

Ecclesiastes Chapter 12

Study Notes

"Solomon's Concluding Thoughts"

SUMMARY

The final chapter begins with a continuation of advice directed to the young. They are told to remember God in their youth, before difficult days come in which there will be found little pleasure.

Such days are described through a series of illustrations that depict the feebleness of old age and eventual death. When the inevitable happens, the body will decay back to dust, and the spirit will return

to God who gave it (1-7).

Solomon brings his "sermon" to a close by restating his theme: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." An epilogue is added that informs the reader of the work Solomon continued to do after concluding his search for the meaning of life. Because of his wisdom, he still taught the people and sought to set in

order many proverbs. He sought to find acceptable and upright words, words of truth. Such words of

the wise and scholarly are described as goads and well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd. One is to

be admonished by these words, yet be aware that there is no end to the making of many books, and much

study is wearisome to the flesh (8-12).

Finally, we are told the "grand conclusion" of the whole matter. Solomon ends his search for meaning

by concluding that the whole purpose for man's existence is to fear God and keep His commandments.

That is because God will bring into judgment everything we have done (13-14).

I. ADVICE TO THE YOUNG (12:1-8)

Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, "I find no pleasure in them"—²before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain;³ when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men stoop, when the grinders cease because they are few, and those looking through the windows grow dim;⁴ when the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades; when people rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint;⁵ when people are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets; when the almond tree blossoms and the grasshopper drags itself along and desire no longer is stirred. Then people go to their eternal home and mourners go about the streets.⁶ Remember him—before the silver cord is severed, and the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, and the wheel broken at the well,⁷ and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. ⁸*"Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Everything is meaningless!"*

A. REMEMBER GOD IN YOUR YOUTH (1-2)

1. Before the difficult days come
2. Before the years come in which you find little pleasure
3. While the sun, moon, and stars are not darkened
4. While the clouds do not return after the rain

ECCLESIASTES 12:1

A life without God can produce bitterness, loneliness, and hopelessness in old age. A life centered around God is fulfilling and can be richer and more bearable when we are faced with disabilities, sickness, or handicaps. Being young is exciting. But the excitement of youth can become a barrier to closeness with God if it makes young people focus on passing pleasures instead of eternal values. Make your strength available to God when it is still yours—during your youthful years. Don't waste it on evil or meaningless activities that become bad habits and make you callous. Seek God now.

B. REFLECT UPON WHAT IS COMING (3-8)

1. The day is coming in which:
 - a. The keepers of the house tremble (the arms weaken)
 - b. The strong men bow down (the legs become frail)
 - c. The grinders cease because they are few (the teeth fall out)
 - d. Those that look through the windows grow dim (the eyes lose their sight)
 - e. The doors are shut in the streets (the ears become hard of hearing)
 - f. The sound of the grinding is low (the mouth and speech become unintelligible)
 - g. When one rises up at the sound of a bird (the elderly easily awakened)
 - h. And all the daughters of music are brought low (the voice no longer able to sing)
 - i. They are afraid of height (the fear of falling)
 - j. And of terrors in the way (no longer feeling invincible)
 - k. When the almond tree blossoms (the wakefulness of old age setting in)
 - l. The grasshopper is a burden (an old man, bowed like the insect, able to move only with some difficulty)
 - m. And desire fails (fleshly desires wane)
 - n. Man goes to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets (death)
2. Remember your Creator before:
 - a. Before the silver cord (the spinal cord) is loosed
 - b. The golden bowl (the skull) is broken
 - c. The pitcher (the heart) shattered at the fountain
 - d. The wheel (the pelvis) broken at the well -- Figures alluding to decay of the body
3. When finally:
 - a. The body returns to the dust
 - b. The spirit returns to God who gave it

ECCLESIASTES 12:6-8

The silver cord, golden bowl, water jar, and pulley symbolize life's fragility. How easily death comes to us; how swiftly and unexpectedly we may return to the dust from which we came. Therefore, we should recognize life as a precious resource to be used wisely and not squandered frivolously.

ECCLESIASTES 12:7, 8

Stripped of the life-giving spirit breathed into us by God, our bodies return to dust. Stripped of God's purpose, our work is in vain. Stripped of God's love, our service is futile. We must put God first over all we do and in all we do because without him we have nothing. Knowing that life is futile without God motivates the wise person to seek God first.

II. EPILOGUE AND CONCLUSION (12:9-14)

⁹ Not only was the Teacher wise, but he also imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. ¹⁰ The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true. ¹¹ The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails—given by one shepherd. ¹² Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them. Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body. ¹³ Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. ¹⁴ For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

A. THE EPILOGUE (8-12)

1. The grand theme restated: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity..."
2. Solomon's ongoing work (because he was wise)
 - a. He continued to teach others
 - b. He pondered and sought to find many proverbs, upright words of truth
3. The value of such words of truth
 - a. The words of the wise are like goads
 - b. The words of the scholars are like well-driven nails -- Such truth comes from One Shepherd
4. It is good to be admonished by such words
 - a. Though there is no end to the making of many books
 - b. Though much study is wearisome to the flesh

ECCLESIASTES 12:12

There is no end of opinions about life and philosophies about how we should live that could be read and studied forever. It is not wrong to study these opinions, but because our life on earth is so short, we should make the best use of time by learning the important truths in God's Word. They affect this life and eternity. Wise students of the Bible will understand and do what it says.

B. THE GRAND CONCLUSION (13-14)

1. The conclusion of the whole matter
 - a. Fear God and keep His commandments
 - b. This is man's all (the whole duty of man)
2. For God will bring every work into judgment
 - a. Every secret thing
 - b. Whether good or evil

ECCLESIASTES 12:13, 14

In his conclusion, Solomon presents his antidotes for the two main ailments presented in this book. Those who lack purpose and direction in life should fear God and obey his commands. Those who think life is unfair should remember that God will review every person's life to determine how he or she has responded to him, and he will bring every deed into judgment. Have you committed your life to God? Does your life measure up to his standards?

ECCLESIASTES 12:13, 14

The book of Ecclesiastes cannot be interpreted correctly without reading these final verses. No matter what the mysteries and apparent contradictions of life are, we must work toward the single purpose of knowing God.

In Ecclesiastes, Solomon shows us that we should enjoy life, but this does not exempt us from obeying God's commands. We should search for purpose and meaning in life, but they cannot be found in human endeavors. We should acknowledge the evil, foolishness, and injustice in life yet maintain a positive attitude and strong faith in God.

All people will have to stand before God and be judged for what they have done in this life. We will not be able to use the inequities of life as an excuse for failing to live properly. We need to (1) recognize that human effort apart from God is futile; (2) put God first—now; (3) receive everything good as a gift from God; and (4) realize that God will judge every person's life, whether good or evil. How strange that people spend their lives striving for the joy that God gives freely, as a gift.