

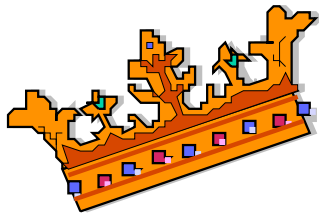
ECCLESIASTES

An expanded paraphrase with the meaning it had in Solomon's day

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Education Library

ECCLÉSIASTES

King Solomon



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Third Edition 2013

Explanation and Purpose

Under the direction and guidance of the Holy Spirit, Solomon writes about life and the activities of life. Because it includes poetry, because it is from the Middle East perspective and from 3000 years ago, the meaning cannot be conveyed thru a literal, word for word translation. The picture language needs to be interpreted and explained based on the meaning of that culture and time. Hebrew idioms or phrases unique to the language have to be put in longer phrases or with additional explanations.

Jewish literature is vastly different from literature in the Western world.

Jewish writing often begins with a summary statement, gives examples and closes with another summary.

It repeats the same idea as many times and ways as possible.

It uses extreme words for non-extreme meanings (*to hate means to not prefer something as much as before*).

It uses picture language to convey characteristics, values, qualities or significance.

The Western mind uses picture language to illustrate facts – the obvious.

Factually, a wisp of air is empty; it is nothingness.

The Middle Eastern mind uses picture language to illustrate what is hidden; what is easy to miss.

Figuratively, a wisp of air is beautiful, but at the same time, it is brief, elusive and unexplainable.

Culture determines the interpretation of picture language. Our translations of Ecclesiastes have taken the Western approach, describing life with its activities as empty and nothingness. As a result, the book is depressing and negative. This is not the purpose of the book. In Hebrew literature, it is one of the wisdom books, which means its purpose is to provide wisdom or skill in life and how to live it within its limitations.

English translations have lost this purpose and meaning. Instead of being one of the most helpful books in Scripture, it is the most misunderstood. The following is not intended to be an exact word for word translation, but rather a concept translation or expanded paraphrase with explanations in order to capture the meaning that Solomon intended.

Suggestions for reading:

First, in the Bible you regularly use, read the book or a chapter.

Pay attention to how much you understand and the negativity it portrays.

Then read the same section in this expanded paraphrase.

Notice the clarity in his logic and development of ideas.

The negative tone is gone; the practical advice is now evident and relevant.

Note:

Solomon is the author, so all the “I, me, and my” is what Solomon is saying about himself.

The poetry form of writing has been kept in the portions where Solomon used it.

The prose form is kept in the parts where Solomon used prose.

Final thought:

This is from an agricultural society whose thinking is far different from ours. Yet the desire to find fulfillment in life and life’s activities is the same. May the Holy Spirit use it to encourage and teach us today.

Outline of Ecclesiastes

Introduction:

The ideal picture of life and life's activities is one's breath on a cold morning; vapor 1:1
While it has beauty, it is **brief, elusive and unexplainable.**

Statement of Purpose 1:13-18

(for clarity in this outline, these verses have been put first)

This is a description of his purpose and goal to understand life and life's activities on this earth.

Studies about Life...

From Nature 1:2-12

Conclusion: our lives are filled with endless cycles.

From Experience 2:1-11

He tried: laughter, pleasure, wine, projects, hired help, livestock, money, music, sex.

Conclusion: no matter how hard we work or how much we enjoy things, the satisfaction will not last.

From Reason 2:12-16

Conclusion: even wisdom, while it is wonderful, is temporary and impossible to keep.

Observations about Life 2:17-12:12

Summary: life is not as wonderful as he thought it would be - there is enjoyment but it does not last.

Because Life is **brief and elusive** (cannot be kept as we want it) ... 2:18 - 6:12

...work should not have so much intensity in our life 2:18-26

...we should enjoy to the fullest, each day for what it brings 3:1-22

Life is mixed with good and bad

God's plan includes eternity

He will eventually bring justice

We are mortal so our life on this earth (under the sun) is temporary

...many things can ruin our enjoyment of life 4:1-16

Oppression and injustice

Wrong motives

Lack of family or friends

Bad or careless leaders

...we must give God reverence and obedience 5:1-7

...wealth does not guarantee enjoyment of life. These are the reasons.

Wealth can bring corruption in government 5:8-9

Wealth never satisfies 5:10-12

Wealth can lead to frustration or sorrow 5:13-17

conclusion: God wants us to eat, drink and enjoy what we do.

Having possessions, enjoying them and accepting life are all gifts from God.

Wealth can bring forgetfulness of God 6:1-12

Because Life is **elusive** (cannot be kept as we want it)... 7:1-14

...we learn more from times of difficulty than from times of happiness 7:1-8

...we have problems with our attitudes 7:9-14

Because Life is **brief**... 7:15-29

...we need balance 7:15-22

...we need practical wisdom 7:23-29

Outline of Ecclesiastes continued

Because Life is unexplainable and confusing... 8:1 - 11:6

...we need to understand more... 8:1 - 10:7

- about obedience
- about injustice
- about God's plans
- about making our plans
- about people's responses

...we need to be careful

- Wise people are careful in what they do and how they do it 10:8-11
- Wise people are careful in what they say 10:12-15
- Wise leaders are careful in how they rule 10:16-19
- Wise citizens are careful in how they react 10:20
- Wise people are careful in what they plan 11:1-6

Because Life is brief and uncertain... 11:7 - 12:7

- ...we should be faithful in what He gives us to do
- ...we should enjoy life on earth within its limitations and brevity
- ...we should make the most of life when we are young and strong
- ...we should accept the changes that come with age

Conclusions about Life 12:8-14

Solomon's picture 12:8

Life and life's activities are like one's breath on a cold morning; vapor.
While it has beauty, it is brief, elusive and unexplainable.

