

There is often a bittersweet feeling as one begins the final chapter of a book. There is the excitement of knowing that one will soon have gleaned all that the author intended to offer. Whether fiction or nonfiction, the plot of the book is all tied together and all the thoughts and purposes of the author are concluded in the final chapter. The characters or information is then left, forever fixed in our minds, exactly as the author intended. But the emotions of triumph at the completion are often mingled with some sorrow. We so enjoyed walking with the characters or thoughts of the book that we hate to see it come to an end. We sigh as the final chapter opens knowing that this part of our journey is nearing completion.

The task the preacher set for himself (Kohleth) is nearly complete. He now has only a few summary points to make before he draws the book to its final conclusion.

The first part of this final chapter continues the journey begun in chapter eleven from birth to death. He will continue to qualify and elaborate on the wonderful yet dangerous advice that is given to the youth. The possible set backs of the curse are not to be taken into consideration in all that one attempts to do “under the sun.” They were not designed nor planned by God to ruin this experience. They had a much higher and loftier purpose which he will now begin to explain. Though he urged all to make full use of their youth, he also wants us to understand that “*childhood and youth are vanity.*” Though they should be used to the fullest, with optimism and

zeal, there is a much greater purpose for them than this. All that has been set into being in this world, from creation to curse, and from birth to death has been done for one and only one reason. He wants us to “*fear God and keep His commandments.*” (Ecc 12:13). Everything written in this final chapter (and really in the whole book) is leading to this point. Enjoy your youth, but keep in the back of your mind the days of darkness and the fact that God will bring you to judgement. Youth comes to an end, life is finite and our days are numbered.

For all our days have passed away in Your wrath; we finish our years like a sigh. 10 The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. 11 Who knows the power of Your anger? For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath. 12 So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. Ps 90:9-12

This is the missing ingredient that is finally added. It is what makes the vanity of living “under the sun” bearable. It is what keeps caution and wisdom in the advice God gives to young people in the previous chapter. The curse which came as a result of the unbelief and rebellion against God’s command was not simply a punishment. It was a punishment with a purpose of love. It was punishment that would lead as many as possible to a second chance in heaven. This is why “*we finish our years like a sigh.*” It is why our life “*is soon cut off and we fly away.*” It reveals “*the power*” of God’s “*anger.*” All of this has been set forth in the book of Ecclesiastes. All of it is designed to “*teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.*” As the chapter progresses, he will now describe the days of darkness(12:1-5) that lead to the end of our life(6-8) and what we ought to do about it(9-14).

1. Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth,

Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes; but know that for all these God will bring you into judgment. Eccl 11:9-10

When one carefully ponders this thought, it is clear that though we have a chapter break, this verse must be viewed as an explanation and further elaboration of the advice given there. This statement is a further clarification of “*know that for all these God will bring you into judgment.*” without these two statements, this good advice could easily be taken out of context. God wants all who are born into this world to enjoy the physical creation to the fullest possible extent. This is obvious both from the manner in which He created it and the multitude of Scriptures where they are used as the basis for praising and honoring Him. But the results of the curse show just the opposite. Death and the other things brought forth in the book make it clear that God does not want us to make “life under the sun” an end in itself. Finally, the two are blended. The creation and the curse are now perfectly balanced. But God must be consulted at every twist and turn for any of it to make sense. If we reject the two pivotal statements that make it all balance, then we will lose it all. We must “*know that for all these God will bring you into judgment,*” and we must “*Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth.*”

The term “remember” as it is used here addresses the need to “*recollect*” and “*call to mind.*” It is important to

see that this is a relative concept. As long as we recollect or call to mind the necessary things as they come up, we consider ourselves to have a good memory. Thus if we remember birthdays and anniversaries annually, paying the bills monthly, taking out the trash weekly, and brushing our teeth daily, we have a good memory and are properly recollecting things.

“To remember, to recollect, to call to mind; mostly with an accusative, ... to bear it in mind, either to his advantage or his disadvantage... It connotes frequently the affection of the mind and the action which accompanies recollection; to remember by actual celebration, to commemorate, as applied to the sabbath, & c. ... remembrance, memory...” (Wilson P. 347)

What then is the significance of remembering our Creator in the days of our youth? Is this admonition to remember there is a Creator an annual, monthly, weekly, or daily basis? Is it something even more than this? This book will not elaborate on this. Other passages clarify this point. God wanted Joshua to ponder His word day and night.

“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Josh 1:8”

Thus the remembrance here would be a continuous thing. We must never forget our Creator.

Actually by using the term Creator instead of LORD or God, this is strongly implied. Everything in material creation “under the sun” is a gift from our Creator. As youth enjoys everything that the sight of his eyes and desires of his heart leads him to, it is impossible to forget the Creator who made and offered them for his use. If we are thanking God for our food, clothing and shelter, and being grateful for the mountains, lakes, streams and oceans and all that they contain, then we will remember our Creator in the days of our youth and all the other days of our life. This was Paul’s exact point in his sermon at Athens:

“And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, 27 “so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; 28 “for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His offspring.’ Acts 17:26-28”

Never for a moment should a young person forget that all that exists holds it’s being by the power and will of God. Never should the debt of gratitude and appreciation be set aside. From the rising and setting of the sun, to each breath that we take, and all the blessings, gifts, and wonderful things that occur each day should bring thanksgiving, praise, and a humble recognition of our need to serve. With so many others easily forgetting and taking it all for granted this admonition is very necessary. The time to remember your Creator is in your youth.

This is true for a variety of reasons. If we want to make memories we are proud of, if we want to use the strength of our youth for Him, if we want to form values and gain insights that can mature as we grow older, and if we want to properly prepare for old age, then we must remember our Creator in the days of our youth.

Before the difficult days come,

The term “difficult” has been used over 30 times in the book. It has two broad meanings. One deals with the moral realm, while the other deals with things that happen “under the sun.” In this verse, it is obviously “under the sun.” *“It can mean “bad” or unpleasant in the sense of giving pain or unhappiness,”* and it is *“the antithesis of shalom.”* These difficult days are those days coming in the future that will bring “pain” and “unhappiness.” They are the days when peace slips away and we have problem after problem.

These days of difficulty begin when one’s life forces begin to fail. He will speak more on these days in the next few verses. The point here is the need to remember and serve one’s Creator before these days come. After they come it is quite nearly too late to turn or remember Him. What is left to be grateful for then? What is there left to offer Him? What is left that might bring one to Him then? Few indeed are they who turn to the Lord in remembrance once the evil difficult days of sorrow and loss come.

