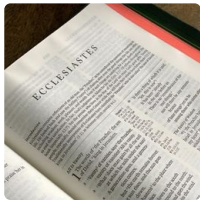


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Ecclesiastes 8 - 12



Ecclesiastes - Steve Gregg

In Ecclesiastes 8-12, Steve Gregg examines the themes of mortality, the uncertainty of life, and the importance of seeking God in all aspects of life. He emphasizes the fleeting nature of human accomplishments and the need to enjoy simple pleasures while also keeping in mind the ultimate judgment before God. Gregg also discusses the concept of chance and how it relates to God's sovereignty, urging listeners to trust in God's plan rather than relying solely on personal wisdom or strength. In all, he stresses the importance of prioritizing Godliness and seeking fulfillment in Him above all else.

Transcript

We now come to the eighth chapter of Ecclesiastes. Hopefully we can finish the book in this session. Who is like a wise man? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? A man's wisdom makes his face to shine, and the sternness of his face is changed.

I counsel you, keep the king's commandment for the sake of your oath to God. Do not be hasty to go from his presence. Do not take your stand for an evil thing, for he does whatever pleases him.

Apparently this means the king does whatever he wants to do. This is talking about the sovereignty of a king. We don't have much experience with that in our society.

We haven't had a king in this society for hundreds of years. But certainly most nations did, all through history. And essentially he talks about keeping the king's commandment for the sake of your oath that you've made to God.

Apparently when kings were sworn in, there was a covenant struck between the king and the people. And just like there is when you swear in a present, they put their hand on the Bible and they make some kind of an oath, take an oath of office or whatever. So there must have been something like that.

So that the people pledged before God that they would honor their king. And probably he made some kind of an oath as well. So keep your oath to God about this.

And he says, don't take a stand for an evil thing because the king does whatever pleases him. An evil thing would probably be a rebellion against the king. So don't stand up against the king, even if there's others who are doing so.

Don't take a stand with them because the king has sovereignty. He says, where the word of the king is, there's power. And who may say to him, what are you doing? He who keeps his command will experience nothing harmful.

And a wise man's heart discerns both time and judgment, because for every matter there is a time and judgment. Though the misery of a man increases greatly, for he does not know what will happen. So who can tell him when it will occur? No one has power over the spirit to retain the spirit.

And no one has power over the day of death or in the day of death. There is no discharge in that war. And wickedness will not deliver those who are given to it.

Now, the statement that the word of the king, in the word of the king, there's power. And who may say to him, what are you doing? This is something, again, that we don't understand. In our society, we question our leaders.

We can even vote them out of office. We can even impeach them if they do wrong. That's not the case in a kingdom.

I mean, there can be a revolution, an illegal revolution. But in our society, we have legal ways of getting rid of a bad ruler. Or if we disagree with him, you know, finding somebody else to be in his place.

That's legal in our society. That was not legal in ancient societies. You had to either be part of a rebel band and take your chances in making war with the king or put up with it.

A king, by virtue of his position, can do what he wants to do. He's sovereign. Now, the value of this particular information to us is, of course, that we have a king in God, in Jesus.

Jesus is our king, and that's something that we have no frame of reference for in our own society. In the Bible, when the Bible said that Jesus is the king, the word king meant something to people because they had kings. They knew what a king was.

Our society has lost touch with what a king is, what the privileges of a king are, or what lords are. We don't have slaves and masters anymore, either. And so those things that were very common in society in all times prior to modern times, every society had kings.

Every society had slavery and masters and so forth. So when the Bible said that Jesus is Lord, or when it says that he's the king and has a kingdom, people understood that almost intuitively because they had a frame of reference for what a king is, what a lord

is. We don't have that in our society, so we need to be reminded that a person, when they have a king, they don't question the king.

He is the absolute authority. He's sovereign, and that's what it's saying here. In verse 9, All this I have seen and applied my heart to every work that is done under the sun.

There is a time in which one man rules over another to his own hurt. Being in charge isn't always to your advantage. I don't know what circumstances he has in mind.

He's a ruler. He probably had, in addition to having privileges, has responsibilities and is the target to other kings. If you go out to war, obviously the enemy looks for the king.

As when Ahab and Jehoshaphat went out against the Syrians and Jehoshaphat was dressed as a king, Ahab was not. And because Jehoshaphat was clearly the king, the enemy targeted him until they realized that he wasn't the king they were looking for. But the king, he's got privileges, but he's also got enemies.

He's got dangers that come with it. There's times when people rule over other people and it's not to the advantage of the ruler. Maybe more than one kind of circumstance has presented itself in Solomon's life that he was thinking of.

We don't know any specifics because he's not giving any. Then I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of holiness. And they were forgotten in the city where they had so done.

This also is vanity. Apparently these are people who backslid. Or they'd gone from the temple, gone from the fellowship of the believers.

And they were wicked and they died and they were buried. And they were not remembered well. Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

This is a great verse actually. This is a verse worth memorizing. People think they're getting away with evil because they don't get punished immediately.

They can go on and on and on in their evil and they feel like they're getting away with it and they become more established in their evil. The habit becomes more ingrained. They become more emboldened, more encouraged in it so that evil becomes a way of life for them.

Because the sentence against their evil work isn't immediately executed. I think that societies have done better than ours in some cases that would more quickly execute a sentence on a criminal than we do. There's people who've been on death row for decades.

Now obviously someone's going to point out, well, the delay gives opportunity for more

evidence to come up in their favor if they happen to be innocent. Many people have pointed out that DNA evidence now has allowed many people on death row their innocence to be discovered and be released. Well, they should never have been condemned in the first place.

