 2)
    - b. Understanding the All-Encompassing Plan of God (Ch. 3 – 5)
    - c. Explaining and Applying the Plan of God (6:1 – 8:15)
    - d. Removing Discouragements (8:16 – 12:14)

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<sup>14</sup> T. M. Moore, *Ecclesiastes: Ancient Wisdom When All Else Fails*, p. 12.

<sup>15</sup> David Holder, *The Structure of Ecclesiastes*, Studies in the Scriptures (SITS)/2003; unpublished manuscript.

<sup>16</sup> Garrett, p. 270.

<sup>17</sup> Michael A. Eaton, *The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Ecclesiastes*, pp. 48-53.

<sup>18</sup> H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Ecclesiastes*, pp. 25-27.

## Texts and Questions

### Cycles of life

1:1 The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. 2 “Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher; “Vanity of vanities, all *is* vanity.” 3 What profit has a man from all his labor In which he toils under the sun? 4 *One* generation passes away, and *another* generation comes; But the earth abides forever. 5 The sun also rises, and the sun goes down, And hastens to the place where it arose. 6 The wind goes toward the south, And turns around to the north; The wind whirls about continually, And comes again on its circuit. 7 All the rivers run into the sea, Yet the sea *is* not full; To the place from which the rivers come, There they return again.

1:8 All things *are* full of labor; Man cannot express *it*. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, Nor the ear filled with hearing. 9 That which has been *is* what will be, That which *is* done is what will be done, And *there is* nothing new under the sun. 10 Is there anything of which it may be said, “See, this *is* new”? It has already been in ancient times before us. 11 *There is* no remembrance of former *things*, Nor will there be any remembrance of *things* that are to come By *those* who will come after.

*Note the translation:* 1:8b No matter how much we see, we are never satisfied. No matter how much we hear, we are not content. 9 History merely repeats itself. It has all been done before. Nothing under the sun is truly new. (The Living Bible)

(From ASD) How are we to understand the author’s statement that “there is nothing new under the sun” in light of technological advances in our modern age? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2:12b For what *can* the man *do* who succeeds the king?— *Only* what he has already done.

3:15 That which *is* has already been, And what *is* to be has already been.

### Solomon’s search for meaning

1:12 I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. 13 And I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven; this burdensome task God has given to the sons of man, by which they may be exercised. 14a I have seen all the works that are done under the sun.

How extensive was Solomon’s search? \_\_\_\_\_

*Note the quote:* “Those that know, do. Those that understand, teach.” – *Aristotle*

12:9 And moreover, because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yes, he pondered and sought out *and* set in order many proverbs. 10 The Preacher sought to find acceptable words; and *what was* written *was* upright—words of truth. 11 The words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd. 12 And further, my son, be admonished by these. Of making many books *there is* no end, and much study *is* wearisome to the flesh.

Solomon acknowledges that there are countless books in the world. What makes this book special? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Under the Sun: Lesson 2

### Quest for Fulfillment

*Guiding thoughts:* Solomon, the man who had everything and whose reach extended to the ends of the earth (see 1 Kings 4), did everything he could and touched and tasted everything within his reach to find fulfillment. He comes to the same conclusion about each endeavor: All is vanity!

But “vanity” does not mean “pointless.” It means “empty,” and the facets of its emptiness include “senseless, sorry, transient.” The same word, translated to Greek, appears in Romans 8:20 where it is translated “vanity” or “futility” or “frustration.” (The New Century Version is out of step with all other translations when it renders the word “useless.”)

“No single part of God’s good world can unlock the meaning to life.”<sup>19</sup> Human wisdom cannot explain life’s unfairness, and human effort cannot satisfy our longing for eternity.

#### All that is done

1:12 I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. 13 And I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven; this burdensome task God has given to the sons of man, by which they may be exercised. 14 I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and indeed, all *is* vanity and grasping for the wind. ... 16 I communed with my heart, saying, “Look, I have attained greatness, and have gained more wisdom than all who were before me in Jerusalem. My heart has understood great wisdom and knowledge.” 17 And I set my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is grasping for the wind.

What did Solomon conclude after looking at everything? \_\_\_\_\_

Name one specific pursuit that proved to be “grasping for the wind.” \_\_\_\_\_

Is life indeed empty? \_\_\_\_ Explain. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

#### Pleasure and fulfilling desires

2:1 I said in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure”; but surely, this also *was* vanity. 2 I said of laughter—“Madness!”; and of mirth, “What does it accomplish?” 3 I searched in my heart *how* to gratify my flesh with wine, while guiding my heart with wisdom, and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what *was* good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives.

Describe the limits Solomon was testing in this part of his experiment. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

#### Wisdom

1:15 What is crooked cannot be made straight, And what is lacking cannot be numbered. 16 I communed with my heart, saying, “Look, I have attained greatness, and have gained more wisdom than all who were before me in Jerusalem. My heart has understood great wisdom and knowledge.” 17 And I set my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is grasping for the wind. 18 For in much wisdom *is* much grief, And he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.

How can increasing knowledge actually and perhaps unexpectedly increase sorrow? \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

<sup>19</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., Ecclesiastes: Total Life, The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, 1979, p. 17.

## Works

2:4 I made my works great, I built myself houses, and planted myself vineyards. 5 I made myself gardens and orchards, and I planted all *kinds* of fruit trees in them. 6 I made myself water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove.

Think of one of the coolest things ever built in the world. \_\_\_\_\_

Off the top of your head, name the person who built it. \_\_\_\_\_

## Possessions

2:7 I acquired male and female servants, and had servants born in my house. Yes, I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me. 8 I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and of the provinces. I acquired male and female singers, the delights of the sons of men, *and* musical instruments of all kinds.

Are the world's richest people typically happy people? \_\_\_\_\_

2:9 So I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. 10 Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, For my heart rejoiced in all my labor; And this was my reward from all my labor. 11 Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done And on the labor in which I had toiled; And indeed all *was* vanity and grasping for the wind. *There was* no profit under the sun.

Did Solomon find any enjoyment in these pursuits? \_\_\_\_\_

Why did Solomon consider his labor to be grasping for the wind? \_\_\_\_\_

## Work-aholism

4:8 There is one alone, without companion: He has neither son nor brother. Yet *there is* no end to all his labors, Nor is his eye satisfied with riches. *But he never asks*, "For whom do I toil and deprive myself of good?" This also *is* vanity and a grave misfortune.