Solomon's credentials 12:9-10

His words have wisdom because they have come from God.

Solomon's summary 12:11-14

We are on this earth to have purpose and enjoyment of life within its limitations.
It is only possible thru inward worship and outward obedience to God.
Only the spiritual can add a lasting quality to our enjoyment and satisfaction.
Because injustice will be dealt with later, enjoy what God provides in the present.

Definitions

Western phrase	Solomon's meaning
Futile, empty, meaningless, vanity	Wisp of breath on a cold morning; vapor
Under the sun, under heaven	Life here on earth
Heavy, evil, grievous	Frustration or sorrow
Burden	Work that requires concentration or thinking
Wisdom	Human wisdom, given by God, that needs to be developed
Wisdom contrasted with folly	Someone who thinks deeply contrasted with one who takes life as it comes
Chasing, longing after the wind	Inability to capture and hang onto life
I hated life	Life is not as wonderful as I thought it would be

Ecclesiastes

Chapter 1

The son of David, king in Jerusalem is calling everyone together in order to teach them.

² I have found the most perfect illustration of life with all its activities.

Life is like one's breath on a cold morning.

It has beauty, but it is also brief, elusive and unexplainable.

³ We can enjoy our projects and work here on earth.

But how long does the enjoyment and satisfaction last?

⁴ Although the earth stays put, everything on it is so temporary - it is there and then it is gone.

For example, people are born while others die.

⁵ The sun rises and sets and hurries back to where it rises.

⁶ The wind blows to the south and turns to the north;
round and round it goes, always returning to do it again.

⁷ All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never filled up;
the water in the streams just keeps coming.

⁸ Our lives are filled with brief and endless cycles that become tiresome because of their sameness.

We have not even begun to see or hear about all of them.

⁹ With nature, what has happened in the past will happen again.

With humanity, what has been accomplished in the past will be accomplished again.

¹⁰ There is nothing new about these cycles here on earth.

They are brief and temporary.

Can anyone say this is a new discovery or that it just started?

¹¹ This has been going on way before our time.

The only reason it seems new is that we do not remember the past.

And what we learn tomorrow will not be remembered by those who come later.

This was my **study about life from nature** – it is filled with endless cycles.

¹² I, the one ready to teach you, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. ¹³ When God first gave me human wisdom, I wanted to develop it so I could understand life and life's activities on this earth. **I studied life from nature, experience and reason.** God has given us the desire to understand life, but it is a task that brings frustration because so much of life cannot be understood.

¹⁴ What I did understand is that our activities in this life are like a breath on a cold morning or like chasing the wind. While they bring satisfaction, we can never capture that satisfaction and keep it. We can never say, *it is mine to enjoy and experience forever*. Just when we think we have life as we want it, something can happen and our life is changed forever.

¹⁵ We cannot straighten what gets twisted.

We cannot enjoy what is no longer there.

Things in life can be elusive.

Events in life can be unexplainable.

¹⁶ I thought to myself, *I have developed more human wisdom and knowledge than even my father, king David. I need to make the most of it.* ¹⁷ So I spent a lot of time looking at both sides of the issue - wisdom and lack of wisdom. I discovered this too is like chasing the wind - something that is elusive and cannot be fully grasped.

¹⁸ Greater wisdom can bring sorrow

when you see all the things that are wrong and unfair,

things that have no answers or cannot be changed.

Greater knowledge often brings grief or frustration instead of satisfaction.

Ecclesiastes

Chapter 2

In my **study about life thru experience**, I wanted to see what brings enjoyment that is lasting and fulfilling.

First I tried **laughter** and **pleasure**. ² But like that breath on a cold morning, it was brief and elusive. Laughter so often is empty. Pleasure is fleeting.

³ Then I tried **wine**, not to get drunk or lose control. I wanted to enjoy it for the feeling and cheer it produces. I also wondered if I could find more worth to life if I did not take things so seriously - if I learned to relax a little more.

⁴ I tried great **projects**. I built houses and planted vineyards just for me. ⁵ I made gardens and parks with all kinds of fruit trees just for me. ⁶ I made pools to water them just for me. ⁷ I **bought** male and female slaves, besides the ones who were born in my house. I had **herds** of cattle and many flocks - more than anyone in Jerusalem before me. ⁸ I also gathered **silver** and **gold** just for me, along with other treasures that kings have and that come from far away places. Just for me I acquired men and women **singers**. And I had the pleasures of **love** from my harem.

⁹ I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all these experiences I continued to use my human wisdom to study life and its activities.

¹⁰ If I saw something I thought would give me pleasure, I got it.

When I thought a project would give me satisfaction, I developed it.

And I found satisfaction in all my efforts.

¹¹ Yet when I fixed my attention on all my projects

and what I worked so hard to achieve, look what I discovered:

the enjoyment was brief and elusive just like a wisp of breath;

it was like chasing the wind;

I could not capture the satisfaction and hold onto it.

In our life here on earth,

no matter how hard we work and how much we enjoy it, the satisfaction will never last.

¹² After studying life and life's activities thru nature and experience,

I studied life thru logic and reasoning.

I spent a lot of time looking at both sides of the issue - deep thinking and a care-free attitude.

Later on, when other kings consider the value of thinking deeply about life, if they have wisdom,
they will come to the same conclusions.

¹³ On one hand, serious thinking about issues of life certainly is far more valuable than not thinking,
just as light is more valuable than darkness.

¹⁴ A thinking person can understand and see how things fit together,

while the care-free person is always in a fog, surprised at what happens and never knows why.

Yet on the other hand, is deep thinking really that important?

In the end, it is the same for both.

