

Ecclesiastes: Life At The Crossroads



“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether it is good or whether it is evil.” (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)

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(The above outline is from *Nelson’s Complete Books Of Bible Maps & Charts*, pp. 190, 191)

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Part One: The Thesis That “All Is Vanity” (1:1–11)

I. Introduction of Vanity (1:1–3)

1. What do we know about the author of this book (1:1)?
2. What made the author qualified to speak on the subject of life?
3. Define the word “vanity” (1:2)
4. How are all things vanity (1:2)?
5. Explain the phrase “under the sun” (1:3).

II. Illustrations of Vanity (1:4–11)

1. What conclusion do we draw from Ecclesiastes 1:4–7?
2. Why is the “eye not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with learning” (1:8)?
3. In what sense is there “nothing new under the sun” (1:9)?
4. How could Ecclesiastes 1:10–11 lead one into despair?

Part Two: The Proof That “All Is Vanity” (1:12—6:12)

I. Proof of “All Is Vanity” from Experience (1:12—2:26)

A. Vanity of Striving After Wisdom (1:12–18)

1. What did the author of this book set out to find (1:13)?
2. What does “grasping for the wind” mean (1:14)?
3. What does the author lament in Ecclesiastes 1:15?
4. How did the author compare with those who preceded him (1:16)?
5. Why is there “grief” in “much wisdom” (1:18)? Explain.

B. Vanity of Striving After Pleasure (2:1–3)

1. How was the author going to test his heart (2:1)?
2. Why was laughter found to be “madness” (2:2)?
3. How could one “gratify the flesh” while at the same time guiding the “heart with wisdom” (2:3)?

C. Vanity of Great Accomplishments (2:4–17)

1. List the accomplishments of the author (2:4–8).
2. What limits did the author put on his quest for pleasure (2:10)?

3. As he looked on his accomplishments, how did the author view them (2:11)?

4. What depressed the author in Ecclesiastes 2:12?

5. What is the common end of both the wise man and the fool (2:14–16)?

6. Why did the author “hate” life (2:17)? What did he mean?

D. Vanity of Hard Labor (2:18–23)

1. What did the author give as another reason for “hating” life (2:18–19)?

2. According to the author, what does hard work bring (2:21–23)?

E. Conclusion: Be Content (2:24–26)

1. How should we view our “labor” (2:24)?

2. What is “the hand of God” (2:24)?

3. What does God give the good man? What does He give the sinner (2:26)?

II. Proof of “All Is Vanity” from Observation (3:1—6:12)

A. Immutability of God’s Program (3:1–22)

1. What do we learn from Ecclesiastes 3:1?

2. How does Ecclesiastes 3:2–8 affect the way you live?

3. Explain how God “made everything beautiful in its time” (3:11). Please give several illustrations from your life.
4. How has God “placed eternity in their hearts” (3:11)?
5. According to Ecclesiastes 3:13, how should we view the fruits of our labor?
6. What does God do that men should fear (3:14–15)?
7. What else did the author see “under the sun” (3:16)?
8. Why does God “test” men (3:18)?
9. What do men and beasts have in common (3:19–20)? Does this cheer you up any?
10. What conclusion does the author reach in Ecclesiastes 3:22?

B. Inequalities of Life (4:1–16)

1. What brought sorrow to the author in Ecclesiastes 4:1?
2. Why did the author praise “the dead who were already dead, more than the living who are still alive” (4:2)?
3. What causes envy (4:4)?
4. What is “grasping for the wind” (4:6)?

5. Who is discussed in Ecclesiastes 4:8?

6. Of what value is a friend (4:9–12)?

7. What is the “threefold cord”? What is it composed of (4:12)?

C. Insufficiencies of Human Religion (5:1–7)

1. How should we “go to the house of God” (5:1)?

2. How can you recognize a fool (5:3)?

3. What type of vow is discussed in Ecclesiastes 5:4–5?

4. How can “your mouth cause your flesh to sin” (5:6)?

5. What is found in a multitude of words (5:7)?

D. Insufficiencies of Wealth (5:8–20)

1. Who watches over “high officials” (5:8)?

2. How is “the king himself served from the field” (5:9)?

3. Will the lover of silver be satisfied with silver (5:10)? Explain.

4. How could the “abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep” (5:12)?

5. How could riches be “kept for their owner to his hurt” (5:13)?
6. What are we going to leave this earth with (5:15)?
7. According to Ecclesiastes 5:18–20, what does “God give” unto man? List these items.

E. Inescapable Vanity of Life (6:1–12)

1. What evil does the author mention in Ecclesiastes 6:2?
2. A “stillborn child” is better off than what man (6:3)? Why?
3. What one thing can the labor of man not satisfy (6:7)?
4. Explain what “the poor man” has (6:8).
5. List some of the “many things that increase vanity” (6:11).

Part Three: The Counsel for Living with Vanity (7:1—12:14)

I. Coping in a Wicked World (7:1—9:18)

A. Wisdom and Folly Contrasted (7:1–14)

1. What is the value of a “good name” (7:1)? How does one acquire a “good name”?
2. Why is “the house of mourning” better than “the house of feasting” (7:2)?
3. Why is “sorrow better than laughter” (7:3)?