*Note the quote:* "Who needs a house out in Hackensack? Is that all you get for your money? And it seems such a waste of time. If that's what it's all about, Mama, if that's moving up, then I'm movin' out." – Billy Joel, "Movin' Out"

Tell as many reasons as you can for being a work-aholic. \_\_\_\_\_

## Fame/Popularity

4:13 Better a poor and wise youth Than an old and foolish king who will be admonished no more. 14 For he comes out of prison to be king, Although he was born poor in his kingdom. 15 I saw all the living who walk under the sun; They were with the second youth who stands in his place. 16 *There was* no end of all the people over whom he was made king; Yet those who come afterward will not rejoice in him. Surely this also *is* vanity and grasping for the wind.

9:13 This wisdom I have also seen under the sun, and it *seemed* great to me: 14 *There was* a little city with few men in it; and a great king came against it, besieged it, and built great snares around it. 15 Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that same poor man.

*Note the quote:* "Today I am your champion, I may have won your hearts, but I know the game and you'll forget my name if I don't stay on the charts." – Billy Joel, "The Entertainer"

Why was Solomon not simply forgotten like other famous people? \_\_\_\_\_

If possible, name one good thing under the sun that Solomon did *not* try. \_\_\_\_\_

If possible, name one thing under the sun that someone could explore more in depth or to the extreme than Solomon. \_\_\_\_\_

What is Solomon remembered for in the following passages?

**Matthew 6:29** - \_\_\_\_\_ **Matthew 12:42** - \_\_\_\_\_ **Acts 7:47** - \_\_\_\_\_

Where are Solomon's riches and buildings now? \_\_\_\_\_

What can be concluded from Solomon's grand search for fulfillment? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Under the Sun: Lesson 3

### Wisdom

*Guiding thoughts:* Human wisdom, as important and even necessary as it is, cannot explain everything. In fact, as a pursuit unto itself, it will lead to frustration, because the one who becomes enlightened about life becomes even more acutely aware of unhappy situations, but is powerless to change them.

#### The value of wisdom

2:12 Then I turned myself to consider wisdom and madness and folly; For what *can* the man *do* who succeeds the king?— *Only* what he has already done. 13 Then I saw that wisdom excels folly As light excels darkness. 14 The wise man’s eyes *are* in his head, But the fool walks in darkness.

Wisdom is better than \_\_\_\_\_. Comment on the analogy he makes. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

7:11 Wisdom *is* good with an inheritance, And profitable to those who see the sun. 12 For wisdom *is* a defense as money *is* a defense, But the excellence of knowledge *is that* wisdom gives life to those who have it.

Describe how wisdom can “give life” in a physical/secular sense. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Describe how it can give life spiritually. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

#### Wisdom is an elusive target

1:13 I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven; this burdensome task God has given to the sons of man, by which they may be exercised. 14 I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and indeed, all *is* vanity and grasping for the wind.

7:23b I said, “I will be wise”; But it *was* far from me. 24 As for that which is far off and exceedingly deep, Who can find it out? 25 I applied my heart to know, To search and seek out wisdom and the reason *of things*, To know the wickedness of folly, Even of foolishness *and* madness.

From 1 Kings 4:29ff, how many proverbs did Solomon write? \_\_\_\_\_

What else did he write about? \_\_\_\_\_

Describe Solomon’s extreme wisdom. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How could average people like us possibly hope to attain wisdom? (Support your answer with a passage or two outside of Ecclesiastes.) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

#### Rulers need it

4:13 Better a poor and wise youth Than an old and foolish king who will be admonished no more.

10:1 Dead flies putrefy the perfumer’s ointment, And cause it to give off a foul odor; *So does* a little folly to one respected for wisdom *and* honor.

When a respected person acts foolishly it destroys his/her \_\_\_\_\_.

10:2 A wise man's heart *is* at his right hand, But a fool's heart at his left. 3 Even when a fool walks along the way, He lacks wisdom, And he shows everyone *that* he *is* a fool. 4 If the spirit of the ruler rises against you, Do not leave your post; For conciliation pacifies great offenses. 5 There is an evil I have seen under the sun, As an error proceeding from the ruler: 6 Folly is set in great dignity, While the rich sit in a lowly place. 7 I have seen servants on horses, While princes walk on the ground like servants.

Give a modern example of folly being set in "great dignity". \_\_\_\_\_

10:15 The labor of fools wearies them, For they do not even know how to go to the city! 16 Woe to you, O land, when your king *is* a child, And your princes feast in the morning! 17 Blessed *are* you, O land, when your king *is* the son of nobles, And your princes feast at the proper time— For strength and not for drunkenness!

### Wisdom turned inward

7:19 Wisdom strengthens the wise More than ten rulers of the city. 20 For *there is* not a just man on earth who does good And does not sin. 21 Also do not take to heart everything people say, Lest you hear your servant cursing you. 22 For many times, also, your own heart has known That even you have cursed others. 23a All this I have proved by wisdom.

What do we learn from an honest self-examination? \_\_\_\_\_

Give a modern (or personal) example of hypocritical judgment. \_\_\_\_\_

### Obey the law

8:1 Who *is* like a wise *man*? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? A man's wisdom makes his face shine, And the sternness of his face is changed. 2 I say, "Keep the king's commandment for the sake of your oath to God. 3 "Do not be hasty to go from his presence. Do not take your stand for an evil thing, for he does whatever pleases him." 4 Where the word of a king *is*, *there is* power; And who may say to him, "What are you doing?" 5 He who keeps his command will experience nothing harmful; And a wise man's heart discerns both time and judgment,

State some reasons for obeying the law. \_\_\_\_\_

From Matthew 5:41; Matt. 17:24-27; Matt. 22:15-22; Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:12-16 tell at least three other reasons for obeying the law. \_\_\_\_\_

### Wise words

9:16 Then I said: "Wisdom *is* better than strength. Nevertheless the poor man's wisdom *is* despised, And his words are not heard. 17 Words of the wise, *spoken* quietly, *should be* heard Rather than the shout of a ruler of fools. 18 Wisdom *is* better than weapons of war; But one sinner destroys much good."

Wise words are better than \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

*Note the quote:* “It is better to remain silent at the risk of being thought a fool, than to talk and remove all doubt of it.” – *Maurice Switzer* in “*Mrs. Goose, Her Book*”

Also, “Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace; When he shuts his lips, he is considered perceptive.” – *Proverbs 17:28*

10:11 A serpent may bite when *it is* not charmed; The babbler is no different. 12 The words of a wise man’s mouth *are* gracious, But the lips of a fool shall swallow him up; 13 The words of his mouth begin with foolishness, And the end of his talk *is* raving madness. 14 A fool also multiplies words. No man knows what is to be; Who can tell him what will be after him?