And the years draw near when you say, “I have no pleasure in them”:

There are years to come in the future when there will no longer be any way to enjoy pleasure. God counsels us to remember him before those years come. The term “pleasure” speaks of things we take *“delight,”* in.

“to do that in which one has great delight when accomplished; joined, therefore, with a negative, it implies very great aversion

and dislike... having a delight in... delight; that which is precious as an object of delight..." (Wilson p. 314-315)

These are the things he counseled us to enjoy in our youth. The things our heart cheered and our eyes delighted in. While in our youth He counsels us to rejoice and walk in these things. But we are now warned that "under the sun," these things will all come to an end. Years will come at the end of our lives where all the things that gave us such great delight in our youth have to be abandoned. Though our heart may yearn for them we can no longer take pleasure or delight in them. The time to remember our Creator is before these days come.

A sober evaluation of what life might be like in it's last few years "under the sun" leads one to understand exactly what is being said here. As one grows older, mothers and fathers pass from the earth and though we would love to talk to them and tell them we love them, they have left us alone. As the years continue friends and neighbors also pass from "under the sun." Health begins to fade and muscles begin to weaken. Eyesight begins to fail and hearing becomes more difficult. It is harder to sleep at night and more uncomfortable just to sit. One by one the pleasure we received from the causes, hobbies, and work that we thought were so important begins to fade. Terminal illnesses with long slow debilitation strike some, arthritis and other muscular / skeletal problems strike another. Some just slowly fade with Alzheimer or senility. A heart attack or stroke strikes another and they live out their days in weakness and frustration. The time to remember our Creator is before these days come.

The fate of man is thus two-edged. They can die young with the promise of life before them, or they can live to be old and reach a point where every day is a burden and anguish. In either case, the only solution is to remember the Creator and count on Him. All other hopes and dreams are destined to fail but this one. Only by putting our soul into his faithful hands in our youth can we have any hope at all. He will care for us no matter what this life might bring to us.

What follows in Hebrew poetry (rhyming of the thoughts) is a description of the frailties and sorrows that old age bring. God counsels us to remember him before the days come when these things occur. There has been a great deal of difference of opinion on the full extent of each of these. We will take the most obvious meaning as the primary interpretation. Only if there are other Scriptures to verify it will we seek for a more symbolic possibility.

2. While the sun and the light, The moon and the stars, Are not darkened,

Each of these must be carefully pondered for both a literal and a symbolic meaning. Though all that may be involved here is the simple loss of eyesight, the darkening of sun, moon, and stars has often meant a great deal more. Taking it literally is one of the most frustrating parts of aging. We depend on our eyes for so much for the things we enjoy. Yet age brings loss of sight through cataracts, degeneration of the retina, diabetes, and just simple loss of elasticity of the eye. For some, blindness or near blindness is their lot for their final years of life. One must factor this in as a possibility. We should be so very grateful for eyeglasses and various medical advances and surgery to forestall this terrible debilitation.

But there may be more here, the symbolism of the darkening of sun, moon, and stars often refers to those dark and dismal days of sorrow and affliction. So it is used when God sends one nation in to destroy another:

Behold the day of the Lord comes, Cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, To lay the land desolate; And He will destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations Will not give their light; The sun will be darkened in its going forth, And the moon will not cause its light to shine. Isa. 13:9-10

And it shall come to pass in that day, says the Lord God, That I will make the sun go down at noon, And I will darken the earth in broad daylight; I will turn your feasts into mourning, And all your songs into lamentation; I will bring sackcloth on every waist, And baldness on every head; I will make it like mourning for an only son, And its end like a bitter day. Am 8:9

Yet it is not just destructions of nations that find such language. God used it as part of the curse for those who refused to obey Him.

"The LORD will strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of heart. 29 "And you shall grope at noonday, as a blind man gropes in darkness; you shall not prosper in your ways; you shall be only oppressed and plundered continually, and no one shall save you. Deut 28:28-29

When speaking of the day how he felt about the day he was born he used these terms as well as how things were going for him during his time of affliction.

"May the day perish on which I was born, and the night in which it was said, 'A male child is conceived.' 4 May that day be darkness; may God above not seek it, nor the light shine upon it. Job 3:3-4

But when I looked for good, evil came to me; and when I waited for light, then came darkness. 27 My heart is in turmoil and cannot rest; days of affliction confront me. 28 I go about mourning, but not in the sun; I stand up in the assembly and cry out for help. Job 30:26-28

Even Koheleth used it earlier in the book to describe the terrible things that can happen to man.

All his days he also eats in darkness, and he has much sorrow and sickness and anger. Ecc 5:17

There are many lights that are liable then to be withdrawn, besides those of the senses and faculties, as, one by one, old friends are taken, familiar customs change, and held hopes now have to be abandoned. All this will come at a stage when there is not longer the resilience of youth or the prospect of recovery to offset it. In one's early years, and for the greater part of life, troubles and illnesses are chiefly set-backs, not disasters. One expects the sky to clear eventually. It is had to adjust to the closing of that long chapter: to know that now, in the final stretch, there will be no improvement: the clouds will always gather again, and time will no longer heal, but kill. So it is in youth, not age, that these inexorable facts are best confronted, when they can drive us into action— that total response to God which was the subject of verse 1— not into despair and vain regrets. (Kidner, Message of Ecclesiastes p. 101-102)

And the clouds do not return after the rain;

The difficulty here between the KJV / NKJV and the ASV / NAS / NIV lies in the term “not.”

the clouds return after the rain; ASV; NIV nor the clouds return after the rain:(KJV)

and clouds return after the rain; (NAS) the clouds do not return after the rain; (NKJ)

Present a paradox giving exactly the opposite statements. Literally what is said is:

The clouds turn back after the rain. The “not” comes from the previous phrase “*while the sun ... are not darkened.*” Obviously the NKJ felt comfortable enough to keep it, though few of the commentaries accept it.

If we accept the KJV/NKJ then the idea would have something to do with drought. For if the clouds do not return after a rain, the crops will die. The coming of the first winter rain brings promise of the water needed for the next year. If the next set of clouds never come, then we have great consequences. This is also true for those who are living under the sun. The vigor and strength of youth like the first rains give promise of lasting forever, but the day finally arrives where the clouds do not return with rain as they previously did, and the body gradually decays.

If the ASV / NAS / NIV translation be accepted then the idea is that of rain after rain after rain. The clouds are full, and they just keep returning over and over again without any break. One rain ends and another one begins. In this be the case, then it could be another reference to the loss of light. Clouds, like the twilight of sunset blot out the blue sky and remove the vibrant beauty of color, or to the floods and troubles that rain after rain would bring.

