

Ecclesiastes

Part Five: wisdom for life

May 5, 2024

This spring, we are studying the Book of Ecclesiastes. In Ecclesiastes, old King Solomon looks at life from a human perspective and concludes, "Everything is meaningless!" The Hebrew word translated *meaningless* is *hevel*. Solomon uses *hevel* as a metaphor to describe how life is temporary, puzzling, and without real value. Ecclesiastes is a dark, depressing book, but it is in the Bible to teach us that life does not have meaning without God. Today, we will enter the final section of Ecclesiastes (Chapters 7-12), where Solomon—the wisest man in history—gives us suggestions for living amid *hevel*.

1st – Solomon shows us wise living is better than foolish living. 7:1-14

- In Vs. 1–4, Solomon says we should try to die with a good reputation.

Solomon says a good reputation is more valuable than costly perfume. Then he says the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth. His point is we should try to die with a good reputation. *What do you need to do to die with a good reputation?* Live each day mindful of your death.

- In Vs. 5–10, Solomon tells us how to live wisely.

Solomon says we need to listen to criticism from wise people – not the praise of fools. We also need to be honest in our business dealings and choose patience over pride, self-control over anger, and contentment over complaining. *How do you do this?* You remember the matter is better than its beginning.

- In Vs. 11–12, Solomon tells us that wealth is better with wisdom.

A better translation of Vs. 11 is "*Wealth is better with wisdom.*" Solomon is teaching that a wealthy, wise person will accomplish more and live longer than a wealthy, foolish person (Eccl 7:17; Prov 13:14).

- In Vs. 13-14, Solomon tells us to live wisely in both the good and bad times.

Solomon finishes this section by telling us to accept (consider) God's unchangeable actions. We cannot control when hard times strike, but we can control how we respond to hard times (James 1:2-5).

- In Vs. 15-18, Solomon tells us to avoid two extremes.

Solomon says he has seen good young people die and wicked people live long lives. He then urges us not to consider ourselves too righteous or wise to die young. Righteousness or wisdom does not guarantee a long life! On the other hand, Solomon tells you not to sin because God could kill you for practicing sin (1 Cor 11:30). In Vs. 18, Solomon tells us that the way to avoid both extremes is to fear God.

2nd – Solomon tells us about the value and limitations of wisdom. 7:19-29

- In Vs. 19-22, Solomon says wisdom is valuable, but people are sinful.

First, Solomon declares that a wise person is stronger than ten town rulers. Why? Everyone on earth sins (Romans 3:10, 23). Listen to what people say about each other; you will see that we are all sinners.

- In Vs. 23-26, Solomon says wisdom has limitations.

After saying wisdom is valuable, Solomon tells us that it is always distant and difficult to find. Even Solomon, with all his God-given wisdom, could not understand all that exists, how God manages it, and what purposes He has in mind. He searched for the “reason [scheme] of things” but did not find answers to all his questions.

Solomon’s quest for understanding life led him to be snared by many foreign women who enticed him away from the Lord and into the worship of heathen gods (1 Kings 11:3–8). The way to escape this evil woman is to fear God and seek to please Him.

- In Vs. 27-29, Solomon says humanity has turned to follow many schemes.

After trying to use his wisdom to understand everything in life, Solomon concluded that only a few people were living for God. Solomon then quickly notes that God did not cause humanity’s universal sinfulness. God created us perfect, but we chose to follow our own schemes and not please God.

Takeaways from Ecclesiastes Chapter Seven:

1. Wise people are mindful of death.
2. Wise people see the end before they begin.
3. Wealth is better with wisdom.
4. Wisdom is valuable, but people have turned to follow their own schemes.