Everyone comes to the end of life and dies.

¹⁵ Then the thought struck me, *I also will die.*

*What then is the value of all **my** wisdom and thinking?*

I came to the conclusion,

being the wisest person in all the world is also like that wisp of breath...

while it is wonderful, it is temporary and nothing I can hang onto.

¹⁶ The thinking person, like the care-free person, will not be remembered for long.

In the future, both will be forgotten. Both must die.

Ecclesiastes

Chapter 2 *continued*

¹⁷ Having finished with my **STUDIES** about life, the rest of the book gives my **OBSERVATIONS**.

In summary, life is not as wonderful as I thought it would be. I enjoyed myself in lots of activities and projects, but the enjoyment did not last. Just when I thought I had a handle on life, it eluded me.

¹⁸ I first want to give you *observations* about life because it is **brief and elusive**. 2:18 - 7:29

After thinking how **brief** life is, and that someone else is going to get the results of my hard labor, I no longer loved my work to the same degree. My projects no longer controlled my life with the same intensity.

¹⁹ Who knows whether the person who gets it will truly appreciate all my efforts and skill. Life's activities are like that breath on a cold morning. While they have beauty, they are so temporary. ²⁰ So I slowed down to enjoy what I already had.

²¹⁻²³ This is true for everyone. People spend their lives working long and hard, having to go thru pain, grief and sleepless nights. But finally, they achieve their goals by using wisdom, knowledge and skill. The tragedy is how little time they have left to enjoy their achievements. Then all of it will go to someone who never had any part in it. How brief and temporary everything is!

²⁴⁻²⁵ With this in mind, the best way to live life is to eat, drink and enjoy that temporary but genuine pleasure in the things you do. I now understand this is a gift from God, because without Him, there can be no true enjoyment. ²⁶ Those who obey God receive their wisdom, knowledge, pleasure and gladness from Him. Those who reject God find the more they get, the less they are satisfied. They go thru life feeling they are chasing the wind and never able to capture it. The final irony is that when they die, God turns over their wealth and achievements to those who obey Him and **can** enjoy them.

Chapter 3

Because life is **elusive** (cannot be kept as we want it), we will experience the good and the bad, positive and negative, the easy and the hard, so take each day as it comes in order to enjoy the good things.

Life continually changes, so learn to be flexible.

At different times we need to respond in different ways.

² At a given time we were born and at a given time we will die.

Sometimes we should begin things and other times we need to end them.

³ Some things we need to destroy while others we need to mend.

There are times to tear down and times to build;

⁴ times to weep and times to laugh,

times to mourn and times to dance.

⁵ Sometimes we need to let things be

and other times we need to do something about the situation.

At different times we need to embrace

or keep our distance,

⁶ search or let go,

keep or throw away.

⁷ At different times we need to show our emotions or mute them (tear one's garments in grief),

be silent or speak up,

⁸ build relationships or break relationships.

There are times of war and conflict

and other times of compromise and peace.

Ecclesiastes

Chapter 3 *continued*

- ⁹ Since everything is so **brief** and changeable, how can we find enjoyment or satisfaction in what we do?
- ¹⁰ From **my** perspective I saw that God gives us life with sorrow and frustration. ¹¹ Yet from **God's** perspective, His timing in what He allows is always right. He also has put a part of Himself - eternity - within us so that we are made for eternity and not just for this life. He does this so we become homesick to live with Him in His presence. But in our human wisdom, we cannot see God's bigger plan for us.
- ¹² His plan is that we enjoy our projects and live within the boundaries of His laws. ¹³ To eat, drink and enjoy the temporary but genuine pleasures in what we do is a gift from God. ^{*} ¹⁴ But at the same time He wants us to remember that what **we** do is temporary and imperfect. What **He** does is eternal and perfect. Nothing needs to be added or taken away to make it better. This is also true about God Himself. God shows us the difference between Himself and us so that we will be in awe of Him.
- ¹⁵ God never changes in His character and qualities. The way He was in the past and the way He is now, is the way He will be in the future. That is why we can always count on Him.
- ¹⁶ Something else I realized when thinking of God's perfection:
 Our laws and judges are so imperfect.
 The very places where we expect to find justice and rightness
 are the places of injustice and wickedness.
- ¹⁷ But I also know:
 that God will eventually bring justice to the righteous
 and judgment to the wicked.
 Just as we have timing for things in this life,
 so God will have timing for His things in eternity.
 He will look at motives and actions
 and judge or reward accordingly.
- ¹⁸ I had one further concept about all of this: God is immortal; we are mortal. He delays final justice to remind us there is this life and there is eternity. ¹⁹ This life is **brief** and **temporary**. Like the animals our bodies will physically die. In spite of all we do, when death comes, there is no more breathing. Breath that gives life leaves the body. ²⁰ The body is put in the ground. All come from dust and to dust all return.
- ²¹ Since we cannot see that breath or spirit, *human* wisdom cannot say with certainty if there is a difference between the breath of animals and the breath of humans. *Human* wisdom cannot say with certainty if human and animal breath go to the same place or different places.
- ²² *Human* wisdom cannot speak with certainty about life **after** death. It can only tell us about life **before** death. Life is **brief** and uncertain. Therefore do not be afraid to enjoy life while you have it. Enjoy to the fullest, each day for the good things that it brings.

Chapter 4

Another part about life's **briefness** is that enjoyment never seems to last.

Something always seems to ruin it.

Sometimes there is **oppression** and **injustice**.

I saw the tears of the oppressed
 and there was no one to comfort them.

I saw the power the oppressors had over them
 and there was no one to console them.