Ecclesiastes 12:3-5

This next section of the book appears to describe the slow decay of the body. In the eleventh chapter Koheleth had exhorted all to enjoy their youth, but also to remember that their days of rejoicing and cheer in which they could walk in the ways of their heart, and in the sight of their eyes was finite. The “days of darkness would be many” and “all that is coming is vanity” (11:8), youth ends in vanity(11:9-10). Though the words of 12:3-5 are somewhat ambiguous and capable of more than one interpretation, their overall purpose is clear. No matter what we choose to “*let our heart cheer us,*” no matter what “*ways of our heart*” we choose to walk in or “*sight of our eyes*” we choose to look upon, sooner or later they will be snatched away from us. Gradually or suddenly we will find the vigor of our arms and legs, and the acuteness of our senses(eyes, ears, nose, hands, mouth) slowing eroding away, and the days of darkness will begin. The things we are now doing that require good eyesight will someday lose their excitement as the eyes begin to fail. The things that require our hearing will slowly lose their satisfaction as the hearing fails. If we become the gourmet and enjoy foods, we must be prepared for the time when taste becomes muted and teeth so few that it no longer holds the pleasure it once did. Those who choose recreational activities or work will find that the things that give them pleasure begin to become more frustrating as the arms and legs become weaker. No matter what makes our life exciting in youth, as the years pass they will gradually be taken from us one by one, and the days of darkness will be many. .

These are the powerful reasons for concluding that this is what this section is dealing with. 11:8-10 warn of them, and 12:6-7 describe death itself. It is clear then that 12:3-5 describe the days of darkness.

Yet the individual clauses are so poetic and figurative that there is going to be room for more than one interpretation. Perhaps this was by design. It makes these more practical to each of us when the terms involved are more easily able to describe the exact situation we are in. Where there is more than one good and reasonable possibility, I will quote from others who see it more clearly that way.

3. In the day when the keepers of the house tremble,

Most accept the idea that the keepers of the house refer to the arms and hands while the strong men refer to the legs and feet. The concept of our body being a house is more fully elaborated on by Paul, where he not only identifies it, but more fully describes the very ideas set forth in this passage.

For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. 2 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, 3 if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. 4 For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. 2 Cor 5:1-4

The keepers of the house are the ones who “keep,” “tend,” or “watch over” the house. These keepers are responsible for the task of “taking care of” and “giving attention to” this house.

shamar 8104, “to keep, tend, watch over, retain.” ... Shamar means “to keep” in the sense of “tending” and taking care of. ... The word also means “to keep” in the sense of “watching over” or giving attention to. ...” (Vine’s Expository Dictionary)

These are figurative and yet perfect descriptions of what the arms and hands do for “*our house this earthly tent.*” They fend off minor irritations like flies mosquitos, or dangers like bees, wasps, scorpions. They are responsible for eating, grooming, scratching, and most of the work/hobbies we engage in.

All that we now take do so easily with the keepers of our house that we simply take them for granted will some day be hindered when their strength fades and the muscles begin to tremble. The term tremble literally means “to quiver” or “to quake” and metaphorically “to be in terror”

2111 zuwa` - to tremble, to quiver, to quake, to be in terror a) (Qal) to tremble, to quake b) (Pilpel) 1) to shake violently 2) to cause to tremble (BDB)

But its other two uses in Scripture show it has an ever greater breadth even than the definition above:

*Will not your creditors rise up suddenly? Will they not awaken who **oppress** you? And you will become their booty. Hab 2:7*

*So Haman went out that day joyful and with a glad heart; but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king’s gate, and that he did not stand or **tremble** before him, he was filled with indignation against Mordecai. Esth 5:9*

God wants us to remember him before the time comes when the arms and hands “oppress” us or “tremble” with weakness. When this time comes, much that we now enjoy doing will be forever gone “under the sun.”

And the strong men bow down;

The strong men bear the entire weight of the house. They move us from place to place. Through most of our life we simply take them for granted. They jump, tromp, run, skip, hop and walk. Never in our youth, except in the case of injury have they not been able to easily take our body where ever our minds wanted to go. Over hill and dale, up the tree or on to the roof, over the fence or jumping the stream. The legs are the key to our movement. Most that our hearts rejoice in require their participation. Nearly all recreational activities, and the work we choose to do requires them. We are urged to rejoice and use them in whatever way we choose in our youth, but are now warned that the day will come when these strong men who have carried us everywhere will begin to bow down. This term describes things that have become “bent” or “crooked.”

5791 `avath- to be bent, to be crooked, to bend, to make crooked, to pervert (BDB)

As we age, we may be forced to use a cane, walker or even a wheelchair because of our strong men’s inability to hold up the weight any longer. When those days come, all the things that we did without thought in youth, will become impossible to enjoy any longer. What a severe trial for man to face. Yet they receive little sympathy from the young who are incapable of both empathy for their plight and the insight to realize that they will someday be there themselves.

When the grinders cease because they are few,

The most obvious interpretation for the grinders ceasing because they are few would be the teeth. They grind our food, and as we grow older, we lose them to decay or injury. Even with modern steps in dentistry, many older people have lost teeth. They simply wear out and decay. Though man has developed dentures to resolve this problem, even those with dentures find that they cannot eat as they did when they were young. Many cultures that have no dentists would find this to be a particularly vexing problem. As the teeth rot away, so does the enjoyment of food and beverages. Hot and cold become painful, as does the heavy chewing of certain foods such as meats and the fresh crust of bread. It is often easier to simply give up our favorite things than to go through the pain of enjoying them. What a day of sorrow it will be as each of these things is added to the other. The eyes dim and mind dims even as these problems break upon us one after the other. The arms can no longer fend off a bee or catch us if we fall. The legs can no longer bear us where we want to go and the teeth can no longer be used to chew the foods we love.

And those that look through the windows grow dim;

This can either be the eyes, or the mind that looks through them. Both grow dim with age. As the eyesight fades and the ability to assess what we see fades with it, truly the days of darkness come upon us. One of the most precious of possessions is our eyesight. It gives us a clear view of those we love, of all that is beautiful, and of all that is dangerous and needs to be clearly seen. As the body begins its gradual decay, we simply cannot see as clearly as we once did. Another must remove the splinter in our hand. We need the help of others to find the small things we drop, and the cries of glee and excitement over the beautiful bird, lovely flower or wonderful sunset are not as greatly appreciated as we grow to see them less clearly. Perhaps even more to the point is the fear and dread one feels when they can no longer trust their eyes to bring them the information needed to avoid the dangers of life.