Obviously if they're innocent, there could not possibly have been two witnesses to their crime. If you don't commit a crime, there won't be two witnesses to it. And you can't condemn a man biblically except on the strength of two witnesses.

So if you have two witnesses who saw it happen and he gets executed, then that's justice. But for a criminal simply to sit on death row year after year after year after year and then either die waiting or actually be put to death eventually, that's not criminal justice. That's the delay of justice.

And when justice isn't executed speedily, people just don't feel that there's an urgency about doing the right thing. Because the sentence isn't executed speedily, people get encouraged to do the wrong thing. Reuben slept with his father's concubine.

Seemed to get away with it. Didn't seem like he got judged for it. But much later in his life, when his father was handing out the patriarchal blessings for the 12 sons, Reuben was passed over.

He was the oldest son, but he didn't get the birthright because of that indiscretion earlier in his life. Same thing with Simeon and Levi. They went out and they slaughtered the people of Shechem, a terrible deed, but they didn't suffer anything for it.

Not initially anyway. Eventually they found out that they did suffer for it because they also were passed over for the birthright many more years later. These guys, they were evil men.

They did evil things and they thought they got away with it because there was no immediate punishment. And they continued to do evil things, including selling their brother into slavery and other evil things they did. Because they had chosen a path of evil and seemed to get away with it.

Well, they didn't get away with it. They found out much later they didn't get away with it. But that was not obvious to them.

Shimei cursed David and was essentially guilty of treason. And yet he didn't get punished immediately. So he got cocky and casual and he was told if he left Jerusalem he would be put to death.

But three years later he just left Jerusalem casually to get some slaves who had run away. He found that he was put to death. The sentence was not executed speedily and he got careless about his behavior.

So Solomon is saying that a speedy execution of sentences is actually to be preferred if we want to keep people from getting established in their evil behavior. He says, though a sinner does evil a hundred times and his days are prolonged, in other words, if he doesn't get punished immediately, yet surely I know it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before him, but it will not be well with the wicked. For nor will he prolong his days, which are like a shadow, because he does not fear before God.

So here we have Solomon expressing his current sentiments as he sometimes does. In this book he sometimes expresses what he was thinking at an earlier time. And he says so.

I was thinking this. I contemplated that. Other times he says what he really believes is true now.

And this is one of those cases. The person who fears God ultimately will do better than those who don't, even if there's no immediate punishment to those who do not fear God. There is a vanity which occurs on earth that there are just men to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked.

Again, there are wicked men to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity. So, you know, people don't always get what they deserve.

People who are righteous end up getting the punishment that should go to a wicked man. And wicked men sometimes get the rewards that should go to the righteous. So I commended enjoyment, because a man has nothing better unto his son than to eat, drink, and be merry.

For this will remain with him in his labor for the days of his life, which God gives him unto the son. Same conclusion he keeps coming back to. Notice he says I commended.

This is past tense. This is how I was thinking back then. When I saw this vanity, it made me think that I should just eat, drink, and be merry as much as I can get away with.

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

So even if you lose sleep over it, even if you spend night and day using all the hours that you have of your life to search out, you can't ever know everything. You can never discover all the works of God. And a man with an insatiable thirst for knowledge finds that a bit frustrating, because people sometimes say, well, I wish I knew the Bible like you do.

I think, why? Why would you want to know the Bible like I do? Why don't you want to know the Bible like the people who I wish I knew the Bible like they do? Why make my level the standard? There's another level beyond that. Anyone should say, I wish I could know everything there is to know about the Bible, not just I know as much as this person. We don't compare ourselves with each other.

If you hunger for the knowledge of God and for the knowledge of God's word or for the knowledge of anything in reality, truth, you realize there's far more there than anyone has apprehended yet. Paul said we, including himself, know in part. And therefore, we can only hope to gain a larger part of knowledge.

We can never know all knowledge, not even a tiny fraction of one percent. So this is frustrating to a man who wants to know it all, who wants to know all that he can know. Well, he finds out there's limits to what he can know.

He could stay up night and day, lose sleep, he says, but you'll never find out all there is to know. So you have to be satisfied with what you can know and no doubt make the best use of it. For I considered, chapter 9, all this in my heart.

Now, this statement, I consider all this in my heart, needs to be applied to all that is about to be said. Many people take some of the statements in chapter 9 and make them doctrines. And we have to remember that he's talking about a past time in his life when these are the things he thought.

It was the same period of time when he commended enjoyment and said there's nothing better than to eat, drink, and be married. This is not the counsel of a godly man. This is the musings of a man who is backslidden.

He says, I considered all this in my heart so that I could declare it all. That the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God. People know neither love nor hatred by anything that is before them.

Everything occurs alike to all. One event happens to the righteous and the wicked, to the good, the clean, and the unclean, to him who sacrifices and to him who does not sacrifice. As it is good, so is the sinner.

Excuse me, as is the good, so is the sinner. And he who takes an oath as he who fears an oath. As it doesn't really matter what course you take, the same thing is going to happen to you.

Of course, he's talking about death and he goes into that more. But the idea is I observe that even if you worship God or if you don't worship God, if you offer sacrifices or don't offer sacrifices, if you're good or bad, if you take oaths or you don't take oaths, it doesn't matter. The same thing is going to happen.

You're not going to escape death. And since he didn't know what happens after death, it just seemed like total vanity. You know, you do good.

What good did it do to you? You die and it's all over, right? That's what he believed at this time. He says, this is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that one thing happens to all. Truly, the hearts of the sons of men are fully are full of evil.

