Wisdom Literature

Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes

Mastering the Old Testament

Adult Study Guide Series

Mark Roberts
How wise are you? How would you define wisdom? How do you get wisdom if you are in short supply?

While many good things may be said about the age we live in it is doubtful that anyone will ever term our day as the “Age of Wisdom.” The demand for immediate gratification, acting without thought of consequence, living with no concern for morality or eternity — all of these characterize our time. All of these problems, therefore, demand that we spend more time in God’s library of wisdom.

Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are very different books, but they all center on one theme: wise living. By inspiration they record for us the musings, reflections, and thoughts of people who were searching for the best ways to live, for the meaning of life, and for the secret to true happiness. They tell us where wisdom begins, how fools act and what they believe, what kind of actions are foolish and what kind of living is wise. It has been said, somewhat tongue in cheek, that what Americans need is not a fountain of youth but a fountain of smart. God provides that fountain. Wisdom is crying out for us, calling to us from these books. Are we wise enough to listen? “Wisdom calls aloud outside; She raises her voice in the open squares . . . “ (Prov. 1:20).

Mark Roberts
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Prepatory Thoughts - Psalms

Psalms is the most widely read and used book in the Old Testament. It is unique in the Bible because rather than containing God’s word for man it contains man’s words to God. Across a wide range of situations and emotions Psalms shows us how the godly turn to their God. Understanding some of the background of Psalms, how they fit together, their purposes and other such material can help us to make better use of the Psalter in our personal worship and service to God.

Introductory Notes for Understanding this Book

Title, Author, and Date

Key Background Ideas

Outline

Psalms is divided into collections, or books:

  Book 1 - Psalm 1-____
  Book 2 - Psalm _____- _____
  Book 3 - Psalm 73-_____  
  Book 4 - Psalm 90-______
  Book 5 - Psalm _____ - ____
Notes on the Text from Class

Examining Different Kinds of Psalms

How to Read the Psalms
Notes on the Text from Class

Applications from Class

Psalms
Class Notes
Prepatory Thoughts - Proverbs

How many proverbs can you think of? We use them all the time. “Look before you leap” and “He who hesitates is lost” are just two examples of modern proverbs. What makes a proverb “work?” What is the purpose of proverbs?

Proverbs contains “God’s sound bites.” Short and to the point the Proverbs pack a powerful punch for those who would be wise. The book itself is a collection of a variety of different kind of proverbial material. Your study here will reward you with access to God’s storehouse of practical wisdom.

Introductory Notes for Understanding this Book

Title, Author, and Date

Key Background Ideas

Outline
More Introductory Ideas in Proverbs

Collections of Proverbs

Notes on the Text from Class


Notes on the Text from Class

Adultery - chs. 5-7


Reputation - 12:2; 27:2, 21; 3:3-4; 13:5; 17:20; 20:17
Notes on the Text from Class

Friendship - 19:4; 14:20; 18:24; 17:17; 27:17; 26:18-19; 17:9; 25:8-10


Preparatory Thoughts - Ecclesiastes

Of all the wisdom books Ecclesiastes may be the most puzzling. At times it appears dark and cynical, only then to suddenly turn back toward light and the Lord. No part of this book is simple. Even its authorship is challenged! Outlining Ecclesiastes seems nearly impossible.

In all of this we will attempt to discern what Solomon is saying about how life is lived, both in and out of a relationship with God. Which way is better? What does it mean to live life “under the sun?” What is the whole duty of man? Ecclesiastes may be tough, but careful study will yield to us great wisdom.

Introductory Notes for Understanding this Book

Title, Author, and Date

Key Background Ideas

Outline
Notes on the Text from Class

Ecclesiastes

Class Notes
Notes on the Text from Class

Applications from Class
Lesson 1 - Wiz Lit

Psalms

INTRODUCTION:

A. **Approach for Wiz Lit class: How many of the “For Dummies” books do you own?**
   1. Would never have imagined you could make millions selling books that insult the reader!
   2. But we have come to an intellectually dark place in our world.
   3. Someone said “Hey, are you dumb? I’ve got a book that will help you!”
   4. They are selling extremely well.

B. Wisdom literature of the Bible isn’t marked “For Dummies” but maybe it should be.
   1. Job through Song of Solomon are unique books teach us how to live, how to serve God, and to some extent, even how to be happy.
   2. They explore philosophical ideas, like the purpose of life, and they bluntly contrast the way of foolishness with the way of the wise.
   3. In places it is the easiest reading in the Bible, in other places it will nearly drive you crazy trying to wrestle with the text, get its meaning.

C. This class will focus on three wisdom books
   1. Psalms - the book of worship and prayer
   2. Proverbs - the book of practical wisdom
   3. Ecclesiastes - Solomon’s experiment with life and living
   4. Our purpose is simple:
      a. Want to get in these books, get comfortable with the basic interpretive issues and ideas being set forth there.
      b. Want to learn the applications to our own life that they contain.
   5. **We begin in Psalms....**

D. **Approach to Psalms:**
   2. I am in the midst of a lifelong love affair with this greatest of books, a love affair I expect to never end.
   3. Now, we certainly cannot read all the 150 psalms in this class.
   4. Don’t want to do that even if we had the time, because I preach from a psalm every month, don’t want to ruin that preaching opportunity.
      a. Have preached on little over 40 psalms, making me almost 30% done.
      b. My goal is to preach from every psalm, which should take nearly nine more years to complete.
   5. So what we want to do here is open these psalms up a bit, so you can read them on your own and gain something from them.
   6. Get some principles that will really help you appreciate them, help your worship, help your private devotion.

II. **TITLE, AUTHOR AND DATE**

   A. **Title**
      1. English word comes from Greek.
      2. LXX uses the term *psalmos* to render the Hebrew word *mismor* (a song sung to the accompaniment of instruments).
4. Hebrew Bible calls it “Praises.”
5. In the Hebrew Bible the Psalms comes first in the section known as the Writings (probably because David comes before his son’s material).
6. In the English Bible Job comes first probably because it is assumed to be older.

B. Author
1. First, need to see they are inspired of God - 2 Tim. 3:16
   b. No other O.T. is more frequently quoted in the NT than Psalms.
2. Second, who are the human authors?¹
   a. 73 ascribed to David
   b. 12 to Asaph (see 1 Chron. 16:7 - he was a temple singer)
   c. 8-10 given to the “sons of Korah” - related to Asaph, doorkeepers at the temple, 1 Chron. 9:19; 26:1, 19).
   d. 1 to Moses
   e. 2 to Solomon
   f. 1 to Heman - temple singer, 1 Chron. 15:16-24
   g. 1 to Ethan
   h. 50 are unattributed.

C. Date
1. The psalms were written over a span of nearly a thousand years.
   a. Psalm 90 is from Moses which would be very early.
   b. There are some written after the Babylonian captivity, so we have material from 1440 down to 500 BC!
   c. This wide diversity of experience gives the book its depth and breadth.
2. How was psalms collected?
   a. Collection finished by LXX (third century BC.).
   b. The collection of the 150 contains some smaller collections.
   c. The 150 may tie to the 153 readings used in the synagogue, so that a psalm could be read with each reading of the Law.²
   d. Some collections can be identified by how they refer to God.
      (1) Elohim is the word of choice in Psalms 42-83. (Note that 14 and 53 are the same but use a different word for God).
      (2) Psalm 72:20 clearly sets apart a collection.
   e. The most common idea for how the Psalms came to be the Psalms is that it was put together for worship in the Second Temple.
   f. Most feel that Psalm 1 is a deliberate choice to begin the book. It says the whole book is about choosing right or wrong.
   g. Psalm 150 ends with ringing praise of God. Very fitting.

III. KEY BACKGROUND IDEAS

A. Are the superscriptions inspired?
1. 116 have headings.
2. Much disagreement on this by scholars, but probably not.
3. However, they are very old and serve as good guides to the psalms.
4. Generally conceded to be added at a later time. Three reasons why:³
   a. Headings in Hebrew not the same as in the Greek and Syriac versions of the O.T.
b. Analogy to other biblical texts, especially in Chronicles. Many psalms in Chronicles have no heading, but the DSS have superscriptions.
   (1) Thus after writing of Chronicles and before the DSS the custom of writing superscriptions came into vogue.

5. The headings do various things:
   a. Give historical data
   b. Give the author of the Psalm
   c. Give the type of psalm - shiggaion or miktam or prayer or psalm of praise.
   d. Give instructions for its singing and playing - sela is used more than 70 times and may mean pause.

B. What should we know about Hebrew poetry when reading psalm?
   1. The use of poetry is not insignificant here.
   2. Poetry is intensive speech, not just decorative words. It is language that speaks to our hearts and minds, appealing to the whole man.
      b. Poetry stimulates our imagination, feelings and emotions.
   3. Poetry can also be read out aloud or sung.

C. Key features of Hebrew poetry:
   1. Parallelism - Psalm 6:1
      a. Oldest view - line a does not equal b - God doesn’t waste words so a new meaning must be found. Led to wild speculation.
      b. Tradition view - line a equals line b - Robert Lowth did the work in 1750 that started this.
      c. Best view - a, what’s more b - the second phrase is amplifying and extending the thought of the first line.
         (1) Psalm 6 is a great example - rebuke in “a,” “discipline in “b.” Discipline is more serious than a rebuke.
      d. Parallelism can be analyzed in increasingly technical. Sometimes it is a is not b, or stair step, etc.
   2. Inclusio - a psalm opens and closes with a parallelism. See Psalm 8.
   3. Acrostic - where the first letter of each line forms a recognizable pattern.
      a. 119 is the most famous. Each stanza begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet in order.
      b. Other acrostics: 9, 10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145.
      c. Acrostics serve to aid memory, totally cover a subject.
   4. Heavy imagery - we have to use our imagination here.
      a. Psalm 58:3
      b. Psalm 23 - God isn’t a literal shepherd

IV. OUTLINE

A. The books of Psalms
   1. Book 1 - Psalm 1-41
   2. Book 2 - Psalm 42-72
   3. Book 3 - Psalm 73-89
4. Book 4 - Psalm 90-106
5. Book 5 - Psalm 107-150

B. Notes:
1. Hard to see any specific character to each book, but there are more laments at the 
beginning of the Psalter.
2. Individual psalms can be terribly difficult to outline. These aren’t sermons — they 
are songs!