^{*} The literal Hebrew is a play on the word "good". *I know the "goodest" is that we enjoy our projects and do good. To eat, drink and find good in what we do is a gift from God.*

Ecclesiastes

Chapter 4 *continued*

² Using only human wisdom and looking at things from the human point of view,
it would seem that those who have died
and have been freed from oppression,
are happier than the living who still have to endure it.

³ In fact it would seem better not to have been born.
That way one would never have to see or experience
all the evil that takes place in this life

⁴ **Wrong motives** can also ruin the enjoyment of life.

Some people work hard and have success just so they can be better than everyone else around them.
But enjoyment of their accomplishments eludes them or it does not last. It is like a wisp of breath or
chasing the wind.

⁵ Other people are so foolish as to never lift a finger to do anything
and therefore have nothing to enjoy.

⁶ There needs to be a balance.
It is better to limit our projects so we have time to enjoy them.
Overworking may give us things, but our souls will be unfulfilled and empty.

⁷ Something else can ruin our enjoyment of life...

⁸ being all **alone** without children or family.
We can put ourselves into our work, always trying to get more,
but then we need to ask ourselves, *Whom am I doing this for?*
We need to admit, *I'm not getting any enjoyment out of life.*

Living life without family or friends becomes a burden.

⁹ Having family or friends has many benefits.

¹⁰ They can support us when we have setbacks and failure (when we fall down).
How sad if we have no one to help us.

¹¹ They can provide when we have personal needs (need warmth).
It is difficult to survive alone.

¹² They can protect us when we are in danger (overpowered).
There is strength that comes from relationships,
just as a cord with 3 strands is not easily broken.

¹³ **Bad or careless leaders** can also ruin our enjoyment of life.

A poor but wise young man is better than a current leader who no longer listens to good advice.

¹⁴ Even if he had been in prison or born in poverty, ¹⁵ people would choose to follow the new leader.

¹⁶ However as time passes, the next generation will want someone different. So leaders who can give
us a better life are also like a breath on a cold morning or like chasing the wind. Even though we like
them for awhile, our satisfaction with them does not last.

Chapter 5

Because life is **brief**, if we play games with God to get ourselves out of trouble, we will have more trouble. So
be careful when you go to worship God at His house. Go to listen so you know what God wants, rather than to
give Him something He doesn't want or cannot accept. People who do not understand God's character will not
even realize they are doing anything wrong.

² Do not be quick with your words or thoughts
in what you say to God.

Remember who God is and who you are.

You and God are not equal, so think before you speak.

Ecclesiastes

Chapter 5 *continued*

³ Too much worrying leads to wild thoughts;
too much talking leads to wild promises.

⁴ When you make a promise to God, do not delay in keeping it. He has no pleasure in foolish or empty words. Keep your promise. ⁵ It is better not to promise than to promise and not keep it. ⁶ Do not let your mouth lead you into the sin of a broken promise to God. Do not complain to a spiritual leader that your promise was a mistake. Why put yourself under God's judgment and experience the consequences?

⁷ Thoughtless and insincere words are like a wisp of breath - here and then gone. So be in awe of God and give Him the proper respect in what you promise Him.

⁸ Because life is **brief** and **elusive**, wealth does not guarantee enjoyment of life. Here are the reasons.

Sometimes wealth brings **corruption** in government.

Do not be surprised when you see the poor being oppressed or robbed of justice and rights. Officials, regardless of their level, take advantage of those under them. ⁹ A good ruler is different. He will make sure that not only he, but everyone benefits in times of prosperity.

¹⁰ However wealth **never satisfies**.

Those who love money will never have enough
and will never be content with their income.

This also is like a wisp of breath
because satisfaction with things is **brief** and **elusive**.

¹¹ Yet the more that people see,
the more they want to accumulate.
Even when they cannot use everything,
they still want to get things just to look at them.

¹² There is nothing wrong with working and using your money to get things.
When it is balanced,
you will enjoy what you are able to have.
But when there is greed,
you will be consumed with just trying to get more.

¹³ Wealth can also lead to **frustration** or **sorrow**.

One reason is that some people hoard their wealth and it destroys them.

¹⁴ Others lose their wealth and it hurts their children who have nothing to inherit.

¹⁶ Here is another reason wealth leads to **frustration**. * (verse out of order for clarity)

If our only goal in life is to accumulate wealth and things,
it is like trying to capture and hang onto the wind.

¹⁵ We need to accept, that as we were born, so we will die.
We came into this world without bringing anything with us.
When we leave, we will take nothing with us,
no matter how hard we worked
or what we physically accumulated.

¹⁷ Greed brings loneliness, sorrow, anxiety or strife.

¹⁸ So what is the answer? A good and beautiful life is to eat, drink and enjoy what we do during the time God gives us here on earth. This is what God wants for us. ¹⁹ And when God gives us wealth and possessions, when He gives us the ability to enjoy better or nicer food, the ability to accept life as it comes and to rejoice in our hard efforts – all these are gifts from God. ²⁰ Because God puts joy within us, we will not be overly occupied with the negative and sadness of life. But this is not the case for those who reject Him.

Ecclesiastes

Chapter 6

Here's the final reason wealth does not guarantee enjoyment of life: **people leave God out of their life.**

² God gives them riches, wealth and honor so they have everything to make them complete. But if they do not include God, He cannot give them the ability to enjoy them. So a stranger enjoys them instead. Like a wisp of breath their wealth is **elusive** - an exhausting frustration.

³ A person may have a hundred children and live many years, yet no matter how long he lives, if he is not satisfied with his prosperity and does not have respect along with an honorable burial, then to me, he is worse off than a baby who is stillborn. ⁴ The baby comes like a wisp of breath and goes into obscurity with its character unknown. ⁵ Although it never enjoyed or knew anything of this life, ⁶ it is better off than a person who lives 2000 years, but cannot enjoy the good things that he has. In the end, both of their bodies will be placed in the ground, but the stillborn never had to suffer life's tragedies, deceptions and sorrows. From the *human* perspective, having no life is better than a long life that is joyless and ends in dishonor.