4. When the doors are shut in the streets,

When one shuts the door to the streets, all the hustle and bustle is closed down on that world. Things are still going on, but with the doors closed, we are no longer aware of it. Our world closes in upon us and only what is transpiring in our own home is brought to our notice. This could therefore refer to the growing isolation that comes upon us as we grow older. As friends and family pass from the earth, as the world we know becomes more and more different, it is easy to retreat into our own world.

But there are many other interpretations to this clause that also fit it well. Kidwell and Pulpit Commentary believe it is the mouth using Ps 141:3 and Mic 7:3 as proof. Leupold applies it to the ears since when doors are closed one can no longer clearly hear what is going on outside. The old Jewish commentators referred it to the body organs used to take in and take out the foods and fluids. They considered it defective digestion, and the inability to relieve one's bladder or colon. This is certainly a problem for the old and a basic truth, though it does not strike the mind with the beauty of the former, it certainly makes life miserable. The Targum interprets it as the inability to eat and taste food. See Keil and Delitzsch for a more thorough discussion of these last two.

And the sound of grinding is low;

The obvious meaning here is that the hearing is beginning to fade. When the sound of the grinding wheel against the stone is dim and cannot be heard loudly. The words of others become muffled and we must bear the frustration of asking them to repeat what they said or to miss what they meant. No longer can the beauty of normal everyday conversation be enjoyed. People must shout to be heard, and the loving tones and whispered words eventually are gone for ever. The sound of a waterfall, the birds calling, the wind rustling the grass, the tinkle of the rain, all forever removed from the hearing.

Other interpretations of this center on the teeth. When we are young, the sound of the grinding of food is loud in our ears for we have all of our teeth, and they are still strong. We can grind up seeds, hard candy, crunchy bread. This sound of grinding becomes lower and lower as the teeth become fewer. Soon we no longer hear the sound of grinding.

When one rises up at the sound of a bird,

The term "rise up" doesn't have any negative connotation by itself. It simply means "*to arise, stand up,*" or "*any movement to an erect position.*"

qum 6965, “to arise, stand up, come about.” This word ... occurs about 630 times in biblical Hebrew and 39 times in biblical Aramaic. It may denote any movement to an erect position, such as getting up out of a bed Gen. 19:33, or it can be used as the opposite of sitting or kneeling, as when Abraham “stood up from before his dead” Gen. 23:3. It can also refer to the result of arising, as when Joseph saw his sheaf arise and remain erect Gen. 37:7. (Vines)

But it is used in several Scriptures with the idea of getting up to flee from some danger.

*So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who had married his daughters, and said, “**Get up**, get out of this place; for the LORD will destroy this city!” But to his sons-in-law he seemed to be joking. 15 When the morning dawned, the angels urged Lot to hurry, saying, “**Arise**, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be consumed in the punishment of the city.” Gen 19:14-15*

*Now therefore, my son, obey my voice: **arise**, flee to my brother Laban in Haran. Gen 27:43*

This is one of the more simple meanings. Because the hearing is beginning to be less reliable, sometimes meaningless sounds strike fear in the heart. The sound of a bird makes him think it is the trumpet sound for war, or perhaps that someone is breaking into the house.

Others put forth the idea of insomnia, one arises after being awakened by the sound of the bird, or possibly our own “getting up with the chickens.” They do not enjoy a good night’s sleep any longer. They long to arise at the earliest moment so they can forget the aches and pains and the inability to sleep.

And all the daughters of music are brought low;

The beautiful voices of those who sing and play become harder and harder to hear properly and therefore to enjoy. The things that require hearing slowly lose their appeal as the sounds made become more and more difficult to hear.

Others see here not just the ears, but also the throat for along with the ability to hear is also lost the ability to sing well. So if they chose singing as one of the things that delighted them, it will someday be brought low

The greatest joy that I have ever known, Is praising Him in song,

I know some day when I have older grown, My voice will not be strong. (The New Song)

NOTE: Studying this section shows the powerful impact that modern technology has had on our lives. With glasses, hearing aids, false teeth, volume controls, and cataract surgery, we have been able to push this evil day back to the point where our youth seems to extend much further. But when the problems begin, they come much more forcefully, and with much less time to make any changes. Whether this is a service or a disservice to mankind is obviously debatable. It makes “life under the sun” more enjoyable for a longer period of time, but it short modifies God’s plan to bring man to his senses and prepare him for eternity. But we all need to carefully consider in our own hearts how much sooner the evil days would have begun without the surgeries, medications, and simple things like eye glasses and hearing aids. Already some of the things we can continue to do would have been removed if we had lived in a different age. Let us praise God for man’s ingenuity and ability to take some of the dominion back from the tyrant of old age, yet at the same time let us cautiously ponder what the need for these things is telling us about where we really are in our lives. We are no longer young when we need these things!

5. Also when they are afraid of height,

While in youth, there is little to fear from height. A fence, tree, or even the climbing up the sheer face of a cliff at the beach or in the mountains is just another challenge to attempt. The eyes, arms and legs can be trusted to do all that they were designed to do, and they have never failed before. There is therefore great confidence while climbing up or even while standing upon the high places of the world. There is nothing to fear because the muscles and the senses are honed and at their highest level. They can take such risks for they know that even if there is a mishap or problem, they have always been able to recover from it.

As one ages and they find their eyes deceiving them and their legs and arms betraying them, taking such risks becomes a much more fearful thing. Heights are no longer the exciting and enjoyable challenges they were in one’s youth. That which used to be done with confidence is now a fearful thing. Even the slightest height brings fear for the keepers of the house and the strong men can no longer be trusted to carry their load. Should either a stumble or a missed handhold occur he will fall, and the fall of the old is fraught with peril for a broken bone

generally spells death.

And of terrors in the way;

The terrors one feels in the way describe the feelings of dread and anxiety one feels as they ponder the possibilities of what can happen when they leave the safety of their home. The term “in the way” generally means the “*path*,” “*road*,” or “*highway*,” one uses to get from one place to another. It is also used often of the “*manner*,” “*conduct*,” or “*condition*” in which one lives, or “*how and what one does*, a “*manner, custom, behavior, mode of life*.” (derek 1870 - Vines)

Therefore depending on whether we take the term in its most basic sense or in its more general use, we will have the same basic idea either broadened out or slightly limited. If taken in the basic sense it means that taking trips away from home no longer have the same pleasure, anticipation and excitement that they do in our youth. The possible risks and dangers seem more real to older folks than to the young. For the young the possibilities of trouble and setbacks only add to the mystique and excitement. While for those who are aged, they will ruin the trip and possibly end the life.