Find a New Testament passage (or more) about using gracious words. \_\_\_\_\_

10:20 Do not curse the king, even in your thought; Do not curse the rich, even in your bedroom; For a bird of the air may carry your voice, And a bird in flight may tell the matter.

Being careful about who may overhear our words is important. What else is important to control, even though no one would hear? \_\_\_\_\_

### Wisdom from unexpected sources

7:1 A good name *is* better than precious ointment, And the day of death than the day of one’s birth; 2 Better to go to the house of mourning Than to go to the house of feasting, For that *is* the end of all men; And the living will take *it* to heart. 3 Sorrow *is* better than laughter, For by a sad countenance the heart is made better. 4 The heart of the wise *is* in the house of mourning, But the heart of fools *is* in the house of mirth.

Wisdom comes from \_\_\_\_\_

Why is that the case? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4:13 Better a poor and wise youth Than an old and foolish king who will be admonished no more.

7:5 *It is* better to hear the rebuke of the wise Than for a man to hear the song of fools. 6 For like the crackling of thorns under a pot, So *is* the laughter of the fool. This also is vanity.

Wisdom also comes from listening to \_\_\_\_\_. Explain. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Under the Sun: Lesson 4

### Healthy Thinking

*Guiding thoughts:* Several negative actions and attitudes, either alone or in concert, have the power to ruin our thinking. The fact that Solomon “turned his heart and despaired” teaches us that we can choose to turn our heart – either way!

The “author knew that the thinking man is haunted by the questions, “Who am I?”, “What is the meaning of life?”, “Should I be worldlier than thou or holier than thou? Or, is there a third alternative that is simultaneously world accepting and God honoring?”<sup>20</sup>

Write the letters corresponding to the following truths beside the passage(s) that mention them. Each truth may be seen multiple times, and some passages contain multiple truths.

- |                    |                             |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| a. Negativity      | e. Impatience               |
| b. Dissatisfaction | f. Anger                    |
| c. Bad behavior    | g. Nostalgia                |
| d. Pride           | h. Fretting over the future |
|                    | i. Going to extremes        |

\_\_\_\_\_ 2:17 Therefore I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was distressing to me, for all *is* vanity and grasping for the wind. 18 Then I hated all my labor in which I had toiled under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who will come after me. 19 And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will rule over all my labor in which I toiled and in which I have shown myself wise under the sun. This also *is* vanity.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2:20 Therefore I turned my heart and despaired of all the labor in which I had toiled under the sun. 21 For there is a man whose labor *is* with wisdom, knowledge, and skill; yet he must leave his heritage to a man who has not labored for it. This also *is* vanity and a great evil. 22 For what has man for all his labor, and for the striving of his heart with which he has toiled under the sun? 23 For all his days *are* sorrowful, and his work burdensome; even in the night his heart takes no rest. This also *is* vanity.

\_\_\_\_\_ 6:3 If a man begets a hundred *children* and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many, but his soul is not satisfied with goodness, or indeed he has no burial, I say *that* a stillborn child *is* better than he— 4 for it comes in vanity and departs in darkness, and its name is covered with darkness. 5 Though it has not seen the sun or known *anything*, this has more rest than that man, 6 even if he lives a thousand years twice—but has not seen goodness. Do not all go to one place?

\_\_\_\_\_ 6:7 All the labor of man *is* for his mouth, And yet the soul is not satisfied. 8 For what more has the wise *man* than the fool? What does the poor man have, Who knows *how* to walk before the living? 9 Better *is* the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire. This also *is* vanity and grasping for the wind.

\_\_\_\_\_ 7:7 Surely oppression destroys a wise *man's* reason, And a bribe debases the heart. 8 The end of a thing *is* better than its beginning; The patient in spirit *is* better than the proud in spirit. 9 Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, For anger rests in the bosom of fools.

\_\_\_\_\_ 7:10 Do not say, “Why were the former days better than these?” For you do not inquire wisely concerning this.

\_\_\_\_\_ 7:16 Do not be overly righteous, Nor be overly wise: Why should you destroy yourself? 17 Do not be overly wicked, Nor be foolish: Why should you die before your time? 18 *It is* good that you grasp this, And also not remove your hand from the other; For he who fears God will escape them all.

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<sup>20</sup> Kaiser, p. 8.

**Focus on “now”**

2:24 Nothing *is* better for a man *than* that he should eat and drink, and *that* his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God. 25 For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I?

What (maybe two things) about our blessings makes it fitting to enjoy them? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What about *us* makes us uniquely qualified to enjoy life? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Note the quote:* “Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” – *Paul, Romans 6:11*

8:15 So I commended enjoyment, because a man has nothing better under the sun than to eat, drink, and be merry; for this will remain with him in his labor *all* the days of his life which God gives him under the sun.

**Thought control**

We face many challenges to our thinking, but the Scriptures offer solutions. Using the New Testament verses cited, list some problems with our thinking and their solutions:

**Matthew 6:19-24:** Problem(s) - \_\_\_\_\_

Solution(s) - \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Philippians 4:4-9 and Matthew 6:25-34:** Problem(s) - \_\_\_\_\_

Solution(s) - \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Philippians 4:10-14:** Problem(s) - \_\_\_\_\_

Solution(s) - \_\_\_\_\_

**Avoiding extremes**

*Note the quote:* “Prosperity may not be a good. And adversity... is not necessarily an evil.” – Unsigned article in the *Princeton Review*, 1857.

*Note the quote:* Darling I don't know why I go to extremes. Too high or too low there ain't no in-betweens. And if I stand of I fall, It's all or nothing at all. Darling I don't know why I go to extremes – *Billy Joel - I Go To Extremes*

7:16a Do not be overly righteous, Nor be overly wise.

Assume that Solomon is *not* promoting a lack of effort regarding being righteous. (Neither was the angel in Revelation 22:11, by the way!) How could someone be “too righteous”? (Consider Luke 18:9; Colossians 2:8, 18.) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Under the Sun: Lesson 5

### Facing Unfairness

*Guiding thoughts:* American culture, perhaps for historical reasons (i.e., we won our war of independence), values fierce independence and self-reliance, giving the illusion that we can control not only our own lives, but every situation we face. Other cultures, perhaps also for historical reasons (i.e., they were conquered), have developed a more pessimistic view which tends to dampen expectations, but which is probably closer to life's probabilities.