V. DIFFERENT KINDS OF PSALMS

A. Why should we care or know about different kinds of psalms?
1. Sometimes you will hear about the “form” of a psalm or its “genre.”
2. That can sound scholarly and easily be dismissed with “who cares?”
3. But form or kind or genre determines everything about how we read material.
4. Genre determines the reading strategy of a particular text. 
5. Usually we make the call for genre without even thinking:
   a. We pick up a newspaper and we know we’re reading events, meant to be 
taken seriously, literally.
   b. We pick up Dr. Suess and we know it is not to be taken seriously.
   c. If you read the paper like you read Green Eggs and Ham you’ll be in trouble.
      Likewise, if you read Green Eggs and Ham like the newspaper you’ll be in 
worse trouble!
6. Biblical forms are just as important. The Bible contains letters. Vital to recognize 
we are reading someone else’s mail, get their situation, etc.
7. Psalms contains many different kind of genres, forms. We need to recognize 
these to gain meaning and understanding of the psalms.

B. Major classifications of psalms:
1. Hymns
2. Communal laments
3. Individual Laments
4. Thanksgiving
5. Royal Psalms
6. Wisdom psalms

C. Hymns
1. Approximately 40 psalms are hymns - 8; 19; 29; 33; 104-105; 111; 113-114; 117; 
   135-136; 145-150.
2. The center of the hymns is praise to God.
3. They occur more in the psalms toward the end (after 90).
4. Hymns tend to be a little looser in form than other psalms.
5. Form for a hymn:
   a. A call to worship - 105:1
   b. Description of God’s acts and attributes - 105:7
   c. Conclusion, calling for more praise - 105:45
6. Some divide the hymns based on the reason why God is praised.  5 sub-catego-
   ries:
   a. Praise for Creator, or as God of nature - 8, 19a, 29, 104.
   b. Hymns of sacred history - Ps. 78, 81, 105, 106, 11, 114, 135, 136.
   c. Hymns of the kingdom - 24, 47, 68, 75, 93, 95-100.
d. Hymns of Zion - 46, 48, 76, 84, 87, 122, 137. These celebrate the choice of Jerusalem.
e. Mixed hymns - 33, 103, 115, 133, 145-150.

7. Bellinger points out that in the psalms it is never just “praise the Lord” but “praise the Lord because.” Praise is always substantive in the psalms, not just emotional fluff.⁶

D. **Communal laments**

1. LaSor uses the term “complaint” but this seems to me to be too harsh.
   a. It is an appeal to God for help and assistance.
   b. Ash: “Lament is a complaint to God in a time of trouble.”⁷
2. Communal laments: 12, 44, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 90, 123, 125, 126, 129.
3. The appeal is for God to do what He said He would do.
4. There may be a corporate activity to demonstrate sorrow, acknowledging sin, etc.
5. Form:
   a. Cry for help - 74:1
   b. Reference to God’s past help - 74:2
   c. Description of suffering - 74:4,9,11
   d. Affirmation of trust - 74:12
   e. Request for rescue - 74:10, 23
   f. Vow of praise - 74:21

E. **Individual Laments**

1. More of these than any other, comprises about one third of the psalter.
2. Every kind of trouble is faced in the psalms.
3. Bellinger has categories:⁸
   a. Sickness - Psalm 6
   b. Falsely accused - Psalm 7
   c. Malicious gossip - 31
   d. Innocence - 17 (also 7 and 31)
   e. Plea for asylum - 61
   f. Prayer of the oppressed - 94
   g. Persecution - 55
   h. Penitence - 51
   i. General laments - 22
4. Form of individual laments:
   a. Cry for help, 22:1
   b. Poetic description of crisis, 22:12,14,15
   c. Affirmation of trust, 22:4
   d. Request for rescue, 22:19
   e. Vow of praise, 22:22
5. Hard to know sometimes exactly what the psalmist is suffering from. The anguish and pain is very real and very powerful, but not always sure of what the problem is.
6. The feelings are very specific, but the problem is not so specific. This gives it a broader audience.
7. Characteristics of laments;
   a. Certainty of hearing -
      1) An expression of trust in God, usually at the end
      2) Can take one of two forms:
         a) I know God will answer
         b) God has answered - crisis has passed, looking back.
Sometimes a vow is promised.

b. Enemies - the trouble makers
c. Sinfulness and innocence

(1) Sometimes the psalmist says he is a sinner; sometimes he is not a sinner, innocent.

(2) Sometimes the psalmist claims both. “I'm a sinner who has been cleansed by God.”

F. Songs of Thanksgiving:
3. The emphasis has shifted from what laments do. Lament will be shrunken, and the major focus is that God heard and responded.
4. Song of thanksgiving is “we suffered, God delivered, we thank Him.”
5. Sometimes that thanking comes first in the psalm.

G. Royal psalms
1. List: 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110, 132, 144.
2. Center on the king.
3. The form is very diverse, but the subject matter draws them together.
4. They may have been written at a particular time in a king’s reign.
5. We don’t always know what king is spoken of - human or divine.
6. Psalm 2 - coronation song
7. Psalm 45 - unique, song for a royal wedding.
8. Psalm 72 - king is the model of justice and righteousness.
9. The king actually is not important. The king is a viceregent of God.
10. Why do we have royal psalms in a time when there is no king? May speak to Messianic expectation.
11. Early church easily referred these to Christ - Ps. 2:7; 110, others.

H. Wisdom psalms
1. 1, 14, 19b, 37, 49, 53, 58, 73, 91, 112, 119, 127, 128, 133, 139.
2. In these psalms we see:
   a. Technique of wisdom material - proverbs, comparisons, numerical series
   b. Clear intent to teach
   c. Characteristic of wisdom material - contrast in righteous and wicked, two ways idea, use of wealth.

I. Not all psalms fit into these neat categories.
1. You will also see other categories.
2. Psalms of trust (11, 16, 23, 27, 62, 63, 131) or psalms of innocence (15).
3. But these will suffice to help us enjoy the psalms.

VI. WORD ON THE USE OF THE PSALTER

A. First, what is the type/structure of the psalm?

B. Get the psalm thoroughly in mind by slow and repeated readings.
   1. Read an intelligible and accurate translation.
   2. Be aware of the various types of psalms.
   3. Know the outline of the psalm - if it tells a story know the story.
4. Know the theological movement of the psalm - what is being said about God?

C. Notice the emotional and attitudinal passages.
   1. Psalms are filled with emotion words.
   2. From Psalm 55 - individual lament - verse 4 - “heart is in anguish....”
   3. If I had written this psalm how would I feel as I wrote it?

D. Read imaginatively - give your mind permission to ramble.

E. Look for special emphases in the psalm
   1. Go through and pick out what it says about God, or the righteous, or the wicked.
   2. Watch for “loaded terms,” word pictures, repetition, etc.

F. Read the psalm on three levels
   1. What did it say for the original audience?
   2. What is its meaning in the light of Christ?
   3. What does it say to my own life?

VII. CONCLUSION

A. We can now move forward and just do some psalm reading.

B. Want to begin next time by reading some hymns and laments.

VIII. ENDNOTES:

¹From Bullock’s Intro, page 121.
²LaSor, Intro to the O.T., page 430.
³From Bellinger.
⁴Longman, How to Read the Psalms, page 21.
⁵From LaSor 434.
⁶Bellinger 104.
⁷From class notes.
⁸Bellinger 48-52.
⁹LaSor 440.
Lesson 2

Wiz Lit - Psalms - Enjoying Psalms Together

INTRODUCTION:

A. Approach: Which is more enjoyable — hearing how the internal combustion engine works or driving the car?
1. We’ve taken the psalms apart technically.
2. Let’s read them!

B. Want to set up and do some reading just like you’d do at home.
1. Work through the steps for enjoying the psalm.
2. See what you think about these texts as well.

C. Refresh your memory as to the steps:
1. First, what is the type/structure of the psalm?
2. Get the psalm thoroughly in mind by slow and repeated readings.
3. Notice the emotional and attitudinal passages - If I had written this psalm how would I feel as I wrote it?
4. Read imaginatively - give your mind permission to ramble.
5. Look for special emphases in the psalm
6. Read the psalm on three levels
   a. What did it say for the original audience?
   b. What is its meaning in the light of Christ?
   c. What does it say to my own life?

D. Let’s read the psalms!

II. PSALM 8 - HYMN

A. Setup
1. Celebrates the majesty of God as seen in creation.
2. It is a sandwich psalm - refrain in the beginning and end. Refrain at the end is more meaningful because it follows all that has been said.
3. The author has looked at the night sky and thought of who he is, and who God is.
4. He is amazed that a God who creates such vastness cares about someone as small as a single person.
5. It is a setup. The smaller man is made the greater God appears when He cares for man.
6. Fleming James ("30 Psalmists") says a man sees his a babe in a crib as he goes out at night, sees the sky and stars.

B. Outline:
1. v. 5 - thesis
2. vv. 6-8 - dominion of man given by God.

C. Analysis:
1. v. 1b - difficult to translate. RSV not as literal as NKJV here.
2. v. 2 - how is the glory of God chanted by babies?
   a. Some say the babies are members of the heavenly court!
   b. God’s power is shown in small things.
   c. Trust of a small child.
The very wonder of human reproduction glorifies God - but what about this "out of the mouth" business?

Infant cries remind you of something ....

v. 2b - what is the "bulwark" (RSV)? And who are these foes?

Matthew 21:16 cites this in reference to children praising Jesus (LXX).

v. 4 - now we are on our face in the dust.

v. 5 - yet we are exalted! What a reversal, and made so vivid by what preceded it.

v. 5a - "made him a little lower than Elohim" is literal Hebrew. LXX, Targums, Syriac have "angels."

vv. 4-5 - quoted in Hebrews 2:6-8.