Madness is in their hearts while they live. And after that, they go to the dead. For him who is joined, but for him who is joined to all the living, there is hope.

For a living dog is better than a dead lion. A lion is much more magnificent than a dog, but when a lion's dead, it's actually worse off than the dog if the dog's still alive. And by extension, a living peasant would be better than a dead king.

Solomon was going to be a dead king. He knew it. He's like a lion in his lifetime, but he'll be dead someday and the poorest peasant who's still alive will have the advantage over him then.

For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing. And they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, their hatred, their envy have now perished.

Nevermore will they have a share in anything done under the sun. Well, he doesn't seem to know about the resurrection. Although it's technically true that they won't have a share in anything done under the sun.

Since in the resurrection, when they do come into what is their share, there will be no more sun, moon, or stars to be under. According to the book of Revelation, there will be new heavens and new earth at that time. And if it's literal, the description, then we are to assume there won't be a sun anymore after that.

Whether it's literal or not is debatable, perhaps. But when he said the dead don't know anything at all, and their love and their hate and all that has perished, there's nothing more of it. He seems to be holding the view that when someone's dead, the lights go out, there's no consciousness anymore, they don't know or think or feel anything.

I don't believe that the Bible supports that notion. There are Christians who find evidence for that particular viewpoint, not only here, but also in other parts of scripture. And they feel that the Bible does teach a soul sleep, and that when you die, you really are unconscious until the resurrection.

Now Solomon didn't even seem to know about the resurrection. At least he didn't make reference to it. Those who believe in soul sleep today, who are Christians, believe that Solomon is quite right about the state of the dead.

That they don't know anything, they're unconscious, it's just like you're completely out. But they also believe that when Jesus comes back, he'll raise the dead, because the Bible does teach that Jesus will raise the dead at his second coming. The intermediate state between death and resurrection is that which they're disputing against perhaps the traditional view of Christianity, which is that when you die, your spirit is alive, your spirit continues to live on in the presence of God.

To be absent from the body is simply to be present with the Lord. That's the way that most Christians have understood the intermediate state, as it's called, the state between death and resurrection. Soul sleep is an alternative view to the intermediate state.

And many times those who believe in soul sleep will quote Solomon in this verse, the dead know nothing at all, as if that proves their point. Now I will say there are other passages much more suited to proving their point than this. There are some passages that one could arguably say sound like they teach something like soul sleep.

I don't believe they do, but I can see why some people would read them that way. This passage, however, is not useful for that purpose, because Solomon is not teaching us reliable doctrine here. He's cataloging the thoughts that he had when he was a cynic away from God, when he didn't know what happens after people die.

He didn't even seem to know about the resurrection, and modern believers in soul sleep believe in that. Solomon seems to be just saying when you die, that's the end. There's nothing more.

The lights go out, the power's down, there's no brainwaves, there's no consciousness anywhere, there's no soul that's gone on to be surviving and living somewhere else. It's just all over. And that person will never more have a share in a life under the sun, or we might say a life on earth.

So he says, Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already accepted your works. Let your garments be white, and your head lack no oil. Now, garments be white is not talking about being righteous, as in, say, the book of Revelation talks about white garments symbolically.

This is just talking about wear clean clothes, anoint yourself, comb your hair. Anoint your head with oil means, you know, groom yourself normally. And just enjoy life, because that's, you know God has accepted that, because he's given it to you.

You don't know what he's going to give you tomorrow, but what you have is what he's given, so what you've got is what he approves of. It's what he's assuming at this point, which is not necessarily a safe assumption, but that's the best he can do. Ecclesiastes 9.9 says, Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life, which he has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity, for that is your portion in life, and in

the labor which you perform under the sun.

So even though he counts life to be vanity, at least you don't have to endure it alone, if you have a wife whom you love. Of course, if you marry someone that you don't love, or who doesn't love you, that obviously is not to be preferred over singleness, but if you have a wife that you love, that's one of the greatest consolations, he's saying. Life is vain, but actually, when you have someone to share it with who you love, a loving relationship, that is something that is a portion that he considers to be a gift from God, and you can share your labors with somebody else.

He had earlier talked about how two are better than one, though he had not necessarily been speaking of marriage, yet he speaks of it better to have a companion than not to, in chapter 4 verses 9 through 12, the advantages of not being alone, the advantages of having a partner in life. Of course, this does apply to marriage, but it wasn't primarily marriage he was talking about, but now he mentions marriage that way, you have a wife that you love, live happily with her, live joyfully with her, there's not much more that can be pleasurable in life than that, and he doesn't see any other, he doesn't see any transcendent value in marriage necessarily, like we do from the New Testament, but he does see that as among the pleasures available to a man in the course of living out of his vain life. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.

For there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you're going, do it while you can. You must work while it is day, the night's coming, no one can work after that. The lights will go out and you'll be able to do no further work after you've gone to the grave, so do it all now that you can.

I returned and saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favor to men of skill, but time and chance happen to them all. Now this is certainly different than what he said in Proverbs, because he seemed to always say that your wisdom will prolong your life and make you wealthy, and foolishness will have the opposite effect. Now he says, well, I'm certainly not seeing that as a universal thing anymore.

Sometimes people are stronger, but they lose the race or lose the battle. Sometimes people are wise, but they aren't wealthy. It seems like chance really finally dictates the outcomes.

Now, we don't believe that, and I don't know if there is such thing as chance. Some people say there's no such thing as chance. They say everything is ordained by God.

This is a meticulous, providential view of God's sovereignty. Calvinists, for example, often will say something like this, that there's no such thing as chance. Everything happens because God has ordained it to happen.