But Koheleth does not promote either extreme. He encourages industry while giving no promise as to the outcome and always acknowledging that God is ultimately in control. And he encourages the acceptance of inequities without advocating for despair. Again because God is in control, every situation will eventually be straightened out, even if that time is postponed till Judgment Day.

#### Rampant wickedness

3:16 Moreover I saw under the sun: *In* the place of judgment, Wickedness was there; And *in* the place of righteousness, Iniquity was there.

*Note the quote:* "You once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience." – Paul, *Ephesians 2:2*

In light of the rampant wickedness in our society (or in our world), how do you think it compares to the days of the Roman Empire? \_\_\_\_\_

... to the days of Noah? \_\_\_\_\_

#### Oppression

4:1 Then I returned and considered all the oppression that is done under the sun: And look! The tears of the oppressed, But they have no comforter—On the side of their oppressors *there is* power, But they have no comforter. 2 Therefore I praised the dead who were already dead, More than the living who are still alive. 3 Yet, better than both *is he* who has never existed, Who has not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.

Tell two aspects of oppression that make it especially hard to witness: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5:8 If you see the oppression of the poor, and the violent perversion of justice and righteousness in a province, do not marvel at the matter; for high official watches over high official, and higher officials are over them. 9 Moreover the profit of the land is for all; *even* the king is served from the field.

8:9 All this I have seen, and applied my heart to every work that is done under the sun: *There is* a time in which one man rules over another to his own hurt.

It's bad when common criminals cause suffering, but it's especially difficult to tolerate when it comes from whom? \_\_\_\_\_

#### Lack of justice

8:11 Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. 12 Though a sinner does evil a hundred *times*, and his *days* are prolonged, yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him. 13 But it will not be well with the wicked; nor will he prolong *his days*, *which are* as a shadow, because he does not fear before God.

What is sometimes the only fact that can anchor our thinking when we see criminals walk free? \_\_\_\_\_

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### Unfair rewards

7:15 I have seen everything in my days of vanity: There is a just *man* who perishes in his righteousness, And there is a wicked *man* who prolongs *life* in his wickedness.

What do we (like Job's friends) naturally expect in terms of lifespan for the righteous? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ ... for the wicked? \_\_\_\_\_

8:14 There is a vanity which occurs on earth, that there are just *men* to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked; again, there are wicked *men* to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous. I said that this also *is* vanity.

8:10 Then I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of holiness, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done. This also *is* vanity.

*Note the translation:* Ecclesiastes 8:10 (NLT) I have seen wicked people buried with honor. Yet they were the very ones who frequented the Temple and are now praised in the same city where they committed their crimes! This, too, is meaningless.

Have you ever known of a criminal becoming a rich, elected official? Have you ever heard someone try to preach into heaven someone known for their bad behavior? Think of other instances of people seeming to forget about a person's evil choices.

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### Irony

*Guiding thoughts:* While this usually does not involve violence or cause physical suffering, watching things turn out differently from how we expect can lead to frustration. If left unchecked, that frustration can start a negative thought spiral.

4:4 Again, I saw that for all toil and every skillful work a man is envied by his neighbor. This also *is* vanity and grasping for the wind.

What simple expectation do we have when we work hard and use our talents successfully? \_\_\_\_\_

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10:7 I have seen servants on horses, While princes walk on the ground like servants.

*Note the quotes:*

“Life is pain, highness. Anyone who says differently is selling something.”

“Life isn't fair, it's just fairer than death, that's all.”

“Who says life is fair, where is that written?” — *William Goldman, The Princess Bride*

# Under the Sun: Lesson 6

## Work

*Guiding thoughts:* Work is an integral part of life. If viewed only from under the sun, though, it can seem unprofitable and even monotonous. The working man suffers “boredom with the routine of joylessly eating, drinking, and earning a paycheck.”<sup>21</sup> But when viewed as a gift of God, a person can learn to appreciate his or her ability to engage in it, enjoy the activity itself, and have a happy outlook on its results, temporary though they are.

### Idleness invites problems

10:18 Because of laziness the building decays, And through idleness of hands the house leaks.

Distinguish “resting” from “being idle” or “lazy”. \_\_\_\_\_

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### Enjoy your work

2:10 My heart rejoiced in all my labor; And this was my reward from all my labor.

3:22 I perceived that nothing *is* better than that a man should rejoice in his own works, for that *is* his heritage. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?

What worldly attitude do we usually see expressed toward work? \_\_\_\_\_

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Tell a couple of phrases from the workplace that show people look forward to *not* working. \_\_\_\_\_

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### Enjoy what your work affords

2:24 Nothing *is* better for a man *than* that he should eat and drink, and *that* his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God.

3:9 What profit has the worker from that in which he labors? 10 I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. 11a He has made everything beautiful in its time. ... 12 I know that nothing *is* better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives, 13 and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it *is* the gift of God.

Comment on this teaching in light of the work God gave Adam and Eve. \_\_\_\_\_

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5:18 Here is what I have seen: It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage. 19 As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor—this is the gift of God. 20 For he will not dwell unduly on the days of his life, because God keeps him busy with the joy of his heart.

Give an example of a rich person who does not have “power to eat of it.” \_\_\_\_\_

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<sup>21</sup> Kaiser, p. 8.

**May bring envy**

4:4 Again, I saw that for all toil and every skillful work a man is envied by his neighbor. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.

Assuming that it is not the work itself which is called vanity in this passage, to what exactly is Solomon referring? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Helps you sleep**

5:12 The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, Whether he eats little or much.

**Work hard**

9:10a Whatever your hand finds to do, do *it* with your might; for *there is* no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.

What perhaps unexpected reason does Solomon give for working hard? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Work smart**

10:8 He who digs a pit will fall into it, And whoever breaks through a wall will be bitten by a serpent.  
9 He who quarries stones may be hurt by them, *And* he who splits wood may be endangered by it.  
10 If the ax is dull, And one does not sharpen the edge, Then he must use more strength; But wisdom brings success.

In light of the risks associated with work, what does Solomon recommend, rather than avoiding the endeavor altogether? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What does Ephesians 4:28 say is the reason for us to work? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Under the Sun: Lesson 7

### Money, Money, Money

Write the letters corresponding to the following truths beside the passage(s) that mention them. Each truth is seen multiple times, and some passages contain multiple truths.