If the term be taken in its broader sense of the entire life, then it simply refers to the tendency of the aged to see change and upheavals differently than in one’s youth. While young, such things still have an excitement, or at least the anticipation that one can rebuild. As one ages and the chance to rebuild is removed because of age and diminished abilities such thoughts lead instead to fear and terror.

When the almond tree blossoms,

When the almond tree is in full blossom, the tree is fully white. What does this beautiful sign of the coming spring and the harvest of almonds have to do with the coming of old age. The most common interpretation is that of the hair of the aged being white just as the almond trees blossoms are white. When the head of man is the same color as the blossoms on an almond tree, then the time to leave this world and move on to the next has drawn near indeed.

The grasshopper is a burden

The term burden is generally used to describe what one has to bear, in the sense of bearing a load.

5445 “cabal- to bear, to bear a load, to drag oneself along ...” (BDB)

When even a grasshopper feels like a load that has to be borne, then one’s strength is beginning to fail.

Others see in this expression the inability to eat the locusts any longer, that their chirping is bothersome, or even that the way they drag themselves about when they are first hatched is similar to the way older folks feel about their hip joints, translating it *the locust drags himself along as a burden*.

And desire fails.

This passage brings about some variety of interpretation based upon the term “desire” which is used nowhere else but here. It is literally the “caper-berry”

35 ‘abiyownah- caper-berry -used of stimulating desire (BDB)

35 ‘abiyownah (ab-ee-yo-naw’); from 14; provocative of desire; the caper berry (from its stimulative taste): (Strong)

From the above definitions one can see why most of the translations use the term desire. Whatever use the caper had to stimulate taste or even of some hormonal value becomes useless to one once they reach a certain age. No matter how valuable it used to be, there is nothing left to work upon within the body itself. Note how the Pulpit commentary interprets it:

... the caper tree or berry, probably the same as the hyssop, which is found throughout the East, AST, and was extensively used as a provocative of appetite, a stimulant and restorative. Accordingly the writer is thought here to be intimating that even stimulants, such as the caper, affect the old man no longer, cannot give zest to or make him enjoy his food.” (Pulpit Commentary Vol 9 p 300) See also Keil & Delitzsch Vol 6 p. 415-417;s

Barzillai captured this thought when speaking to David about going with him.

But Barzillai said to the king, “How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king to Jerusalem? 35 “I am today eighty

years old. Can I discern between the good and bad? Can your servant taste what I eat or what I drink? Can I hear any longer the voice of singing men and singing women? Why then should your servant be a further burden to my lord the king? 2 Sam 19:34-35

The day finally arrives where all that once kindled and stimulated desire no longer brings about any response within the body. The senses are gone and the things that derive pleasure no longer mean anything.

For man goes to his eternal home,

All of the things above have been placed there by God for a very specific purpose. They are all a part of man's return to dust. They point to the fact that man is about to go to his eternal home. Though for us this means what Paul said in II Cor 5:1-4, it is doubtful that they had this clear of a view. They knew some from Enoch's translation (Gen 5:21-24), and more from Samuel's return to speak with Saul (1 Sam 28:11-20), they knew it was precious in God's sight when one of his saints died (Ps 116:13), and David knew he would go to his dead infant (2 Sam 12:23). They knew enough for Koheleth to say

Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it. Eccl 12:7

All the above are signposts that mortality is catching up to them and that the day of one's death finally approaches. We should also recall that even to the Preacher, this was not a bad thing:

A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of one's birth; 2 Better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for that is the end of all men; and the living will take it to heart. 3 Sorrow is better than laughter, for by a sad countenance the heart is made better. Ecc 7:1-3

And the mourners go about the streets.

Nothing stronger than this can be said. When this occurs for each of us, our life is over and we are no longer here. The final things that have to do with us must be done by others. We certainly cannot have any direct role in our own burial or the mourners going in the streets. By the time this occurs we have left this world forever.

6. Remember your Creator before the silver cord is loosed,

"Remember your Creator" is in italics because it has been added by the translators in their attempt to make a smoother transition. The ASV and KJV have the more accurate translation.

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. (KJV)

before the silver cord is loosed, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern, (ASV)

Though the verse breaks, the thought still flows out of the last clause: "*and the mourners go about the streets.*" This is a very sobering thought. It is the essence of his earlier words:

Better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for that is the end of all men; and the living will take it to heart. Eccl 7:2

We all need to take these things to heart! All of the things in 7:3-5 need to be! But the final term is the most powerful of all. The mourners will be going out into the streets over me. My time will finally come to be the one being buried and mourned. I will no longer be here in this life then. Instead of adding or repeating the verb, he gives an incomplete thought which our own mind is to finish. He uses a negation, a preposition and a relative pronoun. "Not" + "as far as, even to, up to," + "that which."

5704 `ad- as a preposition: 1) as far as, even to, until, up to, while, as far as c) used of time: even to, until, unto, till, during, end d) used of degree: even to, to the degree of, even like ...

834 `asher- 1) (relative pronoun) a) which, who b) that which (what) 2) as a conjunction: a) that (in an objective clause) b) when c) since d) as e) if (conditional)

3808 lo' or low' or loh (Deut. 3:11)- not, no a) not (with verb, absolute prohibition) b) not (with modifier, negation) c) nothing (substantive) d) without (with particle) e) before (used of time)

It could be translated "*not up to that which.*" Since he started the chapter with "*remember your Creator ... before,*" the translators have rightly brought it forward. If this has not been done "*up to*" the point that is described ("*that which*") then it will be too late. This is something that must be done before that point is reached.

We must remember the Creator before the things listed in 6-7 occur. When the silver cord is loosed, it will be forever too late to do it. It hangs by itself to force the mind to again to pay close attention. The mind is forced to ponder and remember the whole context.

The term cord generally means a rope that is twisted together. .

“2256 CHEBEL, khay'-bel; from 2254; a rope(as twisted), espec. a measuring line; ...” (Strong, p. 36).

This is some type of strong woven cord made out of silver. What it was used for is not described in the context. A silver cord might be a necklace made strong to hold a precious jewel. Some have suggested it is that which was made to hold the golden bowl of the next clause. One thing is clear, if some one takes the trouble to make a strong cord out of silver, they have something very precious they want held up or kept close to them. If that cord breaks, then whatever the precious thing was that it kept safe will be lost or broken. It matters little what it holds, the point of the statement is clear. That which holds our spirit/soul to our body is here likened by the Spirit of God to a silver cord. It holds the most precious thing we possess, life. One day that cord will break and our life will leave this body.