Other Christians don't necessarily think that's so. All Christians know that God ordains some things to happen, and that he intervenes to make those things happen. But how many things, we don't know.

How many things he actually intervenes in to make them happen, and how many he leaves to natural processes to take their course, is hard to say. If there is some extent to which God does leave things to run their course, then maybe something like what we call chance is a factor in some outcomes. However, nothing that really pertains to our good will be left to chance if we're trusting in God.

The hairs of our head are numbered, and not one hair of our head will be lost. He's paying attention to the details. If our lives are in his hands, if we're trusting him, we can be sure that he will at least work all things together for good.

Even if it is the case that some things happen by chance, they will not happen without his being able to exploit those things and turn them around for our good. It may be a more comforting thought to think that everything really comes directly from the hand of God. I personally have felt that at least since the Bible teaches that God can prevent anything he wishes to prevent, because what could stop him from doing that? If he wished to prevent something, he has every power to do so.

Therefore, whatever happens, even if it happened, let us say, through chance occurrences, it happens because God doesn't stop it from happening. He may see those chance occurrences, he may see those dominoes falling and know where the last one is going to hit me, but he can stop it if he wants to. Or not.

He can do what he wants to do. Therefore, even if it is true that some things happen not so much by his ordination, but by something like what we would call chance, it is not as if our well-being is still left entirely to chance. Our well-being is left to the will of God and what he permits to happen or what he does not permit to happen.

This business of chance is a philosophical concept that really tweaks the mind when you try to get into how God governs the universe and what chance really means. Anyway, Solomon at this point is thinking that everything is left to chance. If good men are rewarded, it is not because of the inevitable results of their good deeds, it is simply chance.

They might as easily have not been rewarded. Everything happens by chance. For a man does not know his time like fish taken in a cruel net, like birds caught in a snare.

So the sons of men are snared in an evil time when it falls suddenly upon them. So a man may be wise and on the road to success and riches, but an evil time may come upon them like a trap on a bird or a net catching fish. They are just going along minding their own business and doing what fish are supposed to do, what birds are supposed to

do, and suddenly their whole world is interrupted by this thing that comes upon them.

And so also, by chance, a man who is doing all the right things may have tragedy come into his life when an evil time suddenly comes upon him. This wisdom I have also seen under the sun, and it seemed great to me. There was a little city with few men in it, and a great king came against it, besieged it, and built a great snares around it.

Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city, yet no one remembered that same poor man. Then I said, Wisdom is better than strength. Nevertheless, the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard.

Words of the wise spoken quietly should be heard, rather than the shout of a ruler of fools. Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good. Now we don't know what this city was that he's describing.

He apparently actually saw this happen in his lifetime. Some city was delivered from an overwhelming invasion by the counsel of a wise man who was a poor man, and therefore because he was poor he was not really remembered after his death, but he had saved the city. Well, no doubt there are cases like that.

We don't know of this specific case where this was. We do know of a case where a rebel against David had run into a city, and Joab and the armies of Israel had surrounded the city, and they were going to destroy the city to capture this man, and a wise woman in the city said, Hey, what are you going to destroy this city for? And he said, We're here to catch this rebel. And she said, Well, let me see if we can take care of that.

And so she counseled the people of the city to capture the rebel and cut off his head and throw it over the wall to Joab, and she saved the city by her counsel. Gruesome counsel, but better him than them, you know. And so we do know of cases where a wise person giving counsel and negotiating and mediating can bring peace where there would be disaster.

Wisdom is better than weapons of war. It's better to have wise counsel than necessarily large armies because it's possible to save a city by wisdom. However, he's saying if that wisdom is delivered by a person who's poor and therefore not respected in the community because he's a poor man, well, it didn't do him any good in the long run.

He's despised. He's forgotten. However, he said it's still better.

Still better to have wisdom. It says, I like verse 17, Words of the wise spoken quietly should be heard rather than the shout of a ruler of fools. A lot of people, in order to be heard, in order to have influence, to convince people, they'll raise their voices and they'll shout.

But if their points are not valid, their shouting is not going to have an impact that it

should anyway. It shouldn't have an impact. A person who speaks quietly and has the truth should be listened to, even if he's not trying to use dramatic emphasis to make his point.

His quiet wisdom should be heard rather than the loud shouts of somebody whose statements are not valid, who's a fool and what's coming out of his mouth is foolish. Probably everybody has heard this story, at least all Christians who've been listening to sermons for very long because it's a commonly told sermon illustration. It is said that there was a janitor in the church who, when he was cleaning up around the pulpit, found the pastor's sermon notes that had fallen on the floor after the sermon and the pastor had left.

He picked up the sermon notes and saw that the pastor had written instructions to himself alongside the points of his sermon about gestures and things like that that he should join with the points he was making. At one point he had written in the margin, he said, this is a weak point, pound the pulpit and speak loudly. I don't know if that really happened, the story's often told, but it certainly could have happened.

Judging by the way some people preach, if they've got a really weak point they get really emphatic because they may be a ruler of fools but they shout loudly and they think people will understand or will receive what they say. Sometimes it's true, sometimes people will listen to the person who's shouting the loudest, not the person who's got the most intelligence or correctness in his speech. In chapter 10 it says, dead flies putrefy the perfumer's ointment.

Now that apparently means that when the perfumer is making his pot of perfume, if some flies land in it and die, that little tiny bit of corruption or pollution in their ointment makes the whole thing stink. I don't know very much about what kind of perfume they had, but he must have known that this was true. He knew a lot about everything.