⁷ Although we work hard in this life to provide
for the needs of our body
and the desires of our heart,
it can never satisfy our soul.

⁸ This is true of everyone -
educated, non-educated, rich or poor.

⁹ It is better to be content with what we have (what our eyes can see)
than to be driven by a restless soul seeking happiness apart from God.
If we spend our life to only satisfy our cravings,
the enjoyment will be like a wisp of breath - **brief** and **elusive**.

Or to use another example,
it will be like chasing the wind - impossible to capture and hang onto.

¹⁰ This is not something new.
From the beginning God created us
to find rest and fulfillment in a relationship with Him.
We cannot change it, no matter how much we argue or reason.

¹¹ It will get us nowhere to argue with God.

¹² We are a creation of God taken from the dust. What makes us think we can decide what gives value to our life during the brief time we are here on earth? What makes us think we know everything about the future?

Chapter 7

Because life is **elusive**,
we **learn** more from times of difficulty than from times of happiness.
Our inward character is more important
than our outward trappings (name better than perfume).

It is not how we start
but how we finish in life.

² There is more to life
than just partying and having fun.

Since we all will die,
we need to make decisions about where we will spend eternity.

Ecclesiastes

Chapter 7 *continued*

- ³ There is nothing wrong with enjoying the pleasures of life, but
character develops more thru sorrow than thru frivolity;
⁴ wisdom develops more thru grief than giddiness.
- ⁵ Listening to correction from a wise person has more value
than the catchy tunes and jokes of a superficial person.
- ⁶ Their laughter and fun is like a dry “Christmas tree” burned in the fireplace.
It is loud and blazing for a short time,
but then it is gone and there is nothing left.
- ⁷ Extortion and bribes completely change a person’s character.
- ⁸ How things end is more important than how they start.
- ⁹ Because life is **elusive**, we have problems with our **attitudes**:
Patience to wait for things in life is certainly better
than demanding what we want when we want it.
Anger and impatience are attitudes of those who lack wisdom
which will cause them to do dangerous and foolish things.
- ¹⁰ Wisdom does not live in the past
or get upset when things are not going as well as they once did.
- ¹¹ Wisdom like an inheritance, has value while living here on earth.
¹² Both give security.
But we know wisdom is better than an inheritance
because it can show us how to have security at the **end** of life.
- ¹³ Understand and accept God’s ways
rather than think you can change them
or go against them and still come out OK.
Who do you think you are?
- ¹⁴ Thoroughly enjoy the times of prosperity.
But when there are times of trouble and sorrow, remember,
God allows both good and bad in our lives. He does this
so we depend on Him and not on ourselves
or so we do not become arrogant, thinking we can control life.
- ¹⁵ Because life is **brief**, we need to have **balance**
I have seen a godly person die early in life
while a wicked person lived for many, many years.
- ¹⁶ Do not think you can impress God and live longer by:
keeping a bigger list of rules,
becoming a religious fanatic,
becoming over-educated or a know-it-all.
These will only keep you from enjoyment and fulfillment in life.
- ¹⁷ The same is true if you only do what you want,
or live life without thinking or taking responsibility.
Just because one person lived longer while being wicked,
does not mean you will live longer if you are wicked.
This kind of thinking will also keep you from enjoyment and fulfillment in life.

Ecclesiastes

Chapter 7 *continued*

- 18 Learn when to say “no” to yourself
and when to say “yes”.
When God is in control of your life
you will be able to avoid both extremes: self-denial and self-centeredness.
- 19 Here are some other ways to stay balanced.
There are times when spiritual protection
is more necessary than the physical.
Wise people get their protection from wisdom.
It is greater than they could get from 10 of the strongest men in a city.
- 20 Since no one, not even wise people always do what is right - since they fail and sin,
they need spiritual protection and strength to obey God.
- 21 Don’t try to know everything people say about you since you may be offended.
The very person you thought would defend you,
may have criticized or judged you.
- 22 But before you get too upset,
remember how many times you have criticized or judged others
instead of defending them.
- 23 By using wisdom, here is what I have learned.
When God gave me the gift of *human* wisdom, I said,
*I am determined not only to know facts, but also to develop my wisdom
so I can grasp all there is to know about God, the world and humanity
and then teach it to others.* But this was beyond me.
- 24 I discovered that absolute wisdom is so vast and deep,
who could possibly grasp all of it?
- 25 So I looked at practical wisdom.
The way I went about it was to look at it from every angle.
I made every effort to understand, to investigate and to search it out.
I wanted to know how life fit together.
I wanted to understand the wickedness of foolish choices
and the foolishness of irrational thinking and behavior.
- 26 By my own sad experience I discovered there is something worse than death.
It is the woman who snares a man away from God.
Her heart is a trap and her hands are chains.
The man who lives within God’s rules will escape her,
but the one who disobeys, will be ensnared by her.
- 27 Look what I discovered when I was trying to see how life fit together.
- 28 In the midst of searching, while I did not find all my answers,
I discovered a truth about humanity.
Men who are wise by choosing to live within God’s rules are very rare –
“One in a million”.
When I looked among all my foreign, pagan wives that I took,
I did not find any with **godly** wisdom.

Ecclesiastes

Chapter 7 *continued*

²⁹ One thing I know for sure. This is not the fault of God.
 When He created Adam and Eve, they were perfect.
 But they and all humanity who descended from them
 decided they wanted to go their own ways and try their own ideas.
 This is also the reason for my failures.