It doesn't matter how one dies, quickly and violently, or slowly through aging, on the day of our death the wonderful silver cord God created to hold our life in our body will break and we will fly away.

The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. Ps 90:10

When the cord breaks life slips forever away, and “life under the sun comes to an end. No matter what was built, no matter what preparations were made to “eat, drink, and be merry,” all is lost. We must “remember our creator” before this event occurs.

Or the golden bowl is broken,

There are two views of this golden bowl. They flow from the difference in the definitions of the term.

1543 gullah a bowl, a spring, a basin... 1) used of a lamp 2) used of bowl shaped portion of capitals of pillars of the Temple.” (BDB)

Many see this as the bowl that holds the oil in a lamp, while the other possibility is that it is a very precious article for the carrying of something very cherished. By using gold, he makes it precious, by using a bowl, one is carrying or keeping something together. In this case, it is the soul/spirit being contained in the body. Held by a silver cord, or contained in a golden bowl. When the bowl breaks, the contents spill away.

Or the pitcher shattered at the fountain,

The primary thought here once again is the fact that something cannot be carried, or even kept if the thing that contains it is broken. The pitcher holds water. Without it, the water cannot be carried. The pitcher is taken to the fountain to get the water and bring it back to the home. If the pitcher is shattered at the fountain, then all the water is lost.

The idea may be more complex though than just a repeat of the previous two thoughts. It centers on the same concept brought out by the Lord in one of the parables in which He seeks to teach the folly of becoming so intense with the things of this life in gaining wealth that the real things of value are overlooked.

And He said to them, “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.” 16 Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. 17 “And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’ 18 “So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. 19 ‘And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.”’ 20 “But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ 21 “So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” Lk 12:15-21

What happened to that rich man will happen to all of us. Slowly or quickly, the things in this life that we become so involved in will be taken from us. This is illustrated by the person who hurries to the well to complete one of life's many tasks. As they arrive at the well to get the water, the pitcher is broken. Regardless of how they put their mind to it, there is no way to get the water. They must go all the way back home and get another pitcher. Yet, in this case there is no more pitcher's. Life is contained in a pitcher. One day that pitcher will break and it's

contents will spill out. All that we have been doing with our lives up to that point will no longer matter.

When one walks all the way to the fountain to get water, and the pitcher we carried there to accomplish it is broken, the trip immediately becomes a wasted effort. No matter how close or far away, the return trip will be full of disappointment and frustration. They will have to go all the way home and get another pitcher, or possibly even buy another one. It is the place that it was broken more than the value of the pitcher which makes this so irritating. This is how all men will lose their lives. There never is a convenient moment unless one has remembered their Creator from the days of their youth.

Or the wheel broken at the well.

The wheel at the well(cistern) describes the instrument used to lower a container into the water so the water can be drawn up out of it. In this case it was not something brought along that caused the problem, but a circumstance at the well over which no control can be maintained. The trip to the well is wasted because it ends with the person unable to get what they came for. This too shows the frustration of death in a very simple figure. Sooner or later at a time most are unprepared, the mechanisms that hold the life in the body will fail, and there will be nothing we can do.

7. Then the dust will return to the earth as it was,

Even before sin entered the world and death through sin, man was made of the dust of the earth.

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 being. Gen 2:7

Later, when God first described the nature of death, that it would be the dissolution and undoing of what God had done. Because of sin, that which holds this dust together(silver cord/golden bowl) is removed, and the dust goes back to the earth.

In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you are, and to dust you shall return. Gen. 3:19

This is such a simple, sobering and powerfully humbling description of death. It immediately reveals how powerless we really are in all this. We were formed out of dust by God, given a soul by God, and someday the body will go back to dust. The silver cord and golden bowl that contain our life is made of dust. The elements of our body which God took from this world and formed into a male and female are dust.

All go to one place: all are from the dust, and all return to dust. Ecc. 3:20

The very absolute best any man can hope for after all his years of life, with all his accomplishments, and all his plans is a plot of ground to be buried in so his body can decay back into the dust out of the sight of others. Whatever man makes out of his few short years allotted to him will make no difference to him then. We must remember our Creator who put this dust together and in gratitude seek to serve Him before this time comes. If not, all is lost.

And the spirit will return to God who gave it.

This is man's only hope, and the real reason to remember his Creator in the days of youth. Yet it too is a humbling and sobering revelation. God formed us from the dust, God breathed in the breath of life, God made it possible for the silver cord to be snapped and the golden bowl to be broken, God allows our bodies to go back to the dust, and God receives the spirit back that He gave to us. We really have no power or say in this at all. We have two choices. We can selfishly squander all these precious gifts of God on ourselves living in rebellion against Him, or we can submit fully to Him in gratitude and live as He directs.

This is the reason why all is vanity "under the sun" as well as the reason why the young man, while walking in the ways of his heart must remember that God will bring him into judgement. The spirit will return to God who gave it. This is also why fearing God and keeping His commandments is the whole of man. It is the great beacon that calls men back to Him. All that has been written in this chapter leads to this! The signs of approaching old age, the frustrations of losing bodily vigor, the loss of the senses, all placed there by a loving God as a reminder that it is time to get ready. We are going home and we must be ready to meet him when that time comes.

We have wonderful examples of those who did so.

And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him. Gen. 5:24

But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, For he shall receive me. Ps 49:15

You will guide me with your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Ps .73:24

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints. Ps. 16:15

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. 3 Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever. . . 13 "But you, go your way till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days." Dan 12:2-3, 13

The choice is ours just like the choice was theirs. Billions and billions have already returned to the dust and their spirit's are now in God's hands. We now walk "under the sun" just as they did. Our own lives will proceed just as their did. We will all enjoy the years of our youth, we will all partake of the infirmities of growing old, and we will all mourn for others and finally be mourned for ourselves.

The time to prepare is today. Remember your Creator!

