

Ecclesiastes Chapter 12

Verses 1-7: Describe old age and are actually addressed to the youth (verse 1). The gradual darkening of the heavenly bodies represents declining vitality and joy. The approaching clouds represent the storms of old age (verse 2). The keepers of the house are the arms; the strong men are the legs; the grinders are the teeth; and those that look out of the windows are the eyes (verse 3). Growing old is further compared to the decline of a great estate (verse 4).

The almond tree is a reference to the white hair of old age; the crippled grasshopper pictures the halting gait of the elderly; and desire that fails many be the loss of sexual desire (verse 5). Finally, life itself in all its preciousness is cut off. Death is pictured as the irreversible shattering of a golden bowl when cut from the end of a silver cord and the similar smashing of a pitcher or wheel (verse 6). After death, the spirit returns to God for judgment and the body returns to dust.

Ecclesiastes 12:1 "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them;"

We were discussing the problems of youth in the last lesson. Now Solomon is bringing answers for those problems.

Remember you are God's property, so serve Him from the start of your years, not the end of your years, when service is very limited.

The earlier a person comes to the Lord, the fewer problems he, or she, will have. Sometimes, I believe it is easier for the youth to come to the Lord. The average age of those who come to Christ in America today is 16.

My own personal view is that as soon as a person is aware of sin, he is old enough to consider Jesus as his Savior. For some, it is very early. Some people are old before they realize their need for a Savior. The age that you come is unimportant, if you are sincere.

When a person comes to the Lord at an early age, the Lord helps him through those difficult years, when the lust of the flesh is so great. God left us a roadmap to get to heaven with. It is His Bible.

If we study the Bible, we have no difficulty in determining what is sin, and what is not. In our later years, it seems that the lusts connected with youth fade away. In each person's life, there is an end. We all grow old and die.

(In verses 2-6), Solomon uses the imagery of aging, incorporating elements of a dilapidated house, nature and a funeral procession to heighten the emphasis (of 11:7 – 12:1).

Ecclesiastes 12:2 "While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain:"

In these last lessons Solomon has used the expression "under the sun". Perhaps this is speaking (in verse 2), of the time when life is no more. In the later part of our lives, the sun and all other natural lights are dimmed to us. Our vision is not as good, as it was in our youth.

Youth is typically the time of dawning light, old age the time of twilight's gloom.

Ecclesiastes 12:3 "In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened,"

All of this is describing the later years of a person's natural life. The strongest man will be bowed, if he lives long enough. The tremble could be for weakness, or for fear of his last days.

The hands and arms which protect the body, as guards do a palace, shake in old age. The legs, like supporting pillars, weaken. The Grinders are the teeth and those who watch through the windows are the eyes.

In the United States, when a person reaches 65 he stops working every day. He stays at home a great deal, usually and sometimes stands at the window looking out contemplating his past life. It is not as bright as it was in his youth. Life is fading away. His vision becomes weaker as he nears the end of life on this earth.

Ecclesiastes 12:4 "And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of music shall be brought low;"

"Doors": Lips that do not have much to say. "Sound of the grinding" refers to little eating, when the sound of masticating is low. "Rise up" indicating light sleep; "daughters of music": The ear and voice that once loved music.

The sounds that go with normal life will not be as loud and distinct as they had been, because the hearing is gone. This speaks, also, of a time when the person, who is aged, does not desire the music and parties that went with youth.

Ecclesiastes 12:5 "Also [when] they shall be afraid of [that which is] high, and fears [shall be] in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets:"

The aged become fearful of heights. They are not as sure of themselves, as they were in their youth. There is fear of falling and breaking something. We do not mend as quickly as we did in our youth. Fear is not the only reason. Our strength is not what it was when we were young.

Fear, in the verse above, is speaking of a time when we are not as self-confident as we were in our youth. The almond tree blooms turn from pink to white when the season is about over. This, probably, symbolizes the grey hair that goes with age. The grasshopper is associated with pestilence. Even the lowly grasshopper becomes a problem, when we are old.

"Desire" is speaking of the lusts of youth which fade away with age. Man "goeth to his long home" is speaking of heaven. The mourners are there, because the time of his funeral is near.

(Verses 6 and 7), are speaking of death.

Ecclesiastes 12:6 "Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern."

The silver "cord being loosed" and the "bowl being broken" is speaking of the life of man being over, or poured out. Age has cut him off from life. The water of life, now, does not flow.

Ecclesiastes 12:7 "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."

The flesh of man returns to the dust.

Solomon recalls (Gen. 2:7 and 3:19), as he contemplates the end of the aging process. The sage ends his message with the culmination of a human life.

“The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away” (Job 1:21; 1 Tim. 6:7).

Genesis 3:19 "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou [art], and unto dust shalt thou return."

The life within the flesh is the spirit of man. It lives on.

Genesis 2:7 "And the LORD God formed man [of] the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."

1 Corinthians 15:44 "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body."

The spiritual body rises to heaven.

This gloomy picture of old age does not negate the truth that old age can be blessed for the godly (Proverb 16:31), but it does remind the young that they will not have the ability to enjoy that blessing of a godly old age and a life of strong service to God if they do not remember their Creator while young (verse 1).

Ecclesiastes 12:8 "Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all [is] vanity."

Solomon is speaking of the natural side of life being vanity. Solomon sees the frailty of mortal things. What is born of the flesh is flesh. Flesh returns to dirt, or nothing.

Solomon is described as a wise man who taught what is upright and true, not as a cynic, pessimist, skeptic, and so on. From one shepherd, who is God, is the origin of the book's teaching.

Ecclesiastes 12:9 "And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, [and] set in order many proverbs."

The wisdom of Solomon was for him to judge his people justly. He used proverbs and parables to teach the people how to lead a better life upon the earth. His goal was to help his people. He has certainly done that, and in so doing taught us as well.

1 Kings 4:32 "And he spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five."

(In verses 9-14), come Solomon's final words of advice.

Ecclesiastes 12:10 "The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and [that which was] written [was] upright, [even] words of truth."

Solomon was committed to the truth. The words he brought were not his own, they were placed into his mind by God, when he received the gift of wisdom.

1 Kings 4:29-30 "And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that [is] on the sea shore." "And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt."

His wisdom was not of this world, it was a gift from God.

Ecclesiastes 12:11 "The words of the wise [are] as goads, and as nails fastened [by] the masters of assemblies, [which] are given from one shepherd."

"Goads ... as nails": Two shepherd's tools are in view: one used to motivate reluctant animals, the other to secure those who might otherwise wander into dangerous territory. Both goads and nails picture aspects of applied wisdom.

"One Shepherd": True wisdom has its source in God alone.

God has not answered every problem of life, but He has commanded man to live joyfully, responsibly, and wisely. Finally, the controlling factor of all of life should be the fear of God, that is, submission to God and His revelation. The certainty of divine judgment demands it.

Proverbs 1:7: "The fear of the LORD [is] the beginning of knowledge: [but] fools despise wisdom and instruction".

Solomon's final word on the issues raised in this book, as well as life itself, focus on one's relationship to God. All of the concern for a life under the sun, with its pleasures and uncertainties, was behind Solomon. Such things seemed comparatively irrelevant to him as he faced the end of his life. But death, in spite of the focused attention he had given to it in Ecclesiastes, was not the greatest equalizer.

Judgment/retribution is the real equalizer as Solomon saw it, for God will bring every person's every act to judgment. Unbelievers will stand at the Great White Throne judgment (Rev. 20:11-15), and believers before Christ at the Bema judgment (1 Cor. 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 5:9-10). When all is said and done, the certainty and finality of retribution give life the meaning for which David's oft-times foolish son had been searching. Whatever might be one's portion in life, accountability to God, whose ways are often mysterious, is both eternal and irrevocable.

Ecclesiastes 12:12 "And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books [there is] no end; and much study [is] a weariness of the flesh."

This is very true today. There are hundreds of thousands of books written just on the Bible subjects. There would be literally millions on all subjects. Even these Bible studies will add to that number.

In the flesh, mankind is constantly trying to learn new things in books. All gaining of knowledge takes much work. The continuous study of books becomes wearisome, as we grow older.

But, books written on any other subject other than God's revealed wisdom will only proliferate the uselessness of man's thinking.

Ecclesiastes 12:13 "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this [is] the whole [duty] of man."

Solomon has searched to find the secret of life. He ponders every natural situation that man has experienced. Suddenly, Solomon turns from the natural man to the spirit of man. He finds the answer there. The only solution to any problem we have is in God. The secret to a truly successful life is to fear God and keep His commandments.

Jesus summed it up like this.

Mark 12:30-31 "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this [is] the first commandment." "And the second [is] like, [namely] this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these."

Ecclesiastes 12:14 "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether [it be] good, or whether [it be] evil."

Let me give a few Scriptures for us to ponder on this last statement Solomon makes here.

Matthew 12:36 "But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment."

John 5:22 "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son:"

John 5:25-29 "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live." "For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself;" "And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man." "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice," "And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."

Revelation 20:15 "And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."

Ecclesiastes Chapter 12 Questions

1. Remember now thy _____ in the days of thy youth.
2. Why is it important to come to the Lord early in life?
3. What is the average age of those who come to Christ in America?
4. When does the author believe a person is old enough to come to the Lord?
5. In each person's life, there is an _____.
6. What is verse 2 speaking of?
7. Verse 3 is speaking of the _____ years of the natural life of man.
8. Who will be bowed?
9. What is the trembling from?
10. Why is it not as bright in old age, as it was in youth?
11. Verse 4 speaks of impaired _____.
12. The aged become fearful of _____.
13. Why is this so?

14. What is "desire", in verse 5, speaking of?
15. What does the "bowl broken" symbolize?
16. The flesh of man returns to the _____.
17. The life within the flesh is the _____ of man.
18. Solomon is speaking of the _____ side of life being vanity.
19. How many proverbs did Solomon speak?
20. Solomon was committed to the _____.
21. What is a "goad"?
22. Who is the "One Shepherd"?
23. What is the conclusion of the whole matter?
24. Which of the Scriptures at the end of this lesson are more exciting to you?