D. Work the questions:
1. Type - A hymn
2. Emotional part - Verse 3 - humbling
3. Read imaginatively - Verse 8 led to a discovery
4. Emphases - Verse 1 and verse 9 tie together, many repeats of "your"
5. Three levels
   a. Original audience - celebrates God the Creator
   b. In light of Christ - verse 4 used in Hebrews 2
   c. Today - humbled before God

II. PSALM 29

A. Setup:
1. Called the Seven Thunder Claps of God.
2. Expression "voice of the Lord" occurs 7 times.
3. Sandwich psalm - begins and ends in heaven, middle part takes place on earth.
4. Very strong example of parallelism - maybe the strongest in the psalter.
5. If you were to read this in the Hebrew it would sound like thunder, someone has said.
6. A violent storm, maybe with an earthquake, and lightning remind the author of the power of God.
7. The setting against which the psalm is placed is the heavenly throne room.
8. Some connect this to the coming of the rains in Israel.
9. There are similarities between this and a Phoenician hymn. They adapted it for their own purposes.
10. The storm moves from the Med. Sea to the north part of the country then it sweeps south down the mountain spine to Kadesh (in the south) v. 8. Some take Kadesh as a northern location.

B. Outline:
1. vv. 1-2 - call to worship addressed to heavenly being.
2. vv. 3-9 - the storm.
3. vv. 10-11 - above the storm to the throne of God.

C. Analysis:
1. vv. 1-2 - similar to Psalm 96:7-8. Who are the “mighty ones”? Those who are in the heavenly court (like in Job), or earthly nobles. If it is heavenly beings it may be that men can never worship God adequately, need to be joined by heavenly beings.
2. v. 2 - worship the Lord in the "splendor of holiness" may mean in holy garments or in awareness of His holiness.
3. v. 3 - the storm is seen over the Mediterranean first. The voice of the Lord is the various aspects of the storm. Any part of the storm is seen as the voice of God.
4. v. 5 - hits the northern part of Israel. The most magnificent trees in the O.T. are the cedars of Lebanon. This is in Syria, north Palestine. Storm so powerful it breaks these trees.
5. v. 6 - “Syrion” is Mt. Herman in the RSV, the largest mountain these people know about. Some thought the mountains were the homes of pagan gods. God is greater than these.
6. v. 7 - seems like something is missing here.
7. v. 8 - some see an earthquake here.
8. v. 9 - some translational difficulty. A sudden change in barometric pressure can make animals give birth prematurely. RSV changes the word for “deer” to “oaks” (change in vowels).
9. v. 9b - what is the Temple? Heaven or the one in Jerusalem?
10. vv. 10-11 - far above the turmoil God is enthroned. He is the force behind the storm, but the storm doesn't affect Him.
11. v. 10a - “Flood” describes only Noah's flood. The implication may be that we are to pick up Noah's story here, the hints of evil and judgement.
12. v. 11 - RSV has this as a prayer, but it can be declarative as in the NKJV. Two items here: strength and peace.
   a. We know the Lord can give strength because we have seen His power in the storm.
   b. But what about peace? God who creates the storm but is not affected by it. Peace comes from perspective - not centering our lives on the storm but on God.

D. Work the questions:
   1. Type - A hymn
   2. Emotional part - breaks, shakes, splinters
   3. Read imaginatively - imagine a thunderstorm
   4. Emphases - voice of the Lord
   5. Three levels
      a. Original audience - speaks of God's power
      b. In light of Christ - ?
      c. Today - The perspective point made in v. 11 above.

III. PSALM 100

A. Setup:
   1. This is obviously liturgical.
   2. It is a hymn of the kingdom.
   3. Basis for many of our hymns.
   4. Clearly tied to cultic activity, but we don't know how.
   5. Is it as you come in? Go out?

B. Analysis:
   1. v. 1 - universal concern. Much joy here.
   2. v. 2 - notice the continued emphasis on joy.
   3. v. 3 - talks about who God is and who we are.
      a. Yahweh is God - created us
      b. Yahweh made us, We are His - chose us
c. We are His people

d. We are His sheep - a special rel. with God.

4. v. 3 - there is a universal idea here. There is a textual problem here. Hebrew word can mean “not” or “to Him.”

5. v. 4 - note the parallelism

6. v. 5 - 3 points:
   a. God is good
   b. His steadfast love is forever
   c. His truth endures

7. In many ways this is similar to kingship type psalms.

C. Work the questions:

1. Type - A hymn

2. Emotional part - gladness, singing, happiness — this is a happy song

3. Read imaginatively - see this as the opening song of temple service

4. Emphases - much on singing

5. Three levels
   a. Original audience - encourages worship
   b. In light of Christ - if they worshiped gladly, how much more us?
   c. Today - what is my attitude toward worship?

IV. PSALM 44 - COMMUNAL LAMENT

A. Setup:

1. Double problem here:
   a. Miliary problem - defeat
   b. Theological problem - why defeated?


3. Basic idea is the contrast between what God used to do and is doing now.

4. vv. 9-16 setup the problem and urge the reader to ask why. Why has this happened? We expect v. 17 to lead with repentance and confession.
   a. The reader is setup to ask why? What happened? Why did God do this?
   b. Deut. 28 makes it clear if they serve God they will win.

5. v. 20 - we are not lying. We wouldn’t try to deceive the Lord. Our affirmation of innocence is sincere.

6. Notice the psalm does not resolve the problem of suffering.

B. Outline:

1. vv. 1-8 - the past history of God’s blessings, mighty deeds.

2. vv. 9-16 - the problem - routed in battle, despoiled, ridiculed, etc.

3. vv. 17-22 - the problem furthered.

4. vv. 23-26 - entreaty to God.

C. Analysis:

1. v. 1 - see the importance of transmission of traditions.

2. v. 2 - planted is a common image for being put in Canaan.

3. vv. 4-8 - personal and communal faith emphasized. “I” and “we” are both used.

4. v. 9ff - many verbs - cast off, abased, spoiled, etc.

5. v. 12 - God sold them without haggling over the price.

6. v. 14 - byword can be proverb.
7. v. 15 - cannot get rid of this.
8. v. 16 - who is the avenger?  The conqueror?
9. v. 17 - problem furthered - if we get what we deserve that is fine, but we did not forget God.
10. v. 19 - “place of jackals” is a deserted place like a battlefield.
11. v. 20 - don’t tell us we haven’t really obeyed God.  God knows what we’ve done and we’ve done right.
12. v. 22 - used in Romans 8:36.  This may mean no more than misfortune is caused by God.  Paul uses this to speak of redemptive suffering.  Be careful not to read this back into the psalm.
13. v. 23 - not the only psalm urging God to wake up.  Psalm 7:6; 78:65.  God you must have been asleep when we were defeated so wake up!
   a. We almost think the psalmist goes too far.
   b. Or is God saying (again) I know how you feel.
14. v. 26b - the appeal is to God’s steadfast love.

D. Work the questions:
1. Type - A communal lament
2. Emotional part - vv. 23ff
3. Read imaginatively - imagine the pain here
4. Emphases - “You make” - this is God’s doing
5. Three levels
   a. Original audience - the struggle of the innocent sufferer
   b. In light of Christ - Jesus is our Help, Intercessor
   c. Today - honesty in prayer; sometimes we don’t understand we are just called to faith (Job never got an explanation).

V. PSALM 133 - WISDOM SONG - TEACHING US SOMETHING HERE

A. Analysis:
1. V. 2 - Unity is compared to choosing a high priest and God blessing him.
2. v. 3 - Herman is in the far north, Zion in the south.  We have unity of north and south.
3. v. 3b - “For there” points to “where brethren dwell together” not a geographic place.  See Deut. 25:5 as well.

B. Work the questions:
1. Type - wisdom song
2. Emotional part - delightful psalm
3. Read imaginatively - get the word picture of verse 2
4. Emphases -
5. Three levels
   a. Original audience - celebrates God the Creator
   b. In light of Christ - verse 4 used in Hebrews 2
   c. Today - Unity comes from above, is a blessing from God.  Value unity!

VI. PSALM 30 - THANKSGIVING

A. Setup:
1. Remember that songs of thanksgiving connect to laments.  Usually contain a reminiscence of the lament.
2. Chronologically it is out of order. If you put it in order you would begin with verses 6-7, then 8-10. Then 1-3.
3. Psalm is not in order to get the attention on thanksgiving. He has been delivered, then explains the problem he faced.

B. Outline:
1. VV. 1-5 - Call to praise God
2. vv. 6-10 - previous situation
3. vv. 11-12 - joy of rescue, concluding thanks.

C. Analysis:
1. vv. 1-3 - 5 ways he describes God’s deliverance:
   a. Draw up - psalmist lifts God up
   b. Didn’t let foes rejoice - enemies not mentioned again.
   c. Heal me - may imply illness. Death imagery.
   d. Brought soul up - doesn’t mean literal resurrection or death. Just means very bad situation.
   e. Restored me
2. v. 3 - connects heavily to verse 9.
3. v. 4 - come and celebrate with me.
4. v. 5 - important to see God properly.
5. v. 5b - Tony sees a traveler image here. I can’t see that.
6. v. 6 - word for prosperity not found any other place in O.T. He grants that God gave him these blessings. I’m set up for life.
7. v. 7b - everything turns upside down. Suddenly God hides His face. Why? Could it be pride?
8. v. 8 - I turn to God.
9. v. 9 - I can’t praise you when things are so bad. If I were dead I couldn’t praise; likewise, how can I praise in this situation.
   a. This may show what he felt, not what is true.
10. v. 11 - two images for joy:
   a. Dancing
   b. Taken garments of mourning off
11. v. 12 - now he can praise God.
12. If it is so that his downfall came from pride it may be a lesson toward the self-centered (v. 12).

D. Work the questions:
1. Type - thanksgiving
2. Emotional part - v. 2, 5, 8
3. Read imaginatively - see v. 11
4. Emphasizes - God’s rescue
5. Three levels
   a. Original audience - thankfulness for help
   b. In light of Christ - Jesus delivers from sin
   c. Today -
      (1) Story of a man who has been profoundly changed. This isn’t life is going to be okay for all — joy comes through prayer and faith.
      (2) Joy of redemption - no indication that his material prosperity was restored. Maybe God just gave him the ability to deal with the problem.
      (3) Idea of gratitude - this is good motivation. Grateful people are motivated people. Luke 17:10-11 - 10 lepers.
VII. CONCLUSION

A. That gives us some flavor from Psalms.

B. Next class we’ll deal with two areas of difficult psalms: imprecations and messianic psalms.
Lesson 4

Proverbs - An Introduction

INTRODUCTION:

A. Approach: What is wisdom?
   1. “The discipline of applying truth to one’s life in the light of experience.”
   2. “Seeing the end of the thing from the beginning.”
   3. “The ability to apply knowledge.”