And he says, and cause it to give a foul odor. So does a little folly to one respected for wisdom and honor. So if a person has a reputation for being honorable, then it doesn't take very much folly on his part to kind of spoil his whole reputation.

And this is something that is very frightening. Frightening to a person in ministry, someone like myself. Cause I've done some foolish things.

Fortunately not all of them are known widely. But, you know, if people respect you as a spiritual leader, and especially if they put you on some kind of a pedestal and then some foolishness that you've done is known, it may be the smallest part of your life. It may be something that happened in a moment, but it spoils the whole thing, the whole picture, the whole reputation.

And Solomon knew that. Of course he had more than a little folly because he ran after

other gods, but he was certainly reputed for wisdom internationally. But then his foolish choices later on spoiled his whole reputation.

A wise man's heart is at his right hand, but a fool's heart is at his left. Apparently the right hand and the left represent different moral things. A wise man's heart is expressed by good actions, no doubt is what he means, and a fool's heart is expressed by bad actions, the actions of a left hand.

Even when a fool walks along the way, he lacks wisdom, and he shows everyone that he is a fool. A fool doesn't only seem to be foolish when he's expounding, even when he's just doing ordinary things, he's just always foolish. Even when he's just walking in the way, his foolishness is somehow shown because foolishness pervades his whole being.

If the spirit of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your post, for conciliation pacifies great offenses. Apparently, leaving your post would mean if you're a government official, and your superiors have gotten angry with you. Instead of fleeing, stand at your post and seek to bring conciliation.

In other words, if you run away from the ruler, you'll be a fugitive for the rest of your life. Better to stand up and defend your position and hopefully bring about dissipation of that anger of that ruler, so you don't have to become a fugitive. Conciliation pacifies great offenses.

There's an evil I've seen under the sun, as an error proceeding from the ruler. Folly is set in great dignity, while the rich sit in a lowly place. I have seen servants on horses, while princes walk on the ground like servants.

This obviously seems like a wrong set of circumstances to him, although I'm not sure where he saw this. This isn't very often the case. He who digs a pit will fall into it, and whoever breaks through a wall will be bitten by a serpent.

He who quarries stones may be hurt by them. Solomon knew a lot about quarries, because he built big stone buildings that required quarrying huge stones. Apparently, he's seen people hurt in the quarries, I can imagine.

And he who splits wood may be endangered by it. If the axe is dull and one does not sharpen the edge, then he must use more strength. But wisdom brings success.

Now there's a lot of, these are like proverbs in the book of Proverbs, and they are observations about life that, you know, in any activity, any routine activity, there may be an accident. And you need to be careful, not to, when you're splitting wood, not to be injured by flying chips. Of course, we have safety goggles for that kind of thing nowadays.

But Solomon had seen that people in the ordinary activities of life, those things that are

not normally considered dangerous, even those can at times present hazards and people can become injured. Now the axe being dull happens because someone is too lazy to keep it sharp. They have not maintained their equipment.

And so they've taken the easy way, but then they end up having to do harder work because a dull axe doesn't split wood as easily. You have to use more force using a dull axe than a sharp axe. So actually, it's a false economy of your time to neglect the maintenance of your equipment.

You may save time at the particular time that you should be doing the work of maintaining it, but then you're going to have more work to do later on. So keep on top of those things. The serpent may bite when it is not charmed.

The battler is no different. The words of the wise man's mouth are gracious, but the lips of a fool shall swallow him up. The words of his mouth begin with foolishness and the end of his talk is raving madness.

It starts out foolish and only gets worse as he speaks, apparently. A fool also multiplies words. No man knows what is to be.

Who can tell him what will be after him? The labor of a fool, or the labor of fools, wearies them and they do not even know how to go to the city. Well, these are hyperboles, apparently, about how foolish, how stupid some people are. They can't even find their way to the city, which shouldn't be hard to find since it had big walls.

It's that huge thing over there, you know, just beyond your farmland. It's got those big walls. That's the city over there, but a fool can't even find it.

It's like the sloth who is too lazy even to pull his hand out of the dish and bring the food back to his mouth. He's put his hand out, but that expended all the energy he's willing to expend. He's a slothful man.

He's not even going to pull his hand back to his mouth from the bowl. These are hyperboles. Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child and your princes feast in the morning.

Blessed are you, O land, when your king is the son of nobles and your princes feast at the proper time for strength and not for drunkenness. Because of laziness, the building decays, and through idleness of hands, the house leaks. A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes merry, but money answers everything.

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

Now these ideas are, some of them a little interesting, I suppose. He talks about how

buildings decay when they're not maintained. It's similar to the axe needing to be sharpened once in a while.

In order for things to keep working as they should, there needs to be human work, human effort put into maintenance. It's an observation, obviously, of what we call the second law of thermodynamics, that because of the fall, things don't just stay nice. They don't stay organized.

They don't stay in good repair. Things, even people, even our bodies, they lose ground if you don't put out effort to change them or to maintain them. And so he sees this.

He doesn't have the name for it that we have for it, the second law of thermodynamics, but he sees the principle. He sees the tendency, and he probably thinks this is part of what makes everything vain, too. You know, you can build great buildings, as he did, but if you don't keep working on them, they decay.

You have to always keep working. Your work is never done, in other words. You can't just do something and leave it and it's going to be fine forever.

You've just got to keep working on it. You never really get something done and can just figure, okay, no more work. I've done all the work I have to do on this.

That business about don't curse a king even in your thoughts, don't curse the rich for a bird in the air will carry your voice, we get that expression, a little bird, he told me. You know, something when you heard something that people think you shouldn't have heard, a little bird told me. It's the same.