Chapter 8

I have given you observations about life because it is **brief and elusive**. 2:18 – 7:29

Now let me give you observations about life because it is **unexplainable**. 8:1 – 11:6

There are so many questions that cannot be answered; there is so much we do not know.

First of all, we need to understand more **about obedience**.

It takes a wise person to get to the heart of the matter.

Wisdom brings joy that shows in one's face.

It removes harshness and anger.

² I, as a wise person, advise you to obey the King's (God's) command because you promised God you would obey Him. ³ Do not be in a hurry to rebel if He does not give you what you want. Do not try to excuse yourself if you have rebelled and are experiencing His consequences. ⁴ Since His word is absolute, who can say to Him, *What are You doing? That is not fair.*

⁵ Whoever obeys His commands will not experience His judgment.

A wise person knows that God has His time when He will bring judgment against disobedience and evil.

⁶ When the disobedient make life miserable for the obedient,
 the obedient can be sure that God will deliver them.

⁷ The disobedient will not listen and so have no awareness of God's judgment.

⁸ They cannot stop their death; they have no say over when they will die.

As soldiers cannot escape the battle, so the wicked will not be delivered from judgment.

⁹ When I was considering our actions here on earth, I saw that because life is **unexplainable**, we need to understand more about **injustice**.

There were times I saw violent leaders who hurt many people. ¹⁰ Later I saw these same leaders being buried with magnificent funerals and beautiful speeches giving them respect and honor. At the same time I saw those who followed God being buried in graves neither sacred nor honorable, being totally forgotten by those in their city. Since we believe God is in control, this does not make sense. How can this be?

¹¹ When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, people feel secure to do evil without fear or shame.

¹² Although a wicked person commits hundreds of crimes and still lives a long time, in the end I am sure it will be better for those who fear the consequences of disobedience and are reverent in God's presence. ¹³ Because the wicked have no reverence for God, it will not go well with them. Although it may seem they have long lives, in reality, their lives are like a shadow that will vanish and disappear.

¹⁴ Here is another injustice that is unexplainable in this life. People who do what is right get what the wicked deserve and the wicked get what the obedient deserve. How can this be? ¹⁵ So rather than focusing on the unfairness of life, I recommend that we enjoy what God has given us in this world - to eat, drink and be cheerful. Then joy will accompany us in our work during the time God gives us to live here on earth.

¹⁶ Because life is **unexplainable** we need to understand more about **God's plans**. When I applied my mind to know wisdom and to observe how God works - going without sleep day and night - ¹⁷ then I began to realize the vastness of God's actions. No one can comprehend all that He does on this earth. Despite all our efforts to search it out, we cannot grasp it. Even if wise people **claim** to know, they have no idea how much they **do not** know.

Ecclesiastes

Chapter 9

So I reflected on all this and concluded that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God's hands - under His direction. They do not know whether their life will be filled with prosperity or adversity. Both are possibilities. ² What they do know is that, they along with everyone else, have a common destiny - the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the pure and the impure, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not.

As it is with the good man,
so with the sinner;
as it is with those who take oaths,
so with those who are afraid to take them.

³ This is the frustration of life here on earth. From a human perspective it does not seem to matter how one lives – full of reverence in obedience to God or full of evil with irrational thinking and behavior. Both come to the end of life and die in the same way. But that is not fair. It is **unexplainable**. ⁴ While you are living, there is certainty you can still make choices about your life. So as our proverb says, *a living dog, no matter how common or lowly, is better than a dead lion, even if he is the king of the beasts*.

⁵ The living know they will die
and therefore can still choose their eternal destiny.

The dead do not know
and cannot experience further opportunities of this life.

They can do nothing more to change their destiny.

The wicked who tried so hard to make a name for themselves will be forgotten.

⁶ What they loved, hated or envied is no longer a part of their life.
In fact they will never have a part of anything more here on earth.

⁷ Since we have just one life to live on this earth,
and we have chosen to obey God,
we should live life to the fullest within His limitations.

⁸ Let us go therefore, eat our food with gladness
and drink our wine with a joyful heart
because God takes pleasure in our doing them.

Express your joy, as we do in our culture,
by dressing in white
and using sweet scented oil on your head.

⁹ Together with your wife whom you love, enjoy this brief life even though it is full of questions about God's methods and plans. These are the things, (food, drink, clothing and relationships), God gives us in order to enjoy life while we live and toil here on earth. ¹⁰ Whatever your hand finds to do with the strength God has given you, do it. Make the most of your opportunities because once you die, they will be gone forever. You will have no more earthly activities of plans and work, knowledge and wisdom.

¹¹ I also observed that because life is **unexplainable**, we need to understand more about **making our plans**. The best people do not always come out on top.

The race is not to the swift
nor the battle to the strong,
Even if we have speed or strength,
it does not guarantee our success.

Ecclesiastes

Chapter 9 *continued*

To use other examples:

good jobs do not always come to the wise,
wealth to the brilliant
or success to those with a good education.

Unexpected circumstances and misfortune happen to everyone.

¹² We do not know when they may come into our lives.
Just as fish are caught in a cruel net,
or birds are caught in a snare trap,
so we can be caught unexpectedly
in a time of frustration when everything goes wrong,
even though God is in control and our lives are in His hands.

¹³ I also observed on this earth an example of wisdom that greatly impressed me. In addition, it showed me that because life is **unexplainable**, we need to understand more about **people's responses**. ¹⁴ There was a small city with only a few people in it. And a powerful king came against it, surrounded it and built huge siege works against it. ¹⁵ Now there lived in that city a poor man who was wise and he saved the city by his wisdom. But afterwards no one remembered to honor or reward him. ¹⁶ From that I learned, wisdom is better than strength. But the person who is poor will not gain respect for the wisdom and advice he has given, nor will people turn to him in the future. In spite of this,

¹⁷ the advice of the wise which is spoken calmly, has more effect and value
than the shouting of the powerful
who are foolish and without wisdom.