LORD, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. 2 Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God. 3 You turn man to destruction, and say, "Return, O children of men." 4 For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past, and like a watch in the night. 5 You carry them away like a flood; they are like a sleep. In the morning they are like grass which grows up: 6 In the morning it flourishes and grows up; in the evening it is cut down and withers. 7 For we have been consumed by Your anger, and by Your wrath we are terrified. 8 You have set our iniquities before You, our secret sins in the light of Your countenance. 9 For all our days have passed away in Your wrath; we finish our years like a sigh. 10 The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. 11 Who knows the power of Your anger? For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath. 12 So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. Ps 90:1-12

Ecclesiastes 12:8-14

November 29, 1998

Having now completed the book, he ends as he began. He has now finished his compilation of the facts he had gleaned by seeking and searching out by wisdom all that is done under heaven (Ecc 1:13). He once again sets forth the only possible conclusion that all who live "under the sun" will slowly be forced to draw about the life we possess that begins at birth and will end in death. "All that is coming is vanity."(11:8), "childhood and youth are vanity,"(11:10), All is vanity(12:8). Slowly, inexorably and with no escape, we are drawn to it. All that is life leads us to this conclusion.

1. All the things man sets his mind to do ultimately end in vanity. Youth's idealism is slowly changed to realism as what is crooked stays crooked, and what is lacking stays lacking. Man cannot change anything "under the sun." The anticipation and excitement of youth slowly gives way to the realization of just how empty life is without God. 1:14; 2:17
2. Mirth and pleasure do not really satisfy for more than a moment, and the attempts to make it last longer through repetition often lead to a growing tired of the activity. 2:1
3. All the works of man's hands and all the labor he can toil end in vanity. Outside of the pleasure derived from the doing, the having proves to be less than expected. 2:11
4. Those who approach life with wisdom seem to have the better plan, but as the years pass, the real outcome under the sun is no different for the fool. Both end in the grave. 2:15-18
5. As our life here draws to a close, and we assess those who will benefit from our labor, it slowly dawns on us that it was all vanity. Those with wisdom don't need it, and those who are fools will not appreciate it, and will not be able to keep from squandering it. 2:19-21
6. God so ordered things after the curse that man is forced to see that those who reject His image and likeness begin the spiral that ends in their living and dying like animals. 3:18-21

7. Those seeking to become highly skilled in their field of endeavor often find that the prestige and honor they sought by hard work only ended in the envy and hatred of their peers. 4:4
8. We will see some who get so caught up in their work that they forgo human relationships. They never even ponder why they are working so hard, but someday it will dawn on them that they are making all these sacrifices for nothing. 4:8
9. Political power and greatness in ruling over others has little value if no one remembers them after they die. 4:16
10. Those who love silver will never be satisfied no matter how much they gain. Those who seek for abundance will never find an end to it. 5:10
11. From time to time we will witness those who gain wealth in their youth but die before they can enjoy it. This too will testify to the vanity of “life under the sun” 6:2
12. One day, it will dawn upon us that sight of the eyes(what he have right now) is much better than wandering desire(what we would like to have). When this day comes we will see how vain the pursuit of things really is. 6:9
13. The laughter and mirth of those who joke about things that are not funny also leads to the conclusion that “life under the sun” is vanity. 7:6
14. When we witness a just man perishing in his righteousness, while a wicked man prolongs his life in wickedness, we will see that “life under the sun” is vain. 7:15
15. When we see a wicked man live a long and full life and then be buried and forgotten without ever having to be accountable for his evil, we will see vanity. 8:10
16. We will also see just men receiving the terrible end that we would expect the wicked to receive, while the wicked will receive the wonderful blessings that good people ought to receive. This too will strengthen our understanding of the vanity of this life. 8:14
17. In our personal life, as our body ages, the days of darkness will slowly come upon us and will lengthen into many years. All that is coming is vanity. 11:8
18. Our childhood and youth will slowly pass away into memory, we will then look back upon it and wish we had enjoyed it more. 11:10

As we live through these things and watch others live through them, we will be drawn to the same conclusion that Koheleth drew. Because of all these things “life under the sun” is vanity. It is empty, fruitless and meaningless as far as any lasting or tangible results are concerned. There is no hope of making any lasting changes on this sin cursed earth. There is no hope of a full life of continual happiness while “living under the sun” There are many troubles and pitfalls, and the ultimate issue of this life is slow decay and ultimate death. Yet in spite of all this, there will be many bright spots along the way. The joy of work, the joy of food and beverages, the joy of marriage, the joy of youth. But even these do not change the final outcome. They can be enjoyed, but in the back of the mind it must always be understood that when it is all weighed out one the balances, the joys and the frustrations, vanity is still the ultimate outcome of this life and it must be lived accordingly.

8. “Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher, “All is vanity.”

There is very little difference between this statement and the one that began the book:

“Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher; “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.” Ecc 1:2

Nothing in all the truth he has written in the book has changed this conclusion in the least. “Life under the sun” has been cursed by God(Gen 3). As a result of that curse, man cannot get ahead in this life. He is being drawn inexorably back to God, and if he returns all the vanity under the sun is changed to a patient waiting for the time when all this will be changed, but for those who refuse to return, their quest is vain. There is no way to get ahead in this life. There are too many things in the way and too little control. For the good and the evil and the just and the unjust, life simply metes out what comes. But for all it will be fruitless, empty, and futile. There will be no

lasting benefits to be gained from it. We came naked and we will leave the same way. Only those who have a faithful life of service to offer the LORD will have gained any meaning from their life. Without that, all who look back on their life will be forced to conclude that it had no real meaning or value. Neither the possessions one earns, the pleasures they pursue, the wealth they work for, or the wisdom they master can bring any meaning to this life unless we also have God. None of these things can bring any real satisfaction when the evil days come and we are forced to say “we have no pleasure in them.” “Life under the sun” is vain because the dust of our bodies always returns again to dust. There is no security under the sun. Not for the righteous and not for the wicked, and not for the strong or weak. All who strip the veneer off of “life under the sun” and see it in the stark reality of truth will draw the same conclusion. This is not pessimism. It is clarity and wisdom. As Koheleth pointed out in the beginning,

For in much wisdom is much grief, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow. Ecc 1:18

This is part of the grief of wisdom. Thanks be to God that we can hope for more from life by serving Him. Glory to God for His grace and mercy which have brought about pardon and changed the vanity of this life into victory.

Verses 9-11 form a parenthetical statement describing the activities of the Preacher(Koheleth) after the book was written and the conclusions contained within it were made. He now saw what “life under the sun” really was. What did he do about it? How did it impact his life as he saw how empty and fruitless this life would be?

9. And moreover, because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge;

The term “moreover” carries the idea of something that is above and beyond, or in excess.