That was something that reminds me of a story we have not yet studied in 2 Kings 6 about how the king of Syria was making plans to ambush the king of Israel, but his ambush plans kept being thwarted because Elisha the prophet knew, by inspiration, by revelation, he knew the plots of the Syrian king that he made privately, and he'd warned the king of Israel so the king of Israel would go another route and miss the ambush. And the king of Syria thought there must be someone among his people who were his enemies, saying, which of you are on the side of the king of Israel? Which one of you are revealing to him my plans? He keeps finding out my plans. And one of his advisors said, well, none of us.

He said, it's Elisha the prophet. He tells the king of Israel the things you say in your bedchamber. In other words, you better be careful in your pillow talk with your wife because everything you say is being reported by Elisha the prophet.

He's getting it from somewhere. A little bird must be bringing it to him or something. But the things you say privately can be exposed.

Jesus said, that which is spoken in secret should be shouted from the housetops. And so

basically, Saul and the same, guard your thoughts and your words, even those that are done privately. You may think that it's going to remain private.

Not necessarily so. It's amazing how news travels. It almost seems like a bird must have carried it sometimes because you can't think of anybody else who spread the rumor.

But when you speak something, it's out there. And who knows how far it will travel. Chapter 11, cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days.

Give a serving to seven and also to eight. For you do not know what evil will be on the earth. Now apparently what he's saying here, cast your bread upon the waters, is that, you know, we've heard that expression a lot.

But does anyone even know what it means? I'm not sure I do. But I think it means this. I'm not sure what the imagery of casting bread on waters is about.

It seems like if you throw bread on the water, you're feeding the fish. You know, I don't know what it's about, casting bread on waters. But he does seem to be saying that you should give from what you have.

Give portions to six or seven people. Because you don't know what evil will be on the earth. If you try to hoard it to yourself, you may not have enough for yourself after all.

So just give it away, and eventually it'll come back to you. Casting bread on the waters presumably means, like, if there's a river going by and you throw your bread, well, you're just getting rid of it, you're never going to see it again. But in fact, surprisingly, it will come back to you.

And you will be rewarded for what you give out. And so the Bible teaches in the New Testament that, you know, if you give, it'll be given unto you. And it seems that what he's saying is share what you have.

Release it from your hand. Toss it out where you'll never plan to see it again. If you throw it on the waters, it's gone.

But maybe not. God will bring it back to you if it's his will in due time. It may not be a permanent loss after all.

He says, if the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth. If a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it shall lie. He who observes the wind will not sow.

He who regards clouds will not reap. It's hard to say exactly what the reference to the clouds and the trees are referring to. He may be comparing them to certain kinds of people.

If clouds are full of rain, they're going to burst out with rain. Just like some people, when they're full of an opinion or full of thoughts or full of emotion, it's going to come pouring out of them. When a tree falls to the north or the south, it's going to just lie there.

It's not going to go anywhere else. Maybe he's thinking like the slothful man. Once he lies down, his position is established.

He's not going to be getting up. I don't know if those are what he's thinking or if he's got some other principle in mind when he talks about these obvious phenomena. It doesn't take a wise man to see these specific points, but it may take a wiser man to figure out what he's saying about them.

But he says, he who observes the wind won't sow. If you're going out to sow seeds, you're like, ah, it's too windy today. I think the seeds will just be carried off and scattered.

They may be carried off beyond my property, out to the neighbor's property. I'll wait until a day that's not so windy to throw my seeds. He says, or if he considers the clouds, he won't reap.

It's time to reap, but it looks like it might rain today. I think I'll stay in today, maybe reap another day. In other words, if a person is looking at adverse circumstances only, he'll always find an excuse not to do his work.

It's like the fool or the slothful man in Proverbs who says, there's a line in the streets. I can't go out today. There might be a line out there.

Not that there really is one, but there could be. You never know. A line might be in the streets today.

I think I heard of one about 400 years ago. Someone saw a line in the streets, so this might be the next time. So I'm going to stay indoors.

The idea is making excuses not to work. You can always find something to prevent you from doing what you're supposed to do and to do what you want to do instead. As you do not know what is the way of the wind, and Jesus said that too to Nicodemus, or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child.

How mysterious that must have seemed to ancient people. It is to us, although we've analyzed all the stages of the embryo and we know how cells divide and we can explain some of those things, it's still mysterious. But how mysterious it must have seemed to the ancients to see that, you know, first there's no baby in there, and then a baby comes out with its bones and skeleton all formed.

How did that happen? Without any scientific knowledge, they would have really been

perplexed by that if they contemplated. He says, as you don't know the way of the wind, you don't know how bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, so you do not know the works of God who makes all things. That's essentially the point that Jesus made with Nicodemus.

The wind blows whithersoever it will. You don't know where it comes from. You don't know where it's going, but that's how it is with the work of God in the heart of a believer when they're born of the Spirit.

In the morning sow your seed. In the evening do not withhold your hand, for you do not know which will prosper, either this or that, or whether both alike will be good. Apparently do all the work you can.

You never know which of your works are going to produce something. Maybe they'll all be productive. Truly the light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun.

But if a man lives many years and rejoices in them all, yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. All that is coming is vanity. Now, days of darkness can mean calamity, or it could even mean death.

Therefore, the light would refer to times that are positive times, enjoyable times, the time when you're healthy and alive, the time when things are going well. That's sweet, that's pleasant, but don't forget, there's the other kind of times too. Now, sometimes you almost want to forget that for a while.