¹⁸ Wisdom is better than weapons of war,
yet the good accomplished by a wise person can be destroyed by a foolish person.

Chapter 10

The contrast between the wise and the foolish is so profound, I want to further describe them.

As dead flies ruin oil valued for its scent,
small foolish actions can ruin those valued for their wisdom and honor.

² The wise gravitate towards the good
but the foolish go towards the bad.

³ So as the foolish walk thru life,
they lack good sense and show everyone how foolish they are.

⁴ If you are wise and the ruler's anger rises against you,
do not lose your composure;
calmness can prevent great wrongs from being committed.

⁵ I find life frustrating when I see rulers make bad decisions.

⁶ They give leadership to foolish and incompetent people,
while qualified people are rejected or given lower positions.

⁷ I have seen slaves on horses, riding like princes,
while princes are on the ground, walking like slaves.

Ecclesiastes

Chapter 10 *continued*

Because life is **unexplainable**, we need to understand people's responses. We also need to be **careful**.

Wise people are careful in **what they do and how they do it**.

⁸ If they are not careful, the one digging a pit might fall into it.

The one knocking down a stone and mud wall
might find a snake resting in a cool crevice of the stones.

⁹ The person removing boulders might be hurt;
the one splitting logs might be cut.

¹⁰ And if the ax is dull and not sharpened,
more strength is needed to get the job done.
But wisdom shows one how to do it successfully.

¹¹ However if a person is not careful – if he chooses not to use wisdom,
the snake will bite before it is charmed,
and what the charmer says will not succeed.

¹² Wise people are careful in **what they say**.

The words from the mouth of a wise person are gracious,
but the lips of the foolish are destructive.

¹³ At the beginning their words are foolish;
in the end their words are evil and irrational.

¹⁴ Many who are empty of sense are full of words about the future,
even though we as human beings, in our *human* wisdom,
do not know what is coming, now or after we die.

¹⁵ The foolish may work,
but they weary themselves without accomplishing anything.
They are so lacking in common sense
they do not know the way to town even though it is right in front of them.

Wise leaders are careful in **how they rule**. Unfortunately not all rulers are wise.

¹⁶ As a nation you are in trouble,
when your king behaves like a child;
when your princes should be judging, but instead, are feasting in the morning.

¹⁷ As a nation you are fortunate,
when your king has a noble disposition
and your princes eat at the proper time, for strength and not for drunkenness.

¹⁸ When there is laziness,
the framework of government breaks down;
when government leaders are idle,
the nation has no protection.

¹⁹ Careless or foolish rulers
want to use their position and opportunity to have a good time,
indulging in the best of food and wine.
Since money is always available to them, they can get what they want.

²⁰ Wise citizens are careful in **how they react** to bad leadership.

Do not plan to retaliate against the king even in your thoughts,
or talk about revenge against authorities in the privacy of your bedroom,
because “walls have ears”.

A bird of the air may carry your words,
and a bird on the wing may report what you say.

Ecclesiastes

Chapter 11

Wise people are careful in **what they plan**.

While the foolish want life's sustenance only for themselves,
the wise want to make it available to others.

Do not be afraid to give of yourself and your substance.

Later on in some way it will come back to be a blessing to you.

To use the proverb of our day,

Cast your bread on the waters

because after many days you will get it back.

² Give generously - to seven, even to eight,
for you do not know what disaster may come upon the land and you will need help.

³ The wise know that disastrous things can happen that are beyond their control,
but they do not let it stop them from moving ahead in life.
When clouds are full of water, they pour rain upon the earth.
When a tree falls to the south or the north, in the place where it falls, there it lies.

⁴ Whoever watches the wind will not plant;
whoever looks at the clouds will not reap.

⁵ We have wisdom, but it is limited and there are the "unexplainables".
As we know neither the path of the wind or the human spirit,
nor how life is formed in a mother's womb,
so we will not understand the actions and methods of God,
the Maker of all things.

⁶ Therefore from morning to evening continue to sow your seed.
By this I mean, do what God has given you to do.
Do not give up,
for you do not know which of your tasks will succeed, whether this or that,
or whether both will be successful.

I have given many observations about life because it is **unexplainable**.

There are so many questions that cannot be answered; there is so much we do not know.

My final observations repeat that life is **brief and uncertain**. 11:7 - 12:7

God wants us to be faithful in what He gives us to do.

He also wants us to enjoy this life here on earth within its limitations and brevity.

⁷ Light is sweet, and our eyes love to see the sun
Life is wonderful when all is going well.

⁸ However many years we may live, let us enjoy them.
But remember that days of darkness are coming, and they will be many.
Life will have problems; old age brings difficulties and limitations.
Life is like a wisp of breath - it is there and then it is gone.

⁹ Young people, you who are living in a good home environment,
enjoy your childhood.
Then delight in your youth.
Listen to your heart and mind.
Use this time and opportunity to explore and make the most out of life.
But remember there are boundaries of right and wrong;
God will hold you accountable.

Ecclesiastes

Chapter 11 *continued*

- ¹⁰ Do not let the frustrations and injustice of life get you down.
 Do not respond to the temptations of your body
 that could ruin your joy of life.
 Your childhood and teen years are like that wisp of breath;
 they are here and then so quickly they are gone.

Chapter 12

- ¹ We should make the most of life when we are young and strong.
 We need to remember our Creator in our youth as we make choices about life.