- |                        |                           |
|------------------------|---------------------------|
| a. Solves everything   | f. Causes stress/problems |
| b. Is a defense        | g. Is uncertain           |
| c. Is wearisome to get | h. Can't pass the grave   |
| d. Is consumed         | i. Is God's gift          |
| e. Doesn't satisfy     |                           |

\_\_\_\_\_ 2:17 Therefore I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was distressing to me, for all *is* vanity and grasping for the wind. 18 Then I hated all my labor in which I had toiled under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who will come after me. 19 And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will rule over all my labor in which I toiled and in which I have shown myself wise under the sun. This also *is* vanity. 20 Therefore I turned my heart and despaired of all the labor in which I had toiled under the sun. 21 For there is a man whose labor *is* with wisdom, knowledge, and skill; yet he must leave his heritage to a man who has not labored for it. This also *is* vanity and a great evil. 22 For what has man for all his labor, and for the striving of his heart with which he has toiled under the sun? 23 For all his days *are* sorrowful, and his work burdensome; even in the night his heart takes no rest. This also *is* vanity.

\_\_\_\_\_ 5:10 He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; Nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also *is* vanity. 11 When goods increase, They increase who eat them; So what profit have the owners Except to see *them* with their eyes?

\_\_\_\_\_ 5:12 The sleep of a laboring man *is* sweet, Whether he eats little or much; But the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep.

\_\_\_\_\_ 5:13 There is a severe evil *which* I have seen under the sun: Riches kept for their owner to his hurt. 14 But those riches perish through misfortune; When he begets a son, *there is* nothing in his hand.

\_\_\_\_\_ 5:15 As he came from his mother's womb, naked shall he return, To go as he came; And he shall take nothing from his labor Which he may carry away in his hand. 16 And this also *is* a severe evil—Just exactly as he came, so shall he go. And what profit has he who has labored for the wind? 17 All his days he also eats in darkness, And *he has* much sorrow and sickness and anger. 18 Here is what I have seen: *It is* good and fitting *for one* to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for *it is* his heritage. 19 As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor—this *is* the gift of God. 20 For he will not dwell unduly on the days of his life, because God keeps *him* busy with the joy of his heart.

\_\_\_\_\_ 4:5 The fool folds his hands And consumes his own flesh. 6 Better a handful *with* quietness Than both hands full, *together with* toil and grasping for the wind.

\_\_\_\_\_ 4:7 Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun: 8 There is one alone, without companion: He has neither son nor brother. Yet *there is* no end to all his labors, Nor is his eye satisfied with riches. *But he never asks*, "For whom do I toil and deprive myself of good?" This also *is* vanity and a grave misfortune.

\_\_\_\_\_ 6:1 There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it *is* common among men: 2 A man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor, so that he lacks nothing for himself of all he desires; yet God does not give him power to eat of it, but a foreigner consumes it. This *is* vanity, and it *is* an evil affliction.

- a. Solves everything
- b. Is a defense
- c. Is wearisome to get
- d. Is consumed
- e. Doesn't satisfy
- f. Causes stress/problems
- g. Is uncertain
- h. Can't pass the grave
- i. Is God's gift

\_\_\_\_\_ 7:12 For wisdom *is* a defense as money *is* a defense, But the excellence of knowledge *is that* wisdom gives life to those who have it.

\_\_\_\_\_ 7:14 In the day of prosperity be joyful, But in the day of adversity consider: Surely God has appointed the one as well as the other, So that man can find out nothing *that will come* after him.

How can we temper our joy over getting money? \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_ 10:19 A feast is made for laughter, And wine makes merry; But money answers everything. Having read the passages, list some classes of people to whom we may end up leaving all our money.

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*Note the quote:* "Money is power, freedom, a cushion, the root of all evil, the sum of blessings." – Carl Sandburg

*Note the better quote:* "6 Now godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. 8 And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. 9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." – Paul, 1 Timothy 6

What is the root of all evil? \_\_\_\_\_

Is it wrong to be rich? \_\_\_\_\_

Consider the "rich young ruler" from Mark 10:17ff. What was his main error? \_\_\_\_\_

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Consider the "rich fool" of Luke 12:16-20. What was his main error? \_\_\_\_\_

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Identify some of the "sorrows" which greed can bring. \_\_\_\_\_

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## Under the Sun: Lesson 8

### Death

*Guiding thoughts:* From the earliest human writings, we read of people's beliefs in the afterlife. In addition to references from Babylonians and Egyptians, we see the existence of mediums and spiritists in ancient Palestine – one of whom witnessed Samuel speak from beyond the grave to King Saul! (1 Samuel 28). (Their existence demonstrates people's belief in the afterlife, not necessarily their power to do what they claim to do.) God's statement to Moses, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham..." suggests the continuing existence of people after they die (Matthew 22:32), and David spoke of going to be with his deceased child (2 Samuel 12:23).

In Ecclesiastes, Solomon alludes to the afterlife, but does not enter into a treatise on it, because he is reasoning primarily from life under the sun where our view is very restricted.

*Note the quote:* Oh, that You would hide me in the grave, That You would conceal me until Your wrath is past, That You would appoint me a set time, and remember me! <sup>14</sup> If a man dies, shall he live *again*? All the days of my hard service I will wait, Till my change comes. – *Job, Job 14:13-14*

Write the letters corresponding to the following truths beside the passage(s) that mention them. Each truth is seen multiple times, and some passages contain multiple truths.

- |                                 |                               |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| a. Comes to all                 | e. May come suddenly          |
| b. Comes in the same way to all | f. We leave everything behind |
| c. Is inescapable               | g. The dead are forgotten     |
| d. Is final                     | h. Live well while you can    |

\_\_\_\_\_ 2:14b I myself perceived That the same event happens to them all. 15 So I said in my heart, "As it happens to the fool, It also happens to me, And why was I then more wise?" Then I said in my heart, "This also *is* vanity." 16 For *there is* no more remembrance of the wise than of the fool forever, Since all that now *is* will be forgotten in the days to come. And how does a wise *man* die? As the fool!

\_\_\_\_\_ 2:18 Then I hated all my labor in which I had toiled under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who will come after me. ... 21 For there is a man whose labor *is* with wisdom, knowledge, and skill; yet he must leave his heritage to a man who has not labored for it. This also *is* vanity and a great evil.

\_\_\_\_\_ 3:19 For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over animals, for all *is* vanity. 20 All go to one place: all are from the dust, and all return to dust.

