



# Ecclesiastes

*Does Life Have Meaning?*

## Youth and Old Age

### ***Ecclesiastes 12:1-8***

In chapter 12, Solomon continues the instruction of the young that he started in the previous chapter. His very strong admonition is: “Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth ...” In that period of life where one is strong and healthy it is easy to become self-absorbed and to feel self-reliant. Qoheleth’s advice is to remember the God who is Creator. This aspect of God’s nature shows him to be completely sovereign and should impress on even the young that they must be thankful to and trust in God.

The relationship of man to his God should be cultivated in the days of youth. No one is assured they will live to reach old age, but attitudes, conduct, and faithfulness cultivated in the days of youth and vigour will benefit a man for a lifetime.



It is impossible to defy the marching deterioration of the ageing body. In verse one these days are called “evil” because they bring with them pain, illness, a weakening body and mind, and eventually death. Solomon speaks of the “days” of youth and contrasts them with the “years” of older life. Youth is fleeting and the wise man will use those days to remember his Creator and to begin his life of service to God.

**1. Why is it so beneficial to develop the right relationship with God at an early age?**

**2. Why does Solomon say there is no pleasure in the evil days that come after youth?**



In verses 2-7 Solomon describes some of the problems one may experience in old age in metaphors that make old age sound quite unpleasant. In verse 2, old ageing is described as a coming storm. In Scripture light is symbolic of life and here the light is slowly extinguished. Note that the light gets progressively dimmer as the sun, the moon, and then the stars are darkened. This storm is one that does not pass, but clouds return immediately after the rain. The troubles of getting old are like reoccurring storms which confront time and time again.

The ailments in verses 3 and 4 are metaphorically described. The “keepers of the house” trembling alludes to palsy or tremors which occur with many diseases and neurological problems. The “strong men” which are “bent” are the legs which become weak and unable to remain straight. The “grinders” are the teeth which are decreasing in number. Those who “look through the windows are dimmed” referring to failing and dimming eyesight.

The “doors on the street are shut” most likely describes the loss of hearing for one who can barely even hear the grinding of grain in the house. The aged man rises at the “sound of a bird” illustrating a lack of sound sleep. The “daughters of song” which are “brought low” describes a once melodious voice which now has lost its beauty.

In verse 5, the elderly person is afraid of heights or steep inclines. There is the fear of falling or losing breath. There are obstacles in every path that create fear because any slip could be tragic. The almond tree blossoming is the greying of the hair and speaks of a decaying body. The grasshopper who drags himself along is a metaphor for the gait of an aged person. The locust hatches in the early spring in Palestine and has no wings, so its progress is clumsy and slow.<sup>1</sup> Desire fails indicating a loss of energy, exuberance, and interest in the things associated with this life. Desire fails because death is near and man goes to his eternal home. Here Qoheleth is not speaking of the after life, but rather the grave to which each man is destined. While this elderly man awaits death the mourners prepare to make their way into the streets to loudly lament his passing.

### **3. Why does Solomon paint such a negative picture of old age?**



Death is pictured in verses 6-7 as a silver cord that is snapped, and a golden bowl that is broken, a pitcher that is shattered, and a wheel is broken. These illustrations show one useful objects that can no longer serve their purpose. The oil is lost from the golden bowl extinguishing the flame, the pitcher is broken releasing the water it once held, and the wheel is broken so that it can no longer draw water from the well. In physical death the body begins to decay so that it returns to dust. The man's spirit goes to God who will serve as judge.

There have been medical advances in recent decades so that many people see who would have been blind in early ages, they hear when they would have been deaf in times past, they often keep their teeth to the grave, they walk when before they would have been immobile, and many live longer than they would have without the medications, treatments, and surgeries which are available in today's world. Still, man has not and will not avoid growing old and facing the grave.

There is often pain, disability, and decline in many areas of our physical and mental lives. It is important that we begin to build our relationship with our Creator at the earliest possible age.

### **4. How can we impress upon young people that life is short and that they should remember their Creator?**

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, James E. *The Wisdom Literature and Psalms*. (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 1996), 809.