B. All of these are attempts to get from the esoteric and academic realm into practical, real-life scenarios.
   1. Wisdom has to do with living life, and living it well.
   2. If that kind of wisdom interests you then Proverbs is your book.
   3. Job and Ecclesiastes are more philosophical books. They deal with how the teachings of wisdom don’t fit the order of God’s world (“Why do the righteous suffer? Why do the wicked prosper?”).
   4. Proverbs has become a favorite book for many because it is so practical, so easy to get a handle on.

II. WHAT IS A PROVERB?

A. Term comes from the Hebrew mashal
   1. That term actually means “to be like, to represent.”
   2. Mashal is translated a variety of ways:
      a. Proverb - 10:1
      b. Parable
      c. Allegory
      d. Taunt
      e. Instruction (see 1:1-19)
   3. For us, a proverb is usually a short saying of general truth.
   4. “Proverbs are crystallized bits of wisdom” usually seven words long, have several levels of meaning and apply to various situations, and are not always true.”
      Professor Mieder, proverbs expert, cited in Smithsonian.
   5. It is “entertainment that teaches” or a “a short statement from long experience.”
   6. Americans use hundreds of proverbs all the time:
      a. The early bird catches the worm
      b. A bird in the hand is wroth two in the bush
      c. Business before pleasure
      d. A picture is worth a thousand words
   7. The power of proverbs is their short but important message that often takes a moment to fully sink in.

B. Major characteristics of proverbs
   1. Short
   2. Easy to remember - Prov. 11:22
   3. Deep insight - makes you think - Prov. 25:15
   4. Not dependent upon context, other verses, etc.
   5. Practical, but not guaranteed - Prov. 22:6; 15:25
   6. Applicable to everyone everywhere in every time
C. Kinds of proverbs
1. Identity - Prov. 29:5
2. Contrast - 27:7
3. Similarity - 25:25
4. Obviously absurd - 17:16
5. Clarification - 14:15 (has some contrast here)
6. Valuing one thing to another - 22:1
7. Consequences of behavior - 20:4

D. “Remembers” for reading proverbs
1. Best taken in small doses or they all run together, blurs everything.
2. Amoral observations do not condone evil - Prov. 14:20
3. Not always accurate - Prov. 15:25
   a. We have that problem with our own proverbs. We say “He who hesitates is lost” but also “Look before you leap.”
   b. Proverbs can sometimes be interpreted differently. “A rolling stone gathers no moss” means be active to Scots, but to the English means be still so you can grow lovely moss on you.

III. INTRODUCTORY MATTERS

A. Authorship
2. Others are mentioned - Agur (30:1); Lemuel (31:1) and “wise men” (22:17; 24:23).
3. Solomon did write many proverbs - 1 Kings 4:29-34.
4. It is worth noting that chs. 1-9 are different than the rest of the book. Ch. 10 begins more “traditional” sounding proverb material. Why?

B. Date
1. Remember, the date of writing and the date when Proverbs was put together probably differ - see 25:1.
2. Very difficult to date wisdom writing because by its nature it is timeless.
3. Liberal scholarship has tried to date Proverbs as a post-exilic work, under Greek influences. The reasoning behind this has been struck down by archaeological and textual research.
4. In the collections, as they are put together, there are duplications
   a. 21:9 and 25:24
   b. 18:8 and 26:22
   c. See more in Bullock 167.
5. Probably best to consider it written, in the main, by Solomon and collected later.

C. Purpose and Target Audience
1. It proposes to teach wisdom to the young men of Israel (1:8,10; 2:1; 3:1; 5:1, etc.).
2. These don’t seem to be all young men (poor never addressed), but probably the young men of the royal court. These would be the future leaders of the nation.
3. The purpose of the book goes beyond that to anyone who will listen.
4. Proverbs tries to form right character, to show us what life is like and how to best deal with it.
5. It encourages behavior that is both good for one’s personal and spiritual well-being, while warning against evil.
6. Then 10 Commandments put the vertical part of man’s life first. The Proverbs
capitalize on the horizontal dimension (man and neighbor). This is very much “how
then should we live” stuff.6

7. Keys:
   a. Two ways
   b. Wisdom versus folly - being foolish is more the practical atheist than being
dumb
   c. Fear of the Lord - (phrase occurs more in Proverbs than anywhere else, 16x).
This is a reverence for God and His ways.

D. Value today:
   1. They demand action by the individual, not a group or nation.
   2. They are applicable to all people of all time.
   3. They urge respect for authority, teachers and traditional ways.
   4. They are very practical, giving sound advice and needed warnings.

E. Outline7
   1. SECTION 1: Intro and Thematic Statement, 1:1-7
   2. SECTION 2: A Father’s Praise of Wisdom, 1:8-9:18
   4. SECTION 4: Words of the Wise, 22:17-24:34
   5. SECTION 5: Hezekiah’s Collection, 25:1-29:27
   6. SECTION 6: Two Appendices, chs. 30-31

IV. SECTION 1: Intro and Thematic Statement, 1:1-7

A. Analysis:
   1. Note v. 7. It’s position is so important. It is repeated in 9:10 (end of first collection).
This is the book’s “compass.”8

B. Note what the purpose of Proverbs here. Proverbs provides:9
   1. Discipline, v. 2a
   2. Discrimination, v. 2b
   3. Intelligent moral action, v. 3
   4. Shrewdness, v. 4a
   5. Plan of action (righteousness, justice, equity), v. 4b
   6. Skillfulness, v. 5
   7. Understanding, v. 6
   8. THEN Verse 7

V. SECTION 2: A Father’s Praise of Wisdom, 1:8-9:18

A. Setup
   1. There are 10-15 discourses covered here.
   2. Much of this sets forth the two-ways principle.
   3. The sections seems to run in cycles. Proverbs gives wisdom (1:1-7), but folly
wrecks that purpose (1:8-33), there are advantages to wisdom (chs. 2-4), but folly
prevents one from seeking it (chs. 5-6), finding wisdom is good (6:20-9:12), but folly
may prevent it (9:13-18).10

B. Discourses:
   1. 1:8-19 - Warning against peer pressure
2. 1:20-33 - Wisdom is personified, calling for acceptance
3. Ch. 2 - Wisdom is the way to find the Lord (the chapter is one long sentence in Hebrew).
4. 3:1-18 - Wisdom is a tree of life
5. 3:19-26 - Role of wisdom in founding the world
6. 3:27-35 - How to treat your neighbor
7. 4:1-5:6 - Get wisdom!
8. 5:7-23 - Marital fidelity and adultery - may be saying something here about being faithful to Lady Wisdom and ignoring Madam Folly.
9. 6:1-5 - sound business practices, don't lend to a foreigner
10. 6:6-11 - sloth and laziness
11. 6:12-19 - the worthless person
12. 6:20-35 - sins of the flesh destroy
13. Ch. 7 - parable on adultery
14. Ch. 8 - wisdom personified
15. Ch. 9 - invitation by Wisdom and Folly to banquets of life or death

VI. SECTION 3: Proverbs of Solomon, 10:1-22:16
   A. Setup
      1. There are 375 sayings or proverbs here.
      2. They are randomly arranged.
      3. The proverbs generalize, usually urging that life rewards the wise and punishes the fool (counter to Job).
      4. 90% of the material from 10:1-15:33 is antithetical, afterwards synonymous slightly outnumbering antithetical. 11

   B. Analysis:
      1. We’ll work with these in the sections indicated in the workbook.

VII. SECTION 4: Words of the Wise, 22:17-24:34
   A. Setup
      1. Format changes slightly - sayings are longer.
      2. Some wonder if Solomon wrote this material.
      3. This material is famous for being rather similar to an Egyptian document known as “Instruction of Amenemope.”
         a. Who borrowed from who is an old discussion of little merit in this class.
         b. “Even though the collections share some of the same interests, the biblical material is unique in its prerequisite of a personal faith in a personal God. To the Hebrews the success of wisdom did not simply require a compliance with wise instructions but trust in, reverence for, and submission to the Lord.” 12

   B. Analysis:
      1. We’ll work with these in the sections indicated in the workbook.

VIII. SECTION 5: Hezekiah’s Collection, 25:1-29:27
   A. Setup
      1. Many of these are the “like” proverbs.
      2. Chs. 25-27 are for Israelite society at large.
      3. Chs. 28-29 have a marked emphasis on rulers.
B. Analysis:
   1. We’ll work with these in the sections indicated in the workbook.

IX. SECTION 6: Two Appendices, chs. 30-31

A. Setup - 3 parts here:
   1. Words of Agur, ch. 30
      a. We do not know who he is.
      b. He may be an Ishmaelite convert from northern Arabia.
      c. There is no consensus as to exactly where his words end.
   2. Words of Lemuel, 31:1-9
      a. We do not know who he is either.
      b. These are the only instruction made directly to a king.
   3. Alphabetic acrostic of the worthy wife, 31:10-13
      a. Some think she personifies wisdom, not what a wife ought to be.
      b. Others disagree.

X. CONCLUSION

A. From this point we want to consider the groupings of Proverbs in the workbook.

B. This is a really practical section of scripture — let’s make sure we get all we can from it!

XI. ENDNOTES:

1 Fee and Stuart 187 from Chuck, page 18.
2 Richard Wolkomir, “A proverb each day keeps this scholar at play,” Smithsonian, my copy of the article undated.
3 Bullock 159.
4 Smithsonian.
5 Bullock 157.
6 Bullock 157.
7 largely from Bullock.
8 Bullock 166.
9 From Melvin Curry, discussion at the Fall Bible Conference.
10 Expositor’s Bible Commentary 889.
11 Chuck’s material, page 27.
12 Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Proverbs, page 885.
INTRODUCTION:

A. Approach: *Time to appropriate some of this great wisdom! Let’s read in Proverbs!*

B. Remember to just let the wisdom grab you, not try to develop them too deeply, make them “walk all fours.” Let’s read, enjoy, and learn!