This passage teaches that (*circle one*) a) people and animals both have souls, b) neither people nor animals have souls, c) none of the above. Support your answer. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ 6:3 If a man begets a hundred *children* and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many, but his soul is not satisfied with goodness, or indeed he has no burial, I say *that* a stillborn child *is* better than he—4 for it comes in vanity and departs in darkness, and its name is covered with darkness. 5 Though it has not seen the sun or known *anything*, this has more rest than that man, 6 even if he lives a thousand years twice—but has not seen goodness. Do not all go to one place?

Is this passage teaching that all people receive the same reward after death? \_\_\_\_\_

Support your answer. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- a. Comes to all
- b. Comes in the same way to all
- c. Is inescapable
- d. Is final
- e. May come suddenly
- f. We leave everything behind
- g. The dead are forgotten
- h. Live well while you can

\_\_\_\_\_ 7:15b There is a just *man* who perishes in his righteousness, And there is a wicked *man* who prolongs *life* in his wickedness.

Name a (modern) wicked person who lived to be very old. \_\_\_\_\_

Name a godly person you knew who died very young. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ 8:8 No one has power over the spirit to retain the spirit, And no one has power in the day of death. *There is* no release from that war, and wickedness will not deliver those who are given to it.

\_\_\_\_\_ 9:1 For I considered all this in my heart, so that I could declare it all: that the righteous and the wise and their works *are* in the hand of God. People know neither love nor hatred *by* anything *they see* before them. 2 All things *come* alike to all: One event *happens* to the righteous and the wicked; To the good, the clean, and the unclean; To him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As is the good, so *is* the sinner; He who takes an oath as *he* who fears an oath.

\_\_\_\_\_ 9:3 This *is* an evil in all that is done under the sun: that one thing *happens* to all. Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness *is* in their hearts while they live, and after that *they go* to the dead. 4 But for him who is joined to all the living there is hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. 5 For the living know that they will die; But the dead know nothing, And they have no more reward, For the memory of them is forgotten. 6 Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished; Nevermore will they have a share In anything done under the sun.

Is this passage referring to our eternal hope? \_\_\_\_\_ Support your answer. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ 9:7 Go, eat your bread with joy, And drink your wine with a merry heart; For God has already accepted your works. 8 Let your garments always be white, And let your head lack no oil. 9 Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity; for that *is* your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun. 10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do *it* with your might; for *there is* no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.

*Note the quote:* "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work." – *Jesus, John 9:4*

\_\_\_\_\_ 9:11 I returned and saw under the sun that—The race *is* not to the swift, Nor the battle to the strong, Nor bread to the wise, Nor riches to men of understanding, Nor favor to men of skill; But time and chance happen to them all. 12 For man also does not know his time: Like fish taken in a cruel net, Like birds caught in a snare, So the sons of men *are* snared in an evil time, When it falls suddenly upon them.

Having read the passages, list some of the "all" to whom death comes. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Note the quote:* "Life isn't fair, it's just fairer than death, that's all." — *William Goldman, The Princess Bride*

From 2 Corinthians 4:16 – 5:7 describe death as viewed from *beyond* the sun. \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

## Beyond the Sun: Lesson 9

### God's Ways

*Note the quote:* "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord.  
9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways,  
And My thoughts than your thoughts." – *Isaiah 55:8-9*

*Note the quote:* Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! – *Romans 11:33*

#### Truths from Ecclesiastes

Write the letters corresponding to the following truths beside the passage(s) that mention them. Each truth is seen multiple times, and some passages contain multiple truths.

- |                          |                           |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| a. His judgment          | e. Life is a test         |
| b. Unchangeable          | f. Everything has a place |
| c. Beyond discovery      | g. His knowledge          |
| d. Done so we might fear | h. His testing            |

\_\_\_\_\_ 3:1 To everything *there is* a season, A time for every purpose under heaven: 2 A time to be born, And a time to die; A time to plant, And a time to pluck *what is* planted; 3 A time to kill, And a time to heal; A time to break down, And a time to build up; 4 A time to weep, And a time to laugh; A time to mourn, And a time to dance; 5 A time to cast away stones, And a time to gather stones; A time to embrace, And a time to refrain from embracing; 6 A time to gain, And a time to lose; A time to keep, And a time to throw away; 7 A time to tear, And a time to sew; A time to keep silence, And a time to speak; 8 A time to love, And a time to hate; A time of war, And a time of peace.

\_\_\_\_\_ 3:9 What profit has the worker from that in which he labors? 10 I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. 11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.

\_\_\_\_\_ 3:12 I know that nothing *is* better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives, 13 and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it *is* the gift of God. 14 I know that whatever God does, It shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, And nothing taken from it. God does *it*, that men should fear before Him.

\_\_\_\_\_ 3:15 That which is has already been, And what is to be has already been; And God requires an account of what is past. 16 Moreover I saw under the sun: *in* the place of judgment, Wickedness *was* there; And *in* the place of righteousness, Iniquity *was* there. 17 I said in my heart, "God shall judge the righteous and the wicked, For *there is* a time there for every purpose and for every work."

\_\_\_\_\_ 3:18 I said in my heart, "Concerning the condition of the sons of men, God tests them, that they may see that they themselves are *like* animals." 19 For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over animals, for all *is* vanity. 20 All go to one place: all are from the dust, and all return to dust. 21 Who knows the spirit of the sons of men, which goes upward, and the spirit of the animal, which goes down to the earth? 22 So I perceived that nothing *is* better than that a man should rejoice in his own works, for that *is* his heritage. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?

\_\_\_\_\_ 1:15 What is crooked cannot be made straight, And what is lacking cannot be numbered.

\_\_\_\_\_ 7:13 Consider the work of God; For who can make straight what He has made crooked?

- a. His judgment
- b. Unchangeable
- c. Beyond discovery
- d. Done so we might fear
- e. Life is a test
- f. Everything has a place
- g. His knowledge
- h. His testing

\_\_\_\_\_ 8:6 Because for every matter there is a time and judgment, Though the misery of man increases greatly. 7 For he does not know what will happen; So who can tell him when it will occur?

\_\_\_\_\_ 8:16 When I applied my heart to know wisdom and to see the business that is done on earth, even though one sees no sleep day or night, 17 then I saw all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. For though a man labors to discover *it*, yet he will not find *it*; moreover, though a wise *man* attempts to know *it*, he will not be able to find *it*.

\_\_\_\_\_ 11:5 As you do not know what *is* the way of the wind, Or how the bones *grow* in the womb of her who is with child, So you do not know the works of God who makes everything.

