

# The Wisdom Literature

Lesson #20

Ecclesiastes 8:16-12:14

## Outline

### I. **Removing Discouragements And Applying The Plan Of God (8:16-12:14)**

- A. Remaining mysteries must not diminish human joy (8:16-9:9).
- B. Remaining mysteries must not prevent us from working with all our might (9:10-11:6).
- C. The daily reminder of death should affect our God-given joy and activity (11:7-12:8).
- D. Conclusion (12:9-14).

## Notes

### **Ecclesiastes 8:16-9:9**

- One must work in the face of God's mysteries (8:16-17).
  - Solomon examined all the affairs of life. He examined the total range of man's labor on the earth. Yet in spite of all the acknowledged injustice, evil, and crooked deals in the world, man's work is identified with "all the work of God."
  - This presents us with a first-class "mystery" in the biblical sense of the word: something we know somewhat better because of God's disclosure on the subject, but which still contains baffling aspects.
  - Even after we have been treated to an elaborate discussion of the plan of God as it affects the most mundane features of life, and even after we have been warned that the alleged inequalities in this divine plan are often mere hasty inferences made by anxious men, Solomon asserts that there still are some insolvable mysteries in divine providence.
  - No one can know entirely what goes on under the sun. Men can search and dig for such wisdom as much as they wish, but they will discover that they will be as shut out from their desired goal as the man who went on the same quest for wisdom in Job 28. All we can understand is what God has told us.
- One must work in the face of the final outcome (9:1-9).
  - In spite of all that has been said to explain and justify the ways of God to man, there are some mysteries in divine providence. No one can tell just by God's treatment of particular individuals whether they are objects of God's love or hatred.
  - If Christians are to walk by faith, there will be times when outward appearances and facts will defy explanation for the moment. In fact,

one of the most perplexing of all life's puzzles is the presence of sin and death in God's good world ruled by God's good plan. We are all subject to God's unsearchable laws.

- The momentary absence of all distinction between the righteous and wicked in that all must die is a mystery above all mysteries. All men have the same lot. However, the point is stressed that wherever there is life, there is hope -- hope of preparation for meeting God, hope of living righteously and the hope of doing something to the glory of God because all men will personally face Him.
- Knowledge in this life, rewards for this life, and opportunities for service are serious challenges when viewed from the prospect of our soon-to-appear death. If men are going to live as if there is no tomorrow in eternity and let their passions and desires have free reign, they will have played the real fool's role. We do not "only go around once."
- Instead of allowing grief to consume one's life, Solomon urges that whatever remains of the unexplained mystery in our lives must not prevent us from enjoying life. Righteous men need not worry about whether God is indifferent to them and their lives: He is not; they are the special objects of His gifts and His acceptance. Therefore, let us accept the grace and joy of life, rejoice in God's good gifts and ask for His ability to rightfully use them (Psalm 118:24).

### ***Ecclesiastes 9:10-11:6***

- The activities of life are unpredictable (9:10-12).
  - The time to labor for God is while we are still on this side of the grave, for when death comes, the day of opportunity will have passed. While you still have the ability to do work, faculties to devise new ideas, and the ability to use the almost daily accumulation of knowledge and wisely apply it to the situations of life, put all your strength enthusiastically into each task. Work gives us a sense of accomplishment and belonging.
  - Advantages and resources often mean very little if God is not in those talents. In the divine plan of things, the race belongs to the one who runs in the strength of God. Strength, wisdom, speed, discernment, and learning are only valuable in so far as they are ordered by God. Chance is in the world.
  - When men do not pay attention to the fact that their "time" of judgment is ever near, they are trapped just like fish and birds are caught in nets. Men must diligently work with all their might to the glory of God in every aspect of life, for the night is coming when the opportunity will be lost and all of life will be reviewed by the God who knows what is right and what is wrong.

- Wisdom is the greatest guide in our work (9:13-18).
  - Solomon enlists the help of a parable to illustrate the great advantage found in the employment of wise action. In fact, wisdom can accomplish what no amount of work can.
  - Wisdom, that gift that comes from the fear of God, is a greater asset than strength, even though it is despised and left unheeded by the masses.
  - Wisdom is not always heeded. Only in emergencies can the quiet words of wisdom be heard. Therefore, men must have a certain mental disposition and spirit of receptivity if wisdom is to be heard.
  - Although wisdom is power, one sinner (or ruler) who in his folly and self-willed obstinacy refuses to accept wisdom will destroy much good.
- Illustrations of those who lack wisdom (10:1-20).
  - What dead flies are to perfume, folly is to the reputation of the wise person. Wise people need to stay away from folly. Folly and wisdom all depend upon the inclination of the heart. Since the fool does not have wisdom in his heart, he gravitates toward what is wrong and gets into trouble. People try to correct him, but he refuses to listen, and this tells everybody that he is a fool.
  - Having expounded on this principle, Solomon then applied it to four different "fools."
    - The foolish ruler (10:4-7).
      - If a ruler is proud, he may say or do foolish things that cause him to lose the respect of his associates.
      - If a ruler lacks character and courage, he will put fools in the high offices and qualified people in the low offices.
    - Foolish workers (10:8-11).
      - Every course of action in life has its risk. Wise men, unlike fools, take into their calculations the possible danger, and then they guard against it.
      - Wisdom is the difference between success and failure. However, wisdom must not be an afterthought added to one's work as perfume is added to complete the dressed-up person.
    - Foolish talkers (10:12-15).
      - They speak destructive words.
      - They speak unreasonable words.
      - They speak uncontrolled words.
      - They speak boastful words.
    - Foolish officers (10:16-20).
      - They are full of indulgence.
      - They are full of incompetence.
      - They are full of indifference.