II. WISDOM AND FOLLY


B. Applications
   1. No instant wisdom! Have to go after it diligently.
   2. Have to choose wisdom, no one accidentally becomes wise! You must value it, want it.
   3. Wisdom gives the best kind of life.
   4. Have to listen to others - 12:15, no one knows it all - 12:15; 28:26
   5. You must accept correction to be wise - 23:9; 16:22

III. PRIDE

A. Read in class: 21:4; 27:2; 20:6; 16:5; 6:16-19

B. Applications
   2. Dangerous - 27:2
   3. Self defeating - 17:19; 20:6; 11:2; 13:10

IV. ANGER


B. Applications
   1. Very foolish - 29:11
   3. Makes trouble - 15:1, 18

V. SELF CONTROL


B. Applications
   1. Great value - 16:32; 25:28
   2. Comes from instruction

VI. ADULTERY

A. Analysis of chapters 5-7
1. 5:1 - man to man talk!
2. 5:4 - Proverbs emphasizes what happens after, the afterwards
3. 5:9 - adultery robs one of health and prosperity
4. 5:12 - “if only” section begins
5. 5:16 - who would drink from the gutter?
6. 5:20 - rhetorical questions
7. 5:21 - can’t conceal from God’
8. 5:28ff - not captivated by wife? Be captivated by sin!
9. 6:25-35 - Lust is, in and of itself, a sin (see Matt. 5:28). It “is only the heart reaching out after sin.”
10. Ch. 7
   a. 7:8 - this is intentional, he is not just wandering around.
   b. 7:12 - the marriage where the partners are always going everywhere but home is in real trouble.
   c. 7:13-15 - these offerings indicate she has been cleansed from impurity (end of her cycle) or more probability that she has fresh meat left over from the sacrifice (see Lev. 7:11-12). Note her callousness toward worship!
   d. 7:23 - this is probably spiritual death, not physical death. The arrows in the liver may be the pangs of guilt.
   e. 7:27 - note the slow progression.

VII. POVERTY AND WEALTH


B. Applications
   1. Money brings problems - 19:4-7
   2. Only way to get money is work - 14:23; 10:4; 12:11 (NIV has “chases fantasies”).
   3. Being able to accept correction helps - 13:18
   4. Work makes you appreciate wealth - 20:21
   5. So much here about “get rich quick schemes” - 28:20

VIII. REPUTATION

A. Read in class: 27:2, 21; 3:3-4; 22:1

B. Applications:
   1. Comes from others say, not what you say - 27:2, 21;
   2. Comes from integrity, wisdom - 3:3-4 (see NASB)
   3. Must be desired - 22:1

IX. FRIENDSHIP

A. Read in class: 19:4; 18:24 (watch NKJV); 17:17; 27:17; 26:18-19;

B. Applications:
   1. There is such a thing as false friends - 19:4
   2. True friends stay with you - 17:17
   3. Make us better - 27:17
   4. Has limits - 26:18-19
X. HUSBANDS AND WIVES
   A. Read in class: 18:22; 11:29; 5:18; 14:1; 19:13
   B. Applications:
      1. Need to value one another - 18:22; 20:6
      2. Don’t destroy your own house - 11:29; 14:1; 19:13
      3. Stay together, enjoy one another - 5:18

XI. PARENTS AND CHILDREN
   A. Read in class: 1:8-9; 22:6, 15; 19:18; 29:15;
   B. Applications:
      1. Needs to be instruction - 1:8-9; 29:15
      2. Training has an effect, don’t sell yourself short! - 22:6

XII. CONCLUSIONS:
   A. Great wisdom is available in Proverbs.
   B. Let’s make use of this wonderful resource!

XIII. ENDNOTES:

\footnote{Expositor’s Bible Commentary 937.}
INTRODUCTION:

A. Approach: Name the Rubik’s Cube of Bible books?
   1. Ecclesiastes might win that award.
   2. It is full of statements that seem almost anti-religious, a deep cynicism that makes it almost gloomy and a structure that doesn’t always seem to really fit together into one cohesive whole.
   3. It is such a tough and puzzling book some even questioned whether it should be in the canon.¹
   4. It is a challenge to harmonize Ecclesiastes with the truth of the rest of scripture, but that harmonizing must be done.

B. Let’s go to work on this great book of (difficult) wisdom!

II. INTRODUCTORY MATTERS

A. Title
   1. The title of Ecclesiastes in Hebrew is “Koheleth.”
   2. The word Ecclesiastes is just the transliteration of the Greek word for Koheleth.
   3. Koheleth is a term found in Eccl. It occurs 7 times (1:1,2,12; 7:27; 12:8,9,10).
   4. There is much debate over what the word means.
   5. It comes from a Hebrew root word that means “to call together” and seems to describe the person who calls people together to address them.
   6. You can see the Greek term “ekklesia” in the term.
   7. It is a tough term to define, perhaps best translated as “teacher” or even “counselor.”

B. Author
   1. 1:1, 12 announce that the author was King over Israel and a son of David.
   2. No one seems to fit this description or have the ability to research what the book does look into in the way it does except Solomon.
   3. Some argue that Solomon couldn’t write the book do to language considerations. Others say that Solomon couldn’t write passages showing concern for the weak or that sound like he suffered.
   4. None of this is conclusive or strong enough to rule out Solomonic authorship.
   5. A “middle ground” position is that someone else is writing down Solomon’s views. This might account for language problems, but still is only conjecture.
   6. We will take Solomon seriously as this book’s author.

C. Date
   1. The book is written in Hebrew with some Aramaic thrown in.
   2. This might be like a preacher who quotes the KJV in more modern terms as he preaches.²
   3. Much is made of various Hebrew terms and Aramaic mixed in but nothing that mitigates against Solomon writing it in his day and it then being later copied with perhaps some changes.
   4. “All that the language shows on this view is that the book in its present form was written later than Solomon’s day. This need not be the date of its composition . . . ”³
5. Several passages would indicate it was written toward the end of Solomon’s life: 2:1-11 and chs. 11-12.

D. Key background ideas
1. **Is the book a unity?**
   a. Some have tried to argue that it is an amalgamation of several works by several authors. For more on this see Expositor’s 1138.
   b. There are key terms such as “vanity,” “striving after wind” that the writer does return to.
   c. Perhaps the differences in perspectives come as the author grows older or grows in spirituality?

2. **Should it be in the Bible?**
   a. It is referred to in Romans 8:20.
   c. Although some debated, was accepted by the time of Christ by Jews.
   d. Canon and that discussion go beyond this class but despite its difficulties its association with Solomon helped the book be accepted.

3. **Who was this book intended for?**
   a. Very hard to say — perhaps as a discussion guide to move people to think out their response to God’s unknown work in their lives and history.
   b. The book is like Job. It explores what we cannot explain well.
   c. Society is not always ideal, the good don’t always prosper.

4. **What is the book’s purpose?**
   a. “Vanity! Vanity! All is vanity” is the key phrase.
      (1) Found some 38x
      (2) It means emptiness, futility, something transitory and unsatisfactory
      (3) That shouldn’t be taken to mean life can’t be good or enjoyable — only that there is a struggle to find lasting purpose.
      (4) When we’re done here we die (losing life and control of our possessions), even if we serve God or are wise or are rich — so what’s the purpose in living if we all die?
   b. Ecclesiastes explores how to build a life that transcends the meaningless of this world, *in some ways, a life that goes beyond death.*
      (1) Where do we find purpose for life? In what? Or in who?
      (2) What is God doing in our lives since He made us?
   c. Note: there really isn’t anything that describes the life of faith — it is almost assumed that the author is pursuing the best life in harmony with his faith.
   d. Believe we make a mistake if we turn Ecclesiastes into a license to sin: “It’s all meaningless so I’ll do as I will.” That isn’t Solomon’s point. He would agree with 1 John 2:15-17 very much.4
   e. Two keys:
      (1) We will much here about how to live life as good as possible when it is all still vanity, still ends in death.
      (2) We will also see some here about transcending death.

E. Outline
1. Some think there is no outline — that the book is a spiral circling around and around the idea of vanity.
2. Curry uses a quest motif. There is a quest for understanding that is worked through the book and arrives at a conclusion.
3. Here is a potential outline:
III.  **CHAPTER 1**

A.  The theme: frustration, vv. 1-3
1.  V. 3 - “Under the sun” is used 29 times.

B.  The frustration in nature and history, vv. 4-11
1.  We get the observations of a scientist here.
2.  Life appears to be endlessly cyclical. How then can make break out of that and do something that amounts to something?
3.  V. 8 - this is the course of human history as well. Just an endless succession of birth and death.
4.  V. 9 - many things have been invented but there are not really any new concepts and probably more than anything the Teacher has in mind an invention that helps man find meaning, break the cycle of futility.

C.  The frustration of wisdom, vv. 12-18
1.  Vv. 12-1 - man has experiences but he can he make sense of any of it?
2.  V. 13 - these are words that mean to deeply study and explore.\(^5\)
3.  V. 13b - what a burden on man that is not on animals: we try to make sense of life!
4.  V. 15 - as we fast we straighten things out more things get broken. It just takes one wicked ruler to cause much trouble.
5.  V. 16 - not a slip by the author because David started a line of kings in Jerusalem.

IV.  **APPLICATIONS - CHAPTER 1**

A.  Meaning in life cannot be discovered in wisdom, nature, or history.

B.  If meaning can not be found “under the sun” then our only hope must lie above it.

V.  **ENDNOTES:**

2. Good illustration from Expositor’s 1141.
3. Expositor’s 1143.
4. Expositor’s 1146.
Lesson 7

_Wiz Lit - Eccl. 2-12_

INTRODUCTION:

A. Approach: _What else can we learn is just vanity in light of death?_

II. CHAPTER 2

A. The frustration of unlimited wealth, vv. 1-11
   1. To most people, unlimited money would mean unlimited happiness. Solomon finds otherwise.
   2. V. 1 - no mention of here of pursuing sin. Immorality is just not the way to discover the true purpose of life.
   3. V. 3 - turns here to sensual pleasure.
   4. Vv. 4-8 - a sensible use of money is in creating things. See 1 Kings 7:1-9; 9:15-19.
   5. V. 8b - “delights of men” is a tough term to translate. It is harem in the NIV and concubines in the RSV. See 1 Kings 11:3.
   6. V. 10 - more than any other man Solomon could buy whatever he wanted! Yet these were momentary pleasures.