**Truths from other passages**

Look at the context of the following passages and tell what are the perhaps surprising, divine aspects of God’s ways under consideration:

Isaiah 55:8-9 \_\_\_\_\_  
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Romans 11:33 \_\_\_\_\_  
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Romans 11:22 “Consider the goodness and severity of God” \_\_\_\_\_  
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Romans 3:26 “That He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” \_\_\_\_\_  
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Ephesians 3:3 “He made known to me the mystery.” \_\_\_\_\_  
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1 Peter 1:12 “Things which angels desire to look into.” \_\_\_\_\_  
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# Beyond the Sun: Lesson 10

## God's Gifts

*Guiding thoughts:* Every person in every culture shares many common experiences: family, health, work, things to use and accumulate, and even a desire to worship. Solomon addresses these things from a viewpoint that sometimes borrows from “beyond the sun” and speaks to the advantage that a godly person has when reflecting on his experiences.

### Simple pleasures

5:19 As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor—this *is* the gift of God. 20 For he will not dwell unduly on the days of his life, because God keeps *him* busy with the joy of his heart.

List the blessings mentioned in this passage. \_\_\_\_\_

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### Special pleasures

9:9 Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity; for that *is* your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun. 10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do *it* with your might; for *there is* no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.

What significance might there be to the repeated mention in verse 9 of the vanity of our lives? \_\_\_\_\_

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4:7 Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun: 8 There is one alone, without companion: He has neither son nor brother. Yet *there is* no end to all his labors, Nor is his eye satisfied with riches. *But he never asks*, “For whom do I toil and deprive myself of good?” This also *is* vanity and a grave misfortune. 9 Two *are* better than one, Because they have a good reward for their labor. 10 For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him *who is* alone when he falls, For *he has* no one to help him up. 11 Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; But how can one be warm *alone*? 12 Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

What other gifts do some get to enjoy? \_\_\_\_\_

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How do all these gifts help us? \_\_\_\_\_

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### Perspective

2:25 For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I? 26 For *God* gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who *is* good in His sight; but to the sinner He gives the work of

gathering and collecting, that he may give to *him who is good* before God. This also *is* vanity and grasping for the wind.

Describe the Christian's perspective from Romans 6:11. \_\_\_\_\_

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3:10 I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. 11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end. 12 I know that nothing *is* better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives, 13 and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it *is* the gift of God.

List additional blessings mentioned in these passages. \_\_\_\_\_

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List some additional blessings of God in your life. \_\_\_\_\_

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Tell what effect(s) reflecting on them has. \_\_\_\_\_

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*Note the quote:* When upon life's billows you are tempest-tossed; when you are discouraged thinking all is lost; count your many blessings .... Do not be discouraged, God is over all; Count your many blessings, angels will attend, Help and comfort give you to your journey's end. Count your blessings, name them one by one; Count your blessings, see what God hath done; ... And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done. – *Count Your Blessings*

*Find the quote* that says, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning." \_\_\_\_\_

# Beyond the Sun: Lesson 11

## Faithful for a Lifetime

*Guiding thoughts:* A person can start seeking and serving God at any point in his or her life (e.g., the parable of the workers in the vineyard, Matthew 20:1-16), and we have examples to that effect across the pages of Scripture. However, serving God starting early in one's life has distinct advantages. Continuing faithful for a lifetime can be difficult no matter when one starts, and both starting early and staying faithful bring their unique challenges.

*Note the quote:* Respect the old, when you are YOUNG. Help the weak, when you are STRONG. Forgive the fault, when you are RIGHT. Because, one day in life you'll be OLD, WEAK, & WRONG. – *Anonymous*

### Temperate youth

11:9 Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, And let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; Walk in the ways of your heart, And in the sight of your eyes; But know that for all these God will bring you into judgment. 10 Therefore remove sorrow from your heart, And put away evil from your flesh, For childhood and youth are vanity. 12:1 Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth....

Tell some commands given in this passage to young people. (Try to combine them as feasible, perhaps into four groups.) \_\_\_\_\_

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God wants us to be happy according to which verse(s) in this passage? \_\_\_\_\_

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Find at least one New Testament passage that suggests the same truth. \_\_\_\_\_

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### Faithful aging

12:1 Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, Before the difficult days come, And the years draw near when you say, "I have no pleasure in them": 2 While the sun and the light, The moon and the stars, Are not darkened, And the clouds do not return after the rain; 3 In the day when the keepers of the house tremble, And the strong men bow down; When the grinders cease because they are few, And those that look through the windows grow dim; 4 When the doors are shut in the streets, And the sound of grinding is low; When one rises up at the sound of a bird, And all the daughters of music are brought low; 5 Also they are afraid of height, And of terrors in the way; When the almond tree blossoms, The grasshopper is a burden, And desire fails. For man goes to his eternal home, And the mourners go about the streets. 6 Remember your Creator before the silver cord is loosed, Or the golden bowl is broken, Or the pitcher shattered at the fountain, Or the wheel broken at the well. 7 Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, And the spirit will return to God who gave it. 8 "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "All is vanity."

*Note the quote:* "Getting old is not for sissies." – *Bette Davis*

Besides the physical changes, what attitude change(s) occur(s) as we get older? \_\_\_\_\_

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Tell at least a couple of reasons from this passage that make it important to serve God from our youth.

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What two things happen after we die according to this passage. \_\_\_\_\_

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How well does this passage fit with James 2:26? \_\_\_\_\_

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# Beyond the Sun: Lesson 12

## Preparing for an Uncertain Future

### Our limited knowledge

6:10 Whatever one is, he has been named already, For it is known that he *is* man; And he cannot contend with Him who is mightier than he. 11 Since there are many things that increase vanity, How *is* man the better? 12 For who knows what *is* good for man in life, all the days of his vain life which he passes like a shadow? Who can tell a man what will happen after him under the sun?

8:6 Because for every matter there is a time and judgment, Though the misery of man increases greatly. 7 For he does not know what will happen; So who can tell him when it will occur?

Tell two aspects of the future that we can't know. \_\_\_\_\_

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10:14 A fool also multiplies words. No man knows what is to be; Who can tell him what will be after him?

Can anyone tell us our future? \_\_\_\_\_ Comment on spiritists who claim they do so. \_\_\_\_\_

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### Making preparations

7:14 In the day of prosperity be joyful, But in the day of adversity consider: Surely God has appointed the one as well as the other, So that man can find out nothing *that will come* after him.