We need to accept the changes that come with age.
 The days of sadness will come
 and the years when we cannot do what we did before...
 when we will say, *life has changed; it no longer gives me the same pleasure.*

- ² Later on in life, the sun, along with the light of the moon and stars, will grow dark;
 the clouds will return after the rain.
 As darkness and clouds take away light,
 so grief and pain take away enjoyment of life.
 When we are young we go thru difficult times,
 but we expect things to get better just as we expect the sun to come after the rain.
 But when we get older,
 instead of sun, we find clouds returning after the rain;
 we find depression and sadness after our tears.
 We know that sometimes and in some situations,
 things will never get better in this life.

- ³ To be more specific,
 the keepers of the house - the hands and arms will tremble.
 Even those who had strong backs and legs will be bent over.
 It will be hard to chew when there are less molars or grinding teeth.
 As we look out the windows of our eyes, things will be dimmer because of cataracts.

- ⁴ The doors to the street will be closed and the sound of grinding will fade.
 Hearing the grinding of grain in the market place gives comfort because it means life is
 going on as usual. But as we get older, we will not go out as much to hear and enjoy the
 sounds of everyday life.
 We will get up with the birds because we cannot sleep.
 But we will not enjoy the songs of the birds because we cannot hear.

- ⁵ We will be afraid of heights
 and dread having to climb steep hills or the stairs.
 We will be afraid of traffic in the streets.
 Our hair will be like almond blossoms which gradually turn white.
 Our body will be like that of the grasshoppers.
 When it is cold, they have to sit in the sun and get warmed before they can move.

Ecclesiastes

Chapter 12 *continued*

Our desires will change...

We will lose our desire for certain kinds of food.

Mental and physical challenges will not be as exciting.

Sexual desire may diminish.

All of this takes place because we are going to our eternal home.

When it happens, those who know us will mourn our death.

⁶ Respond to God as you think about life and death from three illustrations.

Respond to God before the **silver cord** is severed and the **golden bowl** is broken.

Think of how some of our oil lamps are made. A wooden bowl is overlaid with gold and hung from the ceiling with a silver cord or chain. If the chain is broken, the golden bowl-lamp will fall to the marble floor and be ruined. The light will go out.

So our life, valuable like silver or gold, can experience catastrophe and life is ended. The light will go out.

Respond to God before the **pitcher** is shattered at the well.

Since the pitchers we use are made of clay, they are very fragile. Just a small blow against the stones can shatter it.

So our body, made of clay, is fragile. It may be only a small incident that brings our life to an end.

Respond to God before the **wheel** is broken at the well. A pulley-wheel lowers a bucket into the deep well so water can be raised. But if the pulley breaks down, there is no more water.

So when our physical system breaks down, there is no more life.

In other words, our life with beauty and value is fragile. Disaster can strike quickly and unexpectedly.

⁷ When this happens, as members of God's family, our body made of dust will return to the ground. Our spirit will return to God because He is the One who gave it.

⁸ Now let me end as I began.

Life with all its activities is like the **breath** you see on a cold morning:

it has beauty, but it also is **brief**, **elusive** and **unexplainable**.

⁹ Let me also remind you of my credentials.

Not only has this Teacher been wise because he received wisdom from God, but he also has imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered, thoroughly examined and then skillfully set down his many proverbs. ¹⁰ This Teacher searched and inquired to find valuable words that had a purpose. As a result they were written down correctly as words of truth.

¹¹ Words based on *godly* wisdom are like goads that move us to action. Collected sayings are like firmly embedded nails that stay fixed in our memory. They have this effect because they have come from God, the one Shepherd who feeds His people thru wise teaching. ¹² In light of this, my readers, use these words from **God** for advice, for warning and to illuminate your thinking. If you try to study all the words that come from **people**, you will get worn out.

Ecclesiastes

Chapter 12 *continued*

¹³ So after all is said and done,
here is the final conclusion. Here is the bottom line about the value and purpose of life.

God has put us here on earth to have purpose as well as enjoyment of life.

But this is not possible apart from God.

We need to know what He is like so we live in awe of Him.

We need to be afraid of His consequences if we disobey.

We need to obey so we do not lose our *godly* wisdom.

Inward worship and outward obedience.

This is what we were made for.

These must be added to our enjoyment of life.

I know this from my own personal experience because I did not obey and worship Him.

It is only the spiritual

that can add a lasting quality to our enjoyment, fulfillment and satisfaction in this life.

¹⁴ In eternity God will deal with all the injustice and unfairness of this life.

He will go over our actions and choices

and render His verdict both on the good and the bad...

even on the things that were unknown to anyone else.

Life is **unexplainable**, so we stop trying to play God.

Life is **brief**, so we enjoy to the fullest, each day for what it brings.

Life is **elusive** and not completely satisfying, so we look forward to eternity.

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The need for an expanded paraphrase of Ecclesiastes first became evident in my classes. So many of Solomon's words and phrases needed an explanation. In fact, everything about Ecclesiastes – its culture and thinking - its flow and logic – its examples and its conclusion needed to be explained. And so it was, the following summer the Holy Spirit gave me the desire, direction and ability to spend hundreds of hours in study and research. This paraphrase is the result. The books listed below were my major resource material. I am indebted and grateful to these great and godly men for their wisdom and scholarship in explaining the Hebrew and its meaning in that day. Without their input, this paraphrase could never have been accomplished.

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These older books are considered classics. They were written by great European Biblical scholars of the past, most with a knowledge of 8 or more languages as well as backgrounds in science and medicine. Their vast knowledge of Scripture, use of the original Hebrew, detailed explanation of the Hebrew grammar and training in classical literature puts them on a scholastic level seldom found today.