B. The ultimate frustration: death, vv. 12-23
   1. V. 12 - can wisdom guide, provide satisfaction?
   2. V. 13 - wisdom is better than folly
   3. V. 15 - but all still die
   4. “If every card we play is trumped does it really matter how we play?”

C. Daily life to be enjoyed, vv. 24-26
   1. This becomes a kind of refrain we find several times in Eccl. Don’t want to take this out of context and reduce life to mere pleasure seeking.
   2. But as we live out this life enjoy what God gives you as much as you can.
   3. V. 26 - this frustration may be the frustration of one who knows not God or could be the one who is frustrated still with daily life.

III. APPLICATIONS - CHAPTER 2

A. Sensual pleasures promise but they cannot deliver.

B. Without God no enjoyment is possible (v. 24).

C. Those right with God derive benefit from everyone’s labor (v. 26).

IV. CHAPTER 3

A. God’s plan for living, vv. 1-8
   1. We must take life day by day, realizing God has time for everything to be done.
   2. Note that we need to find the right time to act, and when we do act in the right time it is beautiful (v. 11).
   3. V. 2 - this would speak to euthanasia - God knows when, not Kevorkian.
   4. V. 3 - interestingly, this is not the word for “murder” as in the sixth commandment.
   5. V. 5 - the collecting of stones may refer to collecting stones for a building or clearing a pasture.
B. The peace and the whole, vv. 9-15
   1. It lets us into the secret to finding real happiness as Solomon makes three observations about God.³
   2. **What God makes, vv. 10-11**
      a. God does two things here, He causes two things to happen.
      b. First, He makes everything beautiful in its time.
         (1) Term beauty may be misleading. The idea here is appropriate, or fitting.
         (2) Notice the operative element is time. In its time. Not your time, or mine. We don't always have enough of our time to see it.
      c. Second, He makes everyone hungry for eternity.
         (1) There is, this verse is telling you, a God-shaped hole in your soul.
         (2) You can plug anything and everything into that spot but only God will really fit. We have an eternal itch that only our Creator can scratch.
         (3) Now, we're not always going to be able to be able to understand God, or what God is doing, but we are longing for that relationship with God.
   3. **What God gives, vv. 12-13**
      a. The Lord gives us the capacity to enjoy life.
      b. Despite its uncertainty, despite the fact that we cannot control it all, God blesses us with the ability to be happy.
      c. When I invest myself in Him, when I seek Him, when I trust Him to make all things appropriate in His time then I don't have to organize events.
      d. I just do what I can, as I can, and find contentment there.
   4. **What God does, vv. 14-15**
      a. I love the last line of verse 14: "that men should fear Him."
      b. God is working everything together so that men will turn to Him, will fear Him, will trust Him and serve Him.
      c. Indeed, our very lack of control should cause us to realize that we can't control everything, that we are not the end of all things, not omnipotent.
      d. That should push us toward the One who can control it all, who does make it beautiful in its time, who has set eternity in our hearts.
      e. God's awesome work is performed so that we should fear Him.
      f. In fact, God keeps doing that over and over until we get it, until we learn. That's verse 15.
      g. We are the ones who fail to learn from history, who don't get it.
      h. So God will do it again. He repeats the lesson again and again.
      i. We may run from it, or turn it off, or choose to believe the way is found in control.
      j. So God does it again. He takes control from us. He shows us how weak and puny we are. How much we need Him. God does it again and again until we get it, learn.

C. Consequences to mortality, vv. 16-22
   1. V. 16 - one of the big problems in understanding how God works is that sometimes reward and punishment seem missing.
   2. V. 18ff - all sensible people realize they are subject to death just like the animal world.
   3. V. 21 - what does this verse mean? Witnesses use it (and other verses in Eccl.) to say man is like a beast, i.e., has no soul.
      a. Note the context: v. 16 clearly sets that as under the sun.
      b. Several options:
         (1) May reflect a divine record of heresy on Solomon's part. He's just wrong here.⁴
(2) From a purely human standpoint animals and people die alike, we do not see the soul leaving the body.
(3) Probably just means that there is no second chance, and no certainty about the afterlife. See 9:4-10 for similar pessimism.
c. Verse 21 furthers that skeptical refrain: “who can know if a man really has an immortal soul?” NIV: “Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?”
d. One finds it difficult to use Ecclesiastes to “prove” such a doctrine - see 12:7 where soul and body are clearly separated.

V. APPLICATIONS - CHAPTER 3

A. We have to trust God with life — and then be contented.
   1. Solomon says this in the middle section, then again in v. 22.
   2. He doesn’t say compare your lot with others or retaliate or try to figure out everything or even abandon life. No.
   3. Just do the best you can where you are.
   4. Usually we can do little to change our lot. We can only manage our reaction to what is going on around us. That is our job.

B. Injustice does rule — but only temporarily.
   1. If you focus on nothing but corruption and oppression you end up exasperated.
   2. We need to remember God rules.

C. Injustice just reveals how like animals we can really be.

VI. CHAPTER FOUR

A. Setup:
   1. The over-arching theme is the power complex and how people react to it.
   2. Notice the return to the theme of injustice (3:16-17).
   3. The average person in good circumstances may be able to do 2:24-25 but what of the oppressed?

B. The frustration of politics, vv. 1-16
   1. V. 4 - a healthy drive becomes yet another frustration. This isn’t putting down healthy ambition or free enterprise but describes the end of carnal selfishness.
      a. NIV has “all labor... spring from envy of neighbor.”
      b. NKJV has “for this a man is envied by his neighbor.”
      c. Either may be right.
   2. V. 5 - so should we drop out, never work? No, that’s no good either. See Prov. 15:16.
   3. Vv. 7-8 - again a good drive may turn inward into miserliness, collecting things can become an obsessions.
   4. Interestingly, in the first scene we have many (the oppressed), then two (v. 4) and now just one.
   5. The position of the lonely, vv. 9-13
      a. It is better to have someone with us. We get:
      b. Mutual encouragement when we are weak (one falls)
      c. Mutual support when we are vulnerable (if two lie down)
      d. Mutual protection when we are attacked
   6. V. 13 - some hold on to position too long. We cannot help but owner if Solomon is thinking of self here. Looks like this speaks to the transience of popularity.
C. Applications:
1. There will always be oppression and injustice in this world.
2. Workaholics and the lazy have both missed life’s point.
4. Popularity cannot last.

VII. CHAPTER FIVE

A. Setup
1. As we work through Ecclesiastes’ pessimism there are interludes, quiet moments that reflect on God.
2. Solomon is trying to find the satisfying and unifying key to life and its purpose.
3. Much of 3:10-15 discusses how we can only find that satisfaction in accepting God’s purposes for our lives, even if we can’t always discover all that God is doing right now.
4. Life should be marked by acceptance of God, not demands on God.5

B. Quiet before God, vv. 1-7
1. Key principles:6
   a. Draw near and listen well — God is communicating (v. 1)
   b. Be quiet and stay calm — God is great (God is in heaven, v. 2)
   c. Make a commitment and keep it — God expects it (vv. 4-5)
   d. Don’t decide now and deny later — God doesn’t ignore our decision (vv. 6-7)
2. V. 1 - be careful when you go to worship. Idea is “Don’t park!” Pay attention, be alert. This is serious business!
3. V. 1b - seems to be the idea of bribing God, or expecting that pious devotion in one area can overcome sin in another.
4. V. 2 - be careful what you say to God. This may speak to the problem of being so preoccupied with our situation that we talk (worship) mindlessly.
5. Applications:
   a. How often people try excuse their way out of commitments!
   b. “I married the wrong person”
   c. “I shouldn’t have said that, it was too much to take on.”
   d. “I was pretty young back then....”
   e. “I’m only human”

C. Money and Mortality, vv. 8-20
1. V. 8 - Solomon returns to the idea of money and power.
2. V. 9 - very difficult to translate.
   a. NIV: “the king himself profits from the fields.”
   b. NASB: “a king who cultivates the field is an advantage to the land”
   c. Others translate it so that the idea is that as soon as someone cultivates a field the govt comes to get its share.
   d. Probably best is the “king is served by his field,” i.e., he gets the increase from them.
3. V. 12ff - it is sad when money warps a man’s character. Then he loses everything and is destroyed. This comes from measuring success by the wrong standard.
4. Vv. 18-19 - robbers say “Your money or your life.” Solomon says those who aim for money lose real life.7
5. V. 20 - summary: don’t worry about the past, or fret over the future. Be content in
VIII. APPLICATIONS - CHAPTER FIVE

A. Solemnity in worship - *take God seriously*

B. Commitments to the Lord must be completed.

C. No excuse for excuse making: do what you say will!

D. Money cannot satisfy.
   1. Those who have can quickly become have-nots.
   2. Instead claim the gifts of contentment (v. 20). Be content where you are, no matter what.

IX. ENDNOTES:

1. Swindoll 59.
2. Expositor’s Bible Commentary 1161.
3. Much of this adapted from Swindoll’s *Living on the Ragged Edge*, page 86.
4. This is Swindoll’s approach, see 104ff.
5. Expositor’s Bible Commentary 1167.
6. Swindoll 150.
7. Expositor’s Bible Commentary 1170.
Lesson 8

Wiz Lit - Ecclesiastes 6-12

INTRODUCTION:

A. Approach: This is a darkly depressing chapter that in some ways makes us wonder if we aren’t looking at Solomon’s self-portrait.¹

B. This chapter contains some difficult material. We’ll have to do the best we can to make sense and find some themes as we work along.

II. CHAPTER 6

A. The unfulfilled life, vv. 1-9
   1. V. 1 - there is an obvious contrast here to 5:19. There a person can enjoy what God has given him, but here he cannot.
   2. V. 2 - what keeps him from enjoying life? Some foreigner:
      a. The constant desire for more?
      b. An adversary takes it?
      c. Sickness?
      d. Domestic problems invade the home?
      e. Natural calamity?
   3. Vv. 3-6 - Israelites thought the key to a good life was many kids and many years. What is meant by these verses?
      a. A large number of kids keep the family in poverty so that life can’t be enjoyed and a funeral can’t even be paid for.
      b. May mean that a man can have kids and wealth yet not enjoy them and just die in misery
      c. Summary: a life of misery is worse than no life to Solomon.
   4. Vv. 7-9 - here the insatiable appetite for more is discussed.
   5. Solomon says even if you add various things to life it still won’t satisfy.
      a. Many children, v. 3 - Many kids just make for more cares
      b. More years, v. 6 - but if life is pain and calamity who wants more of it?
      c. More work, v. 7 - term “appetite” (NIV) is “soul” (NKJV). Work doesn’t fill up our souls, doesn’t bring satisfaction.
      d. More wisdom, v. 8 - but that still doesn’t work.
      e. Summary, v. 9 - stop dreaming for more, accept what you have.