How did Joseph respond in Genesis 41 when God predicted days of prosperity and days of adversity?

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What result did his preparations have for the nation of Egypt? \_\_\_\_\_

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11:7 Truly the light is sweet, And *it is* pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun; 8 But if a man lives many years *And* rejoices in them all, Yet let him remember the days of darkness, For they will be many. All that is coming *is* vanity.

Is our future likely to hold any adversity? \_\_\_\_\_ What should we do? \_\_\_\_\_

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11:1 Cast your bread upon the waters, For you will find it after many days. 2 Give a serving to seven, and also to eight, For you do not know what evil will be on the earth.

How does being generous, rather than hoarding money, help prepare for the future? \_\_\_\_\_

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Tell another way or two (from your experience or observations) to prepare for the future that do not directly involve money. \_\_\_\_\_

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*Note the quote: "Be nice to your children. After all, they are going to choose your nursing home."  
– Steven Wright*

**“Just do it.”**

11:3 If the clouds are full of rain, They empty *themselves* upon the earth; And if a tree falls to the south or the north, In the place where the tree falls, there it shall lie. 4 He who observes the wind will not sow, And he who regards the clouds will not reap. 5 As you do not know what *is* the way of the wind, Or how the bones *grow* in the womb of her who is with child, So you do not know the works of God who makes everything. 6 In the morning sow your seed, And in the evening do not withhold your hand; For you do not know which will prosper, Either this or that, Or whether both alike *will be good*.

Why should our inability to predict the future actually motivate us, rather than paralyze us? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Thinking really long term**

3:11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.

12:5b For man goes to his eternal home, And the mourners go about the streets.

What should be our ultimate priority? \_\_\_\_\_

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From other passages, describe preparations we should make. \_\_\_\_\_

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# Beyond the Sun: Lesson 13

## Fearing God

*Guiding thoughts:* Notice that Solomon’s conclusion is *not* “All is vanity.” He has highlighted the inherent frustrations and lack of lasting gain from human pursuits apart from God: Some knowledge is unattainable; some situations are unresolvable; every personal profit is temporary. But he has at the same time taught us a proper perspective toward life (even “the mundane world is ‘good’ if one realizes that it, too, comes from the hand of God”<sup>22</sup>) and a way to approach our various activities: appreciate the source of our blessings; enjoy life’s simple pleasures; tolerate its inequities; live joyfully; prepare for judgment.

“The mood of Ecclesiastes is one of delight, with the prospect of living and enjoying all the goods of life once man has come to fear God and keep his commandments.”<sup>23</sup>

### Avoid the ungodly; seek good companions

4:7 Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun: 8 There is one alone, without companion: He has neither son nor brother. Yet *there is* no end to all his labors, Nor is his eye satisfied with riches. *But he never asks*, “For whom do I toil and deprive myself of good?” This also *is* vanity and a grave misfortune. 9 Two *are* better than one, Because they have a good reward for their labor. 10 For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him *who is* alone when he falls, For *he has* no one to help him up. 11 Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; But how can one be warm *alone*? 12 Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

7:26 And I find more bitter than death The woman whose heart *is* snares and nets, Whose hands *are* fetters. He who pleases God shall escape from her, But the sinner shall be trapped by her. 27 “Here is what I have found,” says the Preacher, “*Adding* one thing to the other to find out the reason, 28 Which my soul still seeks but I cannot find: One man among a thousand I have found, But a woman among all these I have not found. 29 Truly, this only I have found: That God made man upright, But they have sought out many schemes.”

What are the negative consequences of getting near that kind of woman? \_\_\_\_\_

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What is the escape? \_\_\_\_\_

How did this play out in Solomon’s life? \_\_\_\_\_

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Apply these teachings to the friends we choose and the people with whom we spend our time. \_\_\_\_\_

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*Note the quote:* “Do not be deceived: ‘Evil company corrupts good habits.’<sup>34</sup> Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.” – Paul, *1 Corinthians 15:33-34*

*Note the quote:* “Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” – Paul, *2 Timothy 2:22*

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<sup>22</sup> Kaiser, p. 48.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 42.

## Worship wisely

5:1 Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil. 2 Do not be rash with your mouth, And let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God *is* in heaven, and you on earth; Therefore let your words be few. 3 For a dream comes through much activity, And a fool's voice *is known* by *his* many words. 4 When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; For *He* has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed— 5 Better not to vow than to vow and not pay. 6 Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin, nor say before the messenger *of God* that it *was* an error. Why should God be angry at your excuse and destroy the work of your hands? 7 For in the multitude of dreams and many words *there is* also vanity. But fear God.

List some principles that should underlie our worship. (Put them in positive, not negative, sentence form. E.g., “Do this.” rather than “Don’t do that.”) \_\_\_\_\_

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Contrast the dreamer and the fool's voice with acceptable worship. \_\_\_\_\_

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## Fear God

3:14 I know that whatever God does, It shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, And nothing taken from it. God does it, that men should fear before Him.

7:16 Do not be overly righteous, Nor be overly wise: Why should you destroy yourself? 17 Do not be overly wicked, Nor be foolish: Why should you die before your time? 18 It is good that you grasp this, And also not remove your hand from the other; For he who fears God will escape them all.

8:12 Though a sinner does evil a hundred *times*, and his *days* are prolonged, yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him. 13 But it will not be well with the wicked; nor will he prolong *his* days, *which are* as a shadow, because he does not fear before God.

From Exodus 20:20, comment on two distinct “kinds” of “fear.” \_\_\_\_\_

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Which kind(s) of fear does Solomon have in mind? \_\_\_\_\_

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## Beware Judgment

3:15 That which is has already been, And what is to be has already been; And God requires an account of what is past. 16 Moreover I saw under the sun: In the place of judgment, Wickedness was there; And in the place of righteousness, Iniquity was there. 17 I said in my heart, “God shall judge the righteous and the wicked....”

11:9 Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, And let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; Walk in the ways of your heart, And in the sight of your eyes; But know that for all these God will bring you into judgment.

12:14 For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil.

From the following verses, tell what else we know about the judgment from the New Testament:

John 12:48 \_\_\_\_\_

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2 Corinthians 5:10 \_\_\_\_\_

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John 5:26-30 \_\_\_\_\_

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### **The conclusion**

12:13 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all. 14 For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil.

Consider the headings in this lesson. What additional exhortation is given in these verses? \_\_\_\_\_

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How does fearing God change our behavior? (Consider also passages such as Leviticus 19:14; 25:43.)

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