## 5. How should a coming death and judgment affect our thinking?

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### Concluding Thoughts

#### ***Ecclesiastes 12:8-14***

Solomon begins his conclusion the way in which he began Ecclesiastes. “Vanity of vanities,” “all is vanity.” Life under the sun is *hebel*. It is a vapour that is soon gone. Life has been shown to be unpredictable with pain, injustice, and perplexity throughout.

Again our author refers to himself as “the Preacher” (*Koheleth*) and claims to be a man of wisdom. This we know to be true of Solomon since God granted him great wisdom. Solomon was also a teacher giving wise instruction after careful investigation. Note he weighed, studied, and arranged his material. Many of the proverbs are recorded for us here in Ecclesiastes as well as in the Old Testament book of Proverbs.

When we read Ecclesiastes it may seem discouraging on the surface, but that was not Solomon’s intent. In fact in verse 10 Qoheleth says that he wants to find words of delight. The words that he wrote were upright and true. They are both the words of Solomon’s heart and words of truth from the Lord. Ecclesiastes is challenging, helpful, and relevant for believers of all ages.

## 6. How can we find delight in the words of Ecclesiastes?

The words of the wise, like Solomon’s words in Ecclesiastes are like “goads” which was a rod used for poking and driving oxen. The words create some pain and promote a response. They are designed to move one in the right direction.



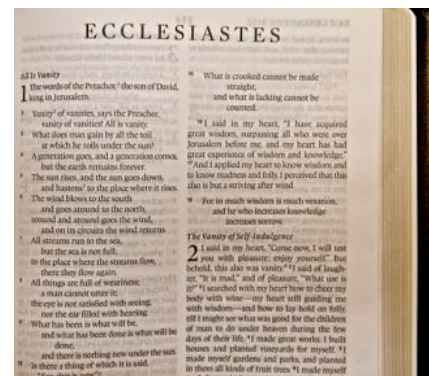
The “collected sayings” (words of Ecclesiastes) are like nails that are fixed which give stability and strength. Nails penetrate and the words of Ecclesiastes also penetrate deep into the heart of the reader. These words are arranged and ordered in a way to bring the greatest result.

## 7. How can goads and nails be helpful?

The words of Ecclesiastes are given by “one Shepherd.” The shepherd of course is God who is the one who inspired all Scripture. This is why Qoheleth can confidently say that these words are upright and true because they ultimately are words from God. This is another way of saying Ecclesiastes is an inspired writing.

Books and words outside of Scripture do not have the same legitimacy of truth as does God's inspired words. There are endless numbers of books written claiming to contain wisdom and truth, but only the Word of God can be trusted to always be true in every way. Studying every truth claim in every book outside the Bible will wear one out as every detail must be weighed, deciphered, and analysed.

## 8. Describe the usefulness and limitations of books outside the Bible.



Solomon's conclusion after all his great investigation into every facet of life, undertaken with every resource, and with great energy, and enthusiasm is this: "All has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man."

That man should fear and obey God is the conclusion of Ecclesiastes. Fear here means a reverent respect and honour of the one who is Creator and Lord. The two commands to fear God and keep his commandments cannot be separated for it is impossible to truly fear God without obeying him. Likewise a man will not obey God without the respect that comes seeing God the Creator as awesome and holy in nature.

Solomon has written time and time again that man cannot know the future and much of what happens under the sun is outside of man's hands. There is one who created all, knows all, and has all power. He is awesome and is to be respected and obeyed.

To fear and obey God is the whole duty of man. Some translations say this is the duty of every man. Whichever translation is correct, both are true. The God who made all, knows all, and sees all. He will judge man after evaluating everything that man does in public and in secret.

## 9. Describe how a man is to fear God.

## 10. What commands does God expect man to keep?

Here are some of the main lessons in chapter 12:

1. A person should begin to remember and obey God as a youth.
2. Ageing brings man difficulties, so obedience to God should begin early in life.
3. The words of Scripture are inspired by God and are true. They contain words to teach us, rebuke us, and spur us to faithful living.
4. Nothing is more important than fearing and obeying god.