B. What is good?, vv. 10-12
   1. This section is difficult.
   2. One approach says that this is an answer to some objections. Man should take life from God’s hand as it comes — but then is man really free to choose? Arguing about it is fruitless.²
      a. Some might try to argue for permissive morality based on the uncertainty of life. Life is short, do what you want.
      b. Such cannot be the answer.
   3. Swindoll offers that Solomon is saying:³
      a. God is sovereign, v. 10
      b. Man is not, v. 10b
      c. Arguing is no help, v. 10c
      (1) See also Isa. 45:9-12; Daniel 4:35.
We ask “God what have You done?” He answers “My will!”

As long as we are fighting God’s hand we cannot learn from Him.

III. APPLICATIONS - CHAPTER 6

A. Much that people seek after to get satisfaction cannot provide it.

B. Learn contentment with what we have - 5:19

C. We cannot fight against God and His will.

III. CHAPTER 7

A. Setup:

1. One of the things missing so far from Ecclesiastes has been wisdom.
2. Now the terms “wise” and “wisdom” occur almost thirty-five times in the last half of this book.
3. Is that an indication that Solomon is headed for “home”? It does mark a change of writing style as we get some proverbs now.
4. The first set of proverbs here speaks of a serious view of life, of taking life seriously. These proverbs contain seven “better than’s.”
5. That urge us to obey God. We may not know God’s entire will for our lives but we can still obey.

B. Practical advice for daily living, vv. 1-14

1. V. 1 - reputation worth more than money (expensive perfume).
2. V. 2 - why is this? Because the end brings us to God. Solomon is urging us to remember that life doesn’t go on forever. Be ready for death!
3. V. 4 - laughter is nice, but it doesn’t last. Jokes are easily forgotten.
4. V. 5 - rather than back-slapping and jokes listen to rebuke.
5. V. 7 - if you hold an influential position don’t use it for personal gain.
6. Vv. 8-9 - end is better because we complete it, we know the whole story, feel good about getting it all done. Yet patience is needed to see something through to the end.
7. V. 10 - don’t look back to the good old days.
8. V. 11 - sudden wealth may not relieve all problems. If you get an “inheritance” use it wisely.
9. Vv. 13-14 - first time God’s name is mentioned.
   a. V. 13 - “crooked” isn’t a moral judgment on God, just references His great strength. If God sets something in a certain way we can’t change it.
   b. V. 14b - we walk by faith, not by sight. We can’t discover the future.
10. Key ideas about wisdom from this section:
   a. Wisdom preserves us from problems, vv. 11-12
   b. Wisdom provides perspective, v. 13

C. Moderation Commended, vv. 15-22

1. V. 15 - if goodness isn’t rewarded in this life why be good?
2. V. 16 - being over-righteous is an obvious allusion to a pharisaical approach.
3. V. 17 - doesn’t mean be a little wicked, but be balanced in your life. We all are sinners (v. 20).
4. V. 18b-19a - note the tie in fearing God and wisdom.
5. V. 21 - an old saying is “no man is a hero to his valet”\(^7\)
6. Again, see the value in wisdom: \(^8\)
   a. Gives balance
   b. Gives strength - particularly the strength to resist criticism
   c. Gives insight - even to understand that we don’t understand self

D. Bad relationships, vv. 23-29
1. Main point here is finding the wisdom that Solomon finds so rare.
2. He finds that wise man is very rare, and a virtuous wise woman even harder to find.
3. V. 26 may reflect Solomon’s experience with so many women

E. Applications - chapter 7
1. Value in funerals
2. God’s “better than’s” - different from ours!
3. Wisdom has great worth.
4. Need for balance in our lives.

IV. CHAPTER 8

A. Setup:
1. Very cynical ending to chapter 7.
2. Now Solomon seems to shake off some of that depression.
3. There is some value to wisdom, living in a wise way.

B. Wisdom for dealing with the king and God, vv. 1-8
1. V. 1 - wisdom does brighten life, you don’t have to be perpetually gloomy.
2. V. 2 - please the king, as you have vowed to God.
3. V. 4 - the king doesn’t answer to you, something we need to remember with God.
4. Vv. 5-7 - we try to do the right thing at the right time, even if all the king’s purposes are past finding out.
5. V. 5b - Swindoll notes that good leaders just have the sense of when to do, what to do. Call in intuition or a sense of timing. The wise have it. \(^9\)
6. V. 8 - like with the king so it is with God. We don’t know it all, can’t know it all, and cannot stop the day of death. Wickedness won’t help you in that battle.

C. Evil rulers, vv. 9-13
1. Solomon here again sets forth some mysteries that just can’t be explained or understood.
   a. Mystery of unjust triumph, vv. 10-13
   b. Mystery of unfair consequences, v. 14
2. V. 9 - this seems to fit w/what goes after, does not seem connected to vv. 1-8.
3. V. 10 - there are wicked rulers who have made a show of religious observance who have big funerals and everyone forgets what they did that was wrong.
   a. Living Bible: “I have seen the wicked buried, and as their friends returned from the cemetery, having forgotten all the dead man’s evil deeds, those men were praised in the very city where they had committed their many crimes. How odd!” \(^10\)
   b. RSV has “I saw the wicked buried, and they came to the grave; and they that had done right went away from the holy place, and were forgotten in the city.”
   c. That is a different idea but can be supported by a different translation of one obscure word. \(^11\)
4. V. 11 - this has an effect on society of people deciding it is only wrong if they get caught.12
5. V. 12 - the servant of God deals differently.
6. V. 13 - NKJV has the comma right here, showing the idea that a shadow is a short time.
7. V. 14 - yet there is always frustration when evil is treated well and good suffers.

D. Life to be enjoyed as best as we can, vv. 14-17
1. The cyclical idea of contentment is returned to again.
2. Vv. 15-16 - some of these verses reminds us of the Sermon on the Mount. Seek God first and accept what comes from His hand.
3. V. 17 - the more one thinks the more one is puzzled by how life works but we have to be content with trusting in God even without complete understanding.

E. Applications:
2. Watch what you say before the authorities!
3. Evil rulers are often well remembered
4. The problem with America’s justice system, v. 11.
5. Sin is the not the answer, v. 12.
6. Be content, v. 15

V. CHAPTER 9

A. Approach: let’s remember all that Solomon has rejected so far.13
1. Optimism - seeing life through rose-colored glasses, pretending life is better than it is.
2. Pessimism - there are some good things in life.
3. Fatalism - you can do nothing to make anything better.
4. Materialism - getting stuff won’t make life better.
5. Epicureanism - more to life than partying.
6. None of these work, have substantive value, fill life up with meaning, satisfy us.
7. Solomon then presents some clear realities that we must grapple with, and that understanding give us real purpose in life. Watch for them!

B. Setup
1. These verses seem to be extending the thoughts of chapter 8.
2. We’ve just left a section on contentment, so yet again, Solomon considers how hard it can be to remain contented.

C. Enjoying life, vv. 1-10
1. V. 1 - the righteous and the wise try to act according to God’s plan (as suggested in 8:15-17), but they can’t always know that plan. They don’t know what awaits them, love or hate.
2. V. 2a - you cannot use bad or good events to determine if God loves you or hates you. Many ask “What have I done to deserve this?” when evil befalls them, but interestingly, few ask that when good comes.14
3. V. 2b - righteous or wicked, you are going to die. All die.
4. Should we then be evil? Since all die just live for this moment?
5. V. 3 - that is how many live.
6. V. 4 - but we can do better than evil while we are alive. We can find a better way to
live, something more meaningful, than just giving ourselves over to sin.

a. Remember, dogs in Solomon’s day were feared.

b. But even such an animal is in better shape than a dead lion.

7. Vv. 5-6 - this doesn’t teach that there is no final judgment (see 12:14) or that the dead are not conscious. It just means that when you are dead you can’t do anything else here.

a. Note again: there is very incomplete knowledge of the afterlife in the O.T.

b. People were not to try and discern the future or the afterlife with mediums (see Isa. 8:19-20). This meant they were dependent upon God and His revelation.

c. But God didn’t have that much to say on the subject of the afterlife. See hints at 2 Sam. 12:23 and Daniel 12:2-3.

8. Vv. 7-9 - so do the best you can to be content in this life.

a. V. 8 - be pure, not sinful.

b. V. 9 - enjoy the marital relationship.

c. V. 9b - part of God’s plan is work.

9. V. 10 - go after life full bore, don’t hold back. Once you are dead you can do nothing here. See 2 Cor. 5:10.

D. Applications - Solomon’s realities

1. The sovereign hand of God, v. 1

2. The certainty of death, vv. 2-3

a. “Death is the debt we all must pay.”

3. Evil and insanity reside in the human heart, v. 3.

a. We ask questions and get no answer.

b. “Why did you leave your family?”

c. “How could you do such a thing?”

4. There is hope for the living, v. 4

5. Be happy where you are, v. 7ff

E. Uncertainty and Inequity, vv. 11-18

1. V. 11 - the idea here is that contentment is tough because of the factor of improbability and randomness in life. See Matthew 5:45.

a. Idea of “chance” here isn’t exactly like ours.

b. Only used elsewhere in 1 Kings 5:4.

c. It is of meeting someone, as in “I chanced upon someone.”

2. V. 11b - we can’t just plow through life full blast, expecting our strength and wisdom to cut a perfect path. Life doesn’t work that way.