4. Why is it better to “hear the rebuke of the wise than for a man to hear the song of fools” (7:5)?
5. How does a bribe debase the heart (7:7)?
6. What are we warned against in Ecclesiastes 7:10?
7. What does one need with his inheritance (7:11)?
8. How does “wisdom give life” (7:12)?
9. What should we remember in the “day of prosperity”? What should we remember in the “day of adversity” (7:14)?

B. Wisdom of Moderation (7:15–18)

1. What example of vanity is found in Ecclesiastes 7:15?
2. What does it mean to be “overly righteous” (7:16)?

C. Strength of Wisdom (7:19–29)

1. What does wisdom give to the wise (7:19)?
2. What lesson is taught in Ecclesiastes 7:21?
3. What did the author desire to seek out (7:25)?
4. What did the author find that was “more bitter than death” (7:26)?

5. Who are we to blame for a lack of wisdom (7:29)?

D. Submit to Authority (8:1–9)

1. What is another benefit of wisdom (8:1)?

2. Why are we to obey “the king’s commandment” (8:2)?

3. What will obedience to the king usually bring (8:5)?

4. How much power do we have “in the day of death” (8:8)?

E. Inability to Understand All God’s Doing (8:10–17)

1. What happens when justice is delayed (8:11)?

2. What comfort can you find in Ecclesiastes 8:12?

3. Why did the author commend “enjoyment” (8:15)?

4. According to Ecclesiastes 8:17, what are men unable to find?

F. Judgment Comes to All Men (9:1–6)

1. What do we learn from Ecclesiastes 9:1?

2. What “evil under the sun” did the writer find in Ecclesiastes 9:2–3?

3. What is meant by the phrase that it is better to be “a living dog is better than a dead lion” (9:4)?

4. What does it mean that “the dead know nothing” (9:5)?

G. Enjoy Life While You Have It (9:7–12)

1. What are we told to do in Ecclesiastes 9:9? Compare this with Proverbs 5:15–21.

2. Why is “the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favor to men of skill” (9:11)?

H. Value of Wisdom (9:13–18)

1. What did the author see in Ecclesiastes 9:13–15?

2. Why is wisdom better than strength (9:16)?

3. Why would one “despise” the “poor man’s wisdom” (9:16)?

II. Counsel for the Uncertainties of Life (10:1—12:8)

A. Wisdom’s Characteristics (10:1–15)

1. What does a “little folly” do to one who is respected for his wisdom (10:1)?

2. How does a fool prove he is a fool (10:3)?

3. What evil did the author see in Ecclesiastes 10:5–7?

4. What is the lesson of Ecclesiastes 10:8–10?

5. Why does the “labor of fools” weary them (10:15)?

B. Wisdom Related to the King (10:16–20)

1. What is the danger of a child-king (10:16)?

2. What would make the land “blessed” (10:17)?

3. How does “money answer everything” (10:19)?

4. Why should we “not curse the king” even in our thoughts (10:20)?

C. Wisdom Related to Business (11:1–6)

1. What does the expression “cast your bread upon the waters” mean (11:1)?

2. What lesson do we learn from Ecclesiastes 11:3–4?

3. What things are we ignorant of (11:5)?

4. In view of Ecclesiastes 11:5, what should our conduct be (11:6)?

5. What are we to learn from Ecclesiastes 11:7–8?

D. Wisdom Related to the Youth (11:7—12:8)

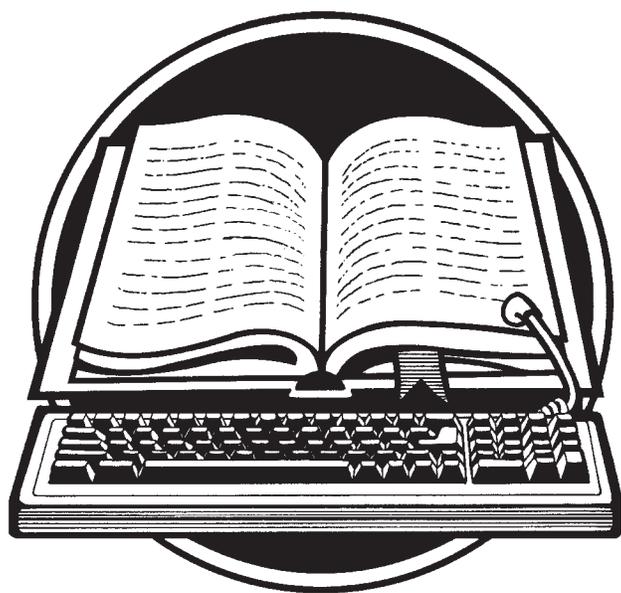
1. How should the young view life (11:9)?

2. All of life is overshadowed by what event (11:9)?

3. Why are “childhood and youth” vanity (11:10)?
4. Why should the young “remember their Creator” (12:1)?
5. Identify the items described in Ecclesiastes 12:2–5.
 - a. “the keepers of the house”
 - b. “the grinders”
 - c. “those that look through the window”
 - d. “the almond tree”
6. What point is made from the golden bowl which is broken, the shattered pitcher and the broken wheel (12:6)?
7. What happens after death (12:7)?

III. “Fear God and Keep His Commandments” (12:9–14)

1. What had the author sought out and pondered (12:9)?
2. How are the “words of the wise” like goads (12:11)?
3. What is the purpose of life (12:13)?
14. What will happen at the judgment (12:14)?



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