You know, it kind of sours your enjoyment of the present. Good times, if you're always thinking, well, this could end, this is going to end. But, nonetheless, maybe if that little tinge of negativity is there in your mind, it may still tend to temper things, temper your enjoyment and temper your behavior, knowing that the times are not always going to be like this.

Wisdom takes that into account. Remember, it's better to be in the house of mourning than the house of feasting. It's better to go to funerals than to parties, because funerals are where all people will end up, and it's good to contemplate that in advance, to make sure that when that time comes for you, you will have done in your lifetime what you want to have done.

Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and in the sight of your eyes, but know that for all these God will bring you into judgment. Therefore, remove sorrow from your heart, and put away evil from your flesh, for childhood and youth are vanity.

Now, when he says, Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you, and walk in the ways of your heart, he may be saying this more or less ironically, rather than just giving this as advice, because he says, Yeah, go have a great time. Do

whatever you want. Just remember, you're going to be judged for all this, you know.

So maybe you shouldn't do all that you want. Maybe you should be more careful about what you choose to do with your youth. A young person is inclined to think of himself as immortal, and though he may know intellectually that someday he'll get old and die, it's just unreal.

It's just surreal. It's not something he takes into account as a reality that governs his thinking and his behavior and his choices. And he's saying, You know, young men, go ahead, have a great time.

But, no, the time is coming when this is going to be ended, and you're going to have to give account for it. So, maybe when you're having a good time, you should be careful about how you're having a good time. He says, Remember now, Chapter 12, your Creator and the days of your youth.

Before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, I have no pleasure in them. The days will come when you're too old to have the pleasures that you had when you were young. So, serve God while you have the best of your powers and the best of your opportunities.

While the sun and the light, the moon and the stars are not darkened, and the clouds do not return after the rain, in the day when the keepers of the house tremble and the strong men bow down, when the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look through the windows grow dim, when the doors are shut in the streets and the sound of grinding is low, when one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of music are brought low, also when they are afraid of height and of terrors in the way, when the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper is a burden, and desire fails, for man goes to his eternal home, and the mourners go about in the streets. Now, this section, verses 2 through 5, did that make any sense to you? Have you ever read it in a modern paraphrase? It's kind of interesting. This is a poetic description of old age.

He says, serve God while you're young and energetic, because the days will come when everything's falling apart. And he means the parts of your body. But it's not obvious because of the poetic language he uses.

I've actually pulled up several paraphrases from different... I've got here the New Living Translation, the Good News Translation, and the Message. Of course, I don't recommend these as Bibles for Bible study, but they all reflect what Bible scholars know about this passage and what Psalm is really talking about. Let me read you, for example, what the New Living Translation says, and read it along in the New King James so you see what phrases are being paraphrased here.

Beginning at verse 2. Remember him before the light of the sun, moon, and stars is dim

to your old eyes, and the rain clouds continually darken your sky. Remember him before your legs, the guards of your house, start to tremble, and before your shoulders, the strongmen, stoop. Remember him before your teeth, your few remaining servants, stop grinding, and before your eyes, the women looking through the windows, see dimly.

Remember him before the door of life's opportunities is closed and the sound of work fades. Now you rise at the first chirping of the birds, but then all their sounds will grow faint. Remember him before you become fearful of falling and worry about danger in the streets, before your hair turns white as an almond tree in bloom, and you drag along without energy like a dying grasshopper, and the caperberry no longer inspires sexual desire.

Remember him before you near the grave, your everlasting home, when the mourners will weep at your funeral. Now that's actually... I guess it continues, didn't it? We want to know this stuff there. Let's look at what the Good News Translation says about it.

And again, read along in your own version. You can see how they're paraphrasing what's there. Verse 2 in the Good News Translation says, That is when the light of the sun, the moon, and the stars will grow dim for you, and the rain clouds will never pass away.

Then your arms that have protected you will tremble. Now, the Good News Translation, or the New Living Translation thought this was a reference to the legs, the protectors, the defenders. But here it's the arms.

Your arms that have protected you will tremble, and your legs, now strong, will grow weak. The Good News Translation thought what it's referred to as the legs, they thought it was the shoulders. Nonetheless, they see them as the loss of strength in different parts of the body.

Your teeth will be too few to chew your food. That's the grinders that are few. And your eyes too dim to see clearly.

Your ears will be deaf to the noises of the streets. You will barely be able to hear the mill as it grinds, or music as it plays. But even the song of a bird will wake you from sleep.

You will be afraid of high places, and walking will be dangerous. Your hair will turn white, and you will hardly be able to drag yourself along. And all desire will be gone, meaning sexual desire.

It says we're going to our final resting place, and then there will be mourning in the streets. And then the message, which I do not ever recommend as a translation, but sometimes it illustrates what a person thinks it means. And this is like the others.

This is from the message, the same verses. It says, in old age your body no longer serves you so well. Muscles slacken, grip weakens, joints stiffen.

The shades are pulled down on the world. You can't come and go at will. Things grind to a halt.

The hum of the household fades away. You are awakened now by birdsong. Hikes to the mountains are a thing of the past.

Even a stroll down the road has its terrors. Your hair turns apple blossom white, adorning a fragile and impotent matchstick body. Yes, you're well on your way to eternal rest, while your friends make plans for your funeral.

Anyway, these paraphrases obviously deviate quite considerably from the actual text, and from each other in their interpretation, but they all kind of reflect the same general theme. That what he's talking about here in poetic terms is the loss of virility, the loss of eyesight, the loss of strength, and so forth. And so I wanted to read those because they are so different than the way it reads here, but no doubt have captured the basic thought that Solomon is getting across.