3. V. 12 - we cannot foresee every obstacle or difficulty.

4. V. 12b - “suddenly” is the key word. In a moment all of life can change.

5. This doesn’t mean give up, it just means we have to keep seeking God’s plan, keep searching for Him.

6. Vv. 13-15 - how frustrating for this wise man! Yet that is part of a self-centered world, especially since it was probably embarrassing for the city to be delivered by so weak a man.

a. Is this from 2 Samuel 20:14ff

F. Applications:

1. Can’t use life to determine God’s judgment on our lives.

2. Have to live life in light of death.

3. Be content.
4. Do whatever you do with all your strength, v. 10.
5. Expect the unexpected - human ability cannot guarantee genuine success, vv. 11-12
6. Wisdom delivers and has value, even when not recognized, vv. 16-18
   a. “Strength is more impressive yet less effective than wisdom.”
7. Human rulers can always outshout the wise and fools seem to prefer it that way.

VI. CHAPTER 10

A. Setup
   1. These are very difficult and in some ways confusing proverbs that seem to lack a unifying structure.
   2. Swindoll uses the idea of contrasts:
      a. Advantages versus disadvantages
      b. Humility and patience versus popularity and partiality
      c. Inevitable risks versus inexcusable stupidity.
   3. Wisdom is being extolled (9:18), so it is a good place to talk more of the wise way.

B. Wise relationships, vv. 1-7
   1. V. 1 - be careful that a few miserable actions don’t ruin your whole reputation. Think of Watergate or Chapaquiddick.
   2. V. 1b - we don’t use the term “folly” often but it means a lack of good sense, a lack of planning, failing to recognize the terrible consequences of one’s actions before doing them.
   3. V. 2 - NKJV weak. “A wise man’s heart directs him toward the right, but the foolish man’s heart directs him toward the left” (NASB).
   5. V. 4 - when in trouble think carefully and see if maybe you should apologize. The unwise just fly off the handle. Don’t just quit and go home mad.
   6. Vv. 5-7 - unfortunately, the best man is not always at the top. And he may name incompetent subordinates to important jobs and enjoy humiliating superiors. Politics is very capricious business. Maybe God just wants us to see how terrible being ruled by nothing but humans really would be.

C. Wise planning, vv. 8-11
   1. This section seems to say there are risks in life, but we have to take them.
   2. V. 10 - good preparation makes anything go better. Take the time to prepare.
   3. V. 11 - really tough.
      a. May mean that if you find yourself having to do something really dangerous just go ahead and do it. There’s no point in waiting till the snake has killed someone to go and try to charm it.
      b. Could mean that if the snake bites the charmer no one will pay to see that charmer! Think ahead — once the damage is done it is too late.

D. Wise speech and thought, vv. 12-20
   1. Quick setup:
      a. Just because we don’t know the future doesn’t mean we shouldn’t act with common sense.
      b. Much of this helps us see how fools act.
         (1) Remember, a fool in scripture isn’t a buffoon, joker or court jester.
         (2) Psalm 14:1 - the fool is the godless person who determines to do as he
pleases no matter what God thinks.

(3) Prov. 14:8 - fools lie
(4) Prov. 14:9 - fools mock at sin
(5) Prov. 10:23 - fools treat wickedness like it is a sport

c. We get some real straight talk here, but as Swindoll points out, we appreciate
that in our CPA, or doctor, or attorney!22

2. V. 15 - the fool is so busy arguing about abstractions that he can't find his way
home!
3. V. 16 - hard to translate. Could be “servant,” or “slave” or even “child.” The idea is
that someone very inexperienced comes to power and he lets everyone just party
and have a grand time.
4. V. 17 - self discipline on the part of leaders is very wise.
5. V. 18 - is this related to the leadership verses prior to it? Through laziness the
nation decays?
6. V. 19 - then rulers act like money can solve everything....

E. Applications:
1. One small act can destroy a reputation, v. 1
2. Every act has some risk to it, vv. 8-9
3. Preparation is the key to success, v. 10
4. Fools show themselves by what they say, v. 14
5. Fools show themselves by what they do, v. 15
6. Fools show themselves by procrastinating and using poor judgment, v. 18
7. The wise are careful in their thoughts and confidences, v. 20

VII. CHAPTER 11

A. Setup
1. Finally we approach the end of this great book.
2. We have learned that “there is nothing in this world that we can build on so as to
find satisfaction or the key to the meaning of things.”23
3. Solomon is telling us that while we cannot see all of God's plans we have to live as
contentedly and wisely as possible.
4. So here is more wisdom on how to live wisely.

B. Analysis:
1. V. 1 - interpreters differ here. Is this the idea of charity (not seen before in Ecclesi-
astes) or take a risk, but don’t put your eggs all in one basket? Swindoll says it
means instead of protecting, release yourself.24
2. V. 3 - we have to recognize the God-given laws of nature, and that there is nothing
we can do about them.
   a. Jerome interpreted the falling tree to be a dead person who’s destiny is this
fixed.25
   b. Some have taken this up but it just isn’t right.
3. V. 4 - if you wait for perfect weather you’ll never do anything.
4. V. 5 - parents don’t understand everything about how a baby grows, but they still do
all they can in a wise and commons sense way to raise the child. So with our
relationship with God — we need to do all we can to fulfil God’s purposes in our
lives even though we don’t understand everything about everything.
   a. Translation note: much controversy about v. 5 - “way of the wind” or “way of
the spirit.” The word is the same so it’s hard to tell.
b. This is probably the verse Jesus quotes to Nicodemus (Jn. 3:8).
5. V. 6 - there are risks in life, the future is unknown.
6. V. 7 - the joy of living should continue throughout life. Here we are given permission to enjoy life! “There are two things to aim at in life: first, to get what you want; and, after that, to enjoy it. Only the wisest of mankind achieve the second.”
7. V. 8 - days of darkness may not be death, just old age (see ch. 12).
8. V. 9 - if you can’t enjoy life when young something is seriously wrong. One rabbi said “Man will have to give account for all that he saw and did not enjoy.”
9. V. 9b - enjoyment of life is not to be total reckless abandonment of God and all that is right.

C. Applications:
1. Life has uncertainty about it.
2. But we cannot allow that to paralyze us into inactivity.
3. But it can still be enjoyed tremendously right now, wherever your are.
4. As we serve God.
   a. As Swindoll says “Be bold! Be joyful! Be godly!”
   b. Remember, though, that we want to let wisdom accompany action.

VIII. CHAPTER 12
A. Old age is coming, vv. 1-8
1. V. 1a - “remember” means “to act decisively for someone.”
   a. 1 Samuel 1:19 says “the Lord remembered Hannah.”
   b. Kidner has “to remember Him is no perfunctory or purely mental act: it is to drop our pretenses of self-sufficiency and to commit ourselves to Him.”
2. V. 1 - the thrill of youth fades. We need to all understand that we are going to grow older. It happens to all of us.
3. We need to pay attention to these thoughts on aging:
   a. A man born in 1900 could scarcely expect to live past middle age, average life span in 1900 was 47. For the father, born in 1940, he could expect to live to be 63. Yet his son, born in 1980, finds the average age stretching past 73.
   b. We need to make sure we age appropriately!
4. V. 2 - the rhythm of life is like the rhythm of the year - spring gives way to summer then fall then winter.
5. V. 3 - arms, hands and legs fail.
6. V. 3b - teeth and eyes fail.
7. V. 4a - “when the doors are shut” is difficult. It may be that this refers to loss of voice with loss of teeth.
8. V. 4b - seems to be a reference to not being able to sleep well, and then not being able to hear that well.
9. V. 5 - old people are afraid of traffic and heights.
10. V. 5b - almond trees is gray hair.
11. V. 5c - grasshopper is too heavy!
12. V. 5d - this seems to be a reference to sexual desire. NASB has “caperberry fails” — caperberry seems to be a sexual stimulant (Viagra?).
13. V. 6 - these figures are hard to nail down.
   a. May just be a picture of total collapse.
   b. Expositor’s Bible Commentary has silver cord as the spine, the golden bowl as the head, the pitcher the heart, and the wheel the stomach.
   c. Swindoll has the golden bowl as the head, the pitcher as the heart.
B. Conclusions, vv. 9-14
   1. V. 11 - this stamps divine inspiration on this, refutes those who want to make it all just cynicism or an advocacy of pagan hedonism.
   2. V. 12 - the warning here seems to be against going beyond what Solomon writes. V. 12a is literally “further than [or ‘from’] those, my son, be warned.”
   3. V. 13 - the idea is “duty” but it is literally “the whole of man.”

C. Applications:
   1. We need to be patient with some and let them “discover” as Solomon did.
      a. It took Solomon 12 chapters to get to the end.
      b. It may take others a while too.
   2. We will grow older but must still serve God.
   3. The two musts of verse 13:36
      a. We must take God seriously.
      b. We must do what He says.
   4. The summary: serve God and be happy. Be happy in serving God.
      a. “To be totally honest about it, happiness is really not that complicated. I’m convinced with all my heart that if my relationship with the living Lord is in place by faith in Jesus Christ, if I take His perspective and look at my life as it unfolds in the valleys as well as on the mountains — it’s amazing! — happiness accompanies me.”
   5. Now is the time to serve God. To wait is just vanity and folly.

IX. ENDNOTES:

1 Swindoll 175.
2 Expositor’s Bible Commentary 1172.
3 Swindoll 181.
4 Swindoll 183.
5 Swindoll 191.
6 Swindoll 200ff.
7 Expositor’s Bible Commentary 1176.
8 Swindoll 209ff.
9 Swindoll 229.
10 Quoted in Swindoll 241.
11 Expositor’s Bible Commentary 1179.
12 Expositor’s Bible Commentary 1179.
13 Swindoll 270ff.
14 Expositor’s Bible Commentary 1181.
15 Swindoll 256ff.
16 Swindoll 257.
17 Expositor’s Bible Commentary 1184.
18 Swindoll 277.
19 Swindoll 286.
20 Swindoll 291.
21 Swindoll 293.
22 Swindoll 299.
23 Expositor’s Bible Commentary 1188.
24 Swindoll 317.
25 Expositor’s Bible Commentary 1189.
27 Expositor’s Bible Commentary 1191.
28 Swindoll 316.
29 Swindoll 342.
30 Swindoll 349.
31 Stats from Swindoll 346.
32 Expositor’s Bible Commentary 1193.
33 Expositor’s Bible Commentary 1194.
34 Swindoll 356.
35 Expositor’s Bible Commentary 1197.
36 Swindoll 372.
37 Swindoll 344.