3148 yowther- as a masculine noun: 1) superiority, advantage, excess as an adverb: 2) excess, better as a conjunction: 3) besides, moreover, more (BDB)

It was not enough for the preacher to record these things in this book. He went beyond that because he was wise. Having been convicted of their truth, and having great wisdom as a result of all the things he had observed, he taught the people knowledge. The term “taught” is a word that means “to teach” or “cause to learn.” It was a common term used in Deuteronomy for the learning and teaching of the Law.

lamad 3925, This common Semitic term... is found approximately 85 times in the text of the Hebrew Old Testament. In its simple, active form, this verb has the meaning “to learn,” but it is also found in a form giving the causative sense, “to teach.” ... Deut. 4:1: “...hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you...” About half the occurrences of lamad are found in the books of Deuteronomy and Psalms, underlining the teaching emphasis found in these books. Judaism’s traditional emphasis on teaching and thus preserving its faith clearly has its basis in the stress on teaching the faith found in the Old Testament, specifically Deut. 6:4-9. Following the Shema’, the “watchword of Judaism” that declares that Yahweh is One Deut. 6:4, is the “first great commandment” Deut. 6:5; Mark 12:28-29. When Moses delivered the Law to his people, he said, “...the Lord commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments...” Deut. 4:14. (from Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words)

In using this term, Koheleth was reminding the people of the need to be taught God’s Laws ordinances, and the things about God that would keep Him fresh in their minds. What he taught them was the knowledge of “perception” and “skill.” The knowledge of “discernment,” “understanding” and “wisdom.”

1847 da`ath- knowledge a) knowledge, perception, skill b) discernment, understanding, wisdom (BDB)

This information was not enough simply to have as simple facts. They must learn the proper application of them. To have this book in their possession was a great blessing, to have it’s author helping them understand it better was an even greater one. This is the greatest outcome of learning the life is “vanity of vanities.” As all other things lose their value and importance that which has true and abiding value rises to a higher position of authority. Peter caught this same thought:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. 11 Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, II Pet 3:10-11

Since all that is accomplished in this life is going to one day be undone, either by death or the end of this age, the preacher saw that the only thing of real true lasting value is to teach people knowledge of God. He dedicated his life to the one occupation that has eternal value. Teaching God’s word to all who will hear it.

yes, he pondered and sought out and set in order many proverbs.

As a consequence of this newfound zeal and desire, he took time not only to teach publicly, but also to write down other things he had learned. The term “pondered” means “to hear,” “listen,” “give ear” or “hearken.”

238 “azan- ... 1) to hear, to listen, to give ear 2) to be obedient, to hearken ...” (BDB)

This is where the greatest wisdom comes from. When we listen to the things God has already created and by pondering them see something powerful and important. Many of the proverbs of Solomon follow this line. They are simple observations of life. By listening to what life teaches, one can come up with some profound wisdom. He also sought and searched for them.

2713 chaqar- to search, to search for, to search out, to examine, to investigate a) (Qal) 1) to search (for) 2) to search through, to explore 3) to examine thoroughly b) (Niphal) to be searched out, to be found out, to be ascertained, to be examined c) (Piel) to search out, to seek out

There may have been some proverbs already written that he simply compiled and put together, or he may mean search in the same way as ponder and have been the author of them all. The setting in order indicates that he set out “to arrange in order.”

8626 taqan- to equalize, to make straight, to become straight a) (Qal) to become straight b) (Piel) to make straight, to put straight, to arrange in order, to set in order (BDB)

This would be the strongest internal evidence that Solomon was the author.

Thus Solomon’s wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the men of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt. 31 For he was wiser than all men-- than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was in all the surrounding nations. 32 He spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were one thousand and five. 1 Kings 4:30-32

The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel: Prov 1:1

The Proverbs of Solomon: a wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is the grief of his mother. Prov 10:1

These also are proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied: Prov 25:1

Solomon is the only inspired writer to whom a large number of Proverbs is credited. He sought them out and put them down. Others may have done so, but if they did, there is no record of them.

10. The preacher sought to find acceptable words;

Another thing that Koheleth sought was acceptable words. This is a different word from what he was doing when he sought out the proverbs. This term emphasizes the need to “aim at,” “devote oneself to,” and “be concerned about.”

baqash 1245, “to seek, search, consult.” This verb... appears in the Bible about 220 times... Basically baqash means “to seek” to find something that is lost or missing, or, at least, whose location is unknown... The sense “seek to secure” emphasizes the pursuit of a wish or the accomplishing of a plan. ... This image may have an emotional coloring, such as, “to aim at, devote oneself to, and be concerned about.”... (Vines Expository Dictionary)

His goal was to find acceptable words. He aimed at and devoted himself to that end. It is interesting to see that those writers who were inspired still wanted to do the very best they could too. He devoted himself to “to find” acceptable words. He sought to “grasp it” “discover” it and therefore “obtain” it.

matsa’ 4672, “to find, meet, get.” ... Matsa’ refers to “finding” someone or something that is lost or misplaced, or “finding” where it is. The thing may be found as the result of a purposeful search... may connote not only “finding” a subject in a location, but “finding something” in an abstract sense... can also mean “to discover.”... The word matsa’, therefore, can mean not only to “find” something, but to “obtain” it as one’s own ... (Vine’s)

This was obviously very important to him. He wanted to the very best he could to put it in the best possible way. The term “acceptable” can also mean “pleasure” and “delight.”

chepets 2656, “pleasure; delight; desire; request; affair; thing.” None of the 39 occurrences of this word appear before First Samuel. All its occurrences are scattered through the rest of biblical literature. This word often means “pleasure” or “delight”: “Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord?” 1 Sam. 15:22 ... Chepes can mean not simply what one takes pleasure in or what gives someone delight but one’s wish or desire... Third, chepes sometimes represents one’s affairs as that in which one takes delight:... (Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words)

He sought for words that would bring pleasure and delight to those who read and understood them.

and what was written was upright-- words of truth.

His intent though was not simply that they would sound good, and bring pleasure, but more importantly, that they would be “upright.” They would lead to a path of life that was “level,” “even” and “straight.”

“to be straight, right; to be even, level... adj. straight, right; upright, righteous, just... straightness, rightness; right, duty, what is right and proper; of persons, uprightness, integrity; ... straightness, rightness, of a way; uprightness, sincerity; justice; evenness, hence happiness...” (Wilson p. 463).

When we know the truth on any subject, we will be walking on a level, even, and straight path. But it must really be the truth. Weight in the “*evenest balance*” possible.

“exact, precise truth; weighed, as it were, in the evenest balance...” (Wilson p. 456)

This is what Koheleth sought for, and with the help of the Holy Spirit he attained