Don't give God the scraps of the end of your life when you've got little you can do. While you're young and strong and have opportunities, those are the times to give to God. And so many times people think just the opposite.

They think, well, I'll just do what I want with my youth, and then when I'm old, then I'll give my life to God because they're thinking of getting saved as just getting a ticket to heaven. What they don't realize is that when you really genuinely get saved, you will wish that you had served God all your life. You'll have nothing but regrets if you truly repent.

Now see, if a person doesn't really repent, if they're just trying to get a ticket to heaven, and so they say the sinner's prayer, do whatever they think they're supposed to do, get baptized on their deathbed or something, have the holy water sprinkled on them. If there's no real repentance, then they'll feel like, I got away with it. I served myself all my life, but then I get to all this in heaven too.

But you really don't get heaven too because true repentance brings a person to a point of true regret over every wasted opportunity, over everything that was done that wasn't pleasing to God and wasn't serving God's interest. If a person really waits until they're old and then really repents and really does get saved, they'll have nothing but grief over the years that they wasted because they'll realize how much virility, how much strength, how much opportunity they had that they could have used for God and that was intended by God to be used for Him, but was just squandered. And there'll be nothing but regret about that.

So he says, use those opportunities while they're still here. The time will come when they aren't here anymore. You can't do anything anymore.

You're too old. And that's not the time to start thinking about trying to serve God. Then you're just giving God the ragged end of your life.

It's not much of an offering of a living sacrifice to put on the altar for Him. Verse 6, Remember your Creator before the silver cord is loosed or the golden bowl is broken or the pitcher shattered at the fountain or the wheel broken at the well. Then the dust will return to the earth as it was and the spirit will return to God who gave it, which is something he wasn't so sure of when he was musing earlier in the book.

But he believes that now. Vanity of vanities, says the preacher, all is vanity. Now we have this epilogue, and moreover because the preacher was wise and he still taught the people knowledge, even though he thought everything was vain, he still was observing things and still teaching people.

Yes, he pondered and sought out and set in order many proverbs. The preacher sought to find acceptable words and what was written was upright, words of truth. At one point in his life he was writing according to the truth.

Other times he was kind of drifting and speculating. The words of the wise are like goads. An ox goad is what prods, it's a cattle prod.

A goad is a cattle prod, basically a sharp stick in those days. Now we have electric ones, probably like stun guns used to make cattle move, but they had a sharp pointy stick as a goad and they'd poke the cow in the butt to get it to move. And so that's how the words of the wise are to us.

They kind of goad us along, they prod us in the right direction. The words of scholars are like well-driven nails. Given by one shepherd.

Strange mixture of images, shepherds giving nails that are driven. I mean, you'd think they'd be like a carpenter, not a shepherd. The idea here is apparently that God is the shepherd of Israel.

And the words of the wise goad people in the right direction and fasten them or build them up like a building is being built up. Their words are like the nails constructing something. Your life is being built up by compliance with the words of wise men, is apparently what's said.

But these words ultimately come from God, from the shepherd, who's directing us all. And further, my son, be admonished by these, of making many books there is no end, and much study is wearisome to the flesh. Not just to the mind, by the way, this is what he's observing.

It's not just that my mind gets tired from it, my body gets tired from it. It's amazing how mental activity can make you physically exhausted. You obviously are burning energy

when you're studying and thinking.

And he had noticed that. Solomon wasn't probably athletic. He probably, as a king, was probably pretty lazy and pampered and all of that.

But he found that he exerted himself in his thinking, in his studying, his wide reading. He said his flesh got tired from that kind of thing, just like if he'd done physical exertion. So it says, 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. So in the end, after many speculations along various other lines, he's tentatively reaching other conclusions than this, thinking that labor is vain, being too righteous is a waste of time, there's no reckoning after death, it's just the end.

After he's thought of all those things, he's come back around to the conclusion he's reached now, is that, you know, I think being with God, fearing Yahweh, he doesn't say Yahweh, but he's no doubt talking about Yahweh, fearing God and keeping his commandments, that's really all that we're here to do, which is different than what he said throughout the book. He says, you know, there's nothing better than just eat and drink and enjoy the fruit of your labor, just a secular philosophy of get the most out of life you can, you only live once, grab all the gusto you can. He says, well, no, that's not really what I think now.

I think the most important thing is that you fear God and you keep his commandments, that's really what your duty is, and you'll be glad you did because he's going to bring every work into judgment, the good and the bad. So, he comes out with a message that we can approve of in which the Bible would agree with in general, but in the course of getting there, he went through many speculations, many philosophical musings that were not things that we could or the rest of the Bible could approve of, and that is no doubt the purpose of his writing, to show that the things he was thinking in those times are the things people tend to think when they're not thinking in God's terms, when they're confining their thinking to considerations that relate to earthly things under the sun. And so, he has given us a diary or a documentation of his pilgrimage to find out what he should have found out earlier, and that is that the whole duty of man is just to fear God and keep his commandments, and he's let us know all the mistakes that he made along the way in trying to find meaning and satisfaction in life, and the opportunities he had were second to none, and yet he found that all was emptiness apart from this final conclusion.

It's not all emptiness if God is going to bring every work into judgment and reward good and evil, then nothing is empty, everything is full of potential, everything is full of significance, because every work will be evaluated and rewarded. And so, not all is emptiness when you consider God, when you fear God and keep his commandments.

That's the conclusion of the matter.

Sometimes as we study the book of Ecclesiastes, we might wish he had reached the conclusion more quickly, but better late than never. And so we're finished with the book also, with our consideration of it.