- They are full of indiscretion.
- Life must be lived by faith (11:1-6).
  - Since we cannot comprehend the totality of God's providential acts, the only proper course of action is to be diligent and wholeheartedly involved; some of this activity will succeed even if all of it does not.
  - Men and women must courageously and judiciously venture forth in benevolent charity without selfish motives, for such help must be given with the confidence that there is a dependable order and plan in the world.
  - Solomon then taught that instead of becoming miserly just because you fear that the future may hold some reversal of fortune, you should distribute all the more to as many as possible so that you can have the blessing of receiving in the event of such reversal.
  - We must also continue in our activity even though we are ignorant of the circumstances connected with our exertions. Whatever occurs, it comes from the hand of God who permits all these circumstances.
  - How God works out His purposes in detail may escape us, but our ignorance does not stop the result, nor should it prevent our wholehearted involvement in life to the glory of God. Do the best you can and let the result -- be it success or failure -- rest in the hand of God.

### ***Ecclesiastes 11:7-12:8***

- Rejoice because life is a gift from God (11:7-10).
  - Our present life was meant to be joyous, as pleasant to the eyes as the rising sun in the morning light, but with the consciousness that we must render account to God for all of life. If we should enjoy many years, we should enjoy them all, even though our eyes are directed toward the inevitable days of disease and death when we go to the grave and meet our Maker.
  - Youth must get all the cheer and joy they can out of innocent happiness. But they must also mark it down well in the midst of enjoyment that God will remember and review the quality of pleasures and the manner in which they enjoy themselves.
  - So then, we must end all sadness, fretting, and morose gloom. We must be free from those injuries to the heart that so quickly cripple the joy of life. Do not ever forget that true joy comes from doing what is right.
- Remember God in the days of your youth (12:1-8).
  - Besides reflecting on and pondering the work of God in creating each individual and His world, there is the strong call to action. To remember our Creator calls for decisive activity based on recollection and reflection on all that God is and has done for us.

- With one of the most beautiful of all allegories in the Bible, using the picture of an old, decaying house, Solomon sets forth strong reasons for men and women to begin acting decisively in strenuous activity to the glory of their Creator before the evil days draw near.
- There are evil days coming when the body's strength and the mental capacities will begin to fail, and thus the output and potential for service to the living God will diminish significantly. In vss. 3-6, we have a list of the following bodily infirmities with their probable meaning:
  - "The watchmen of the house tremble" symbolizes the arms and hands trembling in old age with palsy or feebleness.
  - "The mighty men stoop" symbolizes the legs being bent in feebleness, and the tottering knees.
  - "The grinding ones stand idle because they are few" symbolizes the teeth losing their ability to chew food.
  - "Those who look through windows grow dim" symbolizes the eyes beginning to lose their sight.
  - "The doors on the street are shut" symbolizes the lips which fall into the mouth because of the lack of teeth.
  - "The sound of the grinding mill is low" symbolizes the lack of noise made when food is eaten because the teeth are missing.
  - "One will arise at the sound of the bird" symbolizes sleep which is terminated at the least amount of morning noise.
  - "All the daughters of song will sing softly" symbolizes the qualities that make up the power to enjoy music and song are eluding him in his old age.
  - "Men are afraid of a high place and of terrors on the road" symbolizes the fear of heights and of stumbling along paths once familiar.
  - "The almond tree blossoms" symbolizes the hair which has turned white with old age.
  - "The grasshopper drags himself along" symbolizes the halting gait of the elderly as they walk along with canes or walkers.
  - "The caperberry is ineffective" symbolizes the failure of sexual ability and desire.
  - "Man goes to his eternal home while mourners go about in the street" symbolizes the inevitable death of all men.
  - "The silver cord is broken" symbolizes the spinal cord which connects the brain and nerves.
  - "The golden bowl is crushed" symbolizes the brain.
  - "The pitcher by the well is shattered" symbolizes the heart when it is pierced or broken and all the life-supporting blood flows out.

- “The wheel at the cistern is crushed” symbolizes the system of veins and arteries that carries the blood around continually like a waterwheel.
- How futile to have lived and not to have known the key to living. What a waste to have died without having enjoyed life or known what it was all about. That is the tragedy of tragedies; a tremendous waste.

### ***Ecclesiastes 12:9-14***

- Solomon gives his qualifications for instruction. The designation “wise” was a technical one, marking him as a member of the wise to whom God gave wisdom, just as the priest had the Law and the prophet had the Word. His claim is that the wisdom in Ecclesiastes came from God in a revelation, just as the prophet’s word also was given by divine inspiration.
- He also searched for “words of truth” and not trite remarks. He wrote with “delightful words” or words in perfect sincerity, without any pretense.
- Solomon’s words are designed to prod the sluggish into action. They “goad” him into doing something. But they are also meant to be “nails” that are “driven” as definite points in the sluggard’s mentality to give him anchorage, stability, and perspective on life. Whereas books may multiply and men may weary themselves with the study of the ever-enlarging library of volumes, the inspired words of Ecclesiastes will instruct, warn, and admonish.
- What is the “profit” of living? What does man get for all his work? He gets the living God! His profit consists of fearing Him and obeying His word. Every act will be brought into judgment, whether good or bad. Men are responsible beings, not brutes, who will confront the past with the God that they either feared or flouted.
- “Keep His commandments” is a summary of the beginning, middle, and end of life as we know it on this earth: coming to know and trust the living God; receiving the gifts of life’s goods; learning how to enjoy those mundane gifts; understanding the major part of the plan of God; and being guided into joyous and strenuous activity in the art of living, even while portions of life remain enigmatic.
- Because God will pass judgment on our lives, everything becomes vitally important. Nothing is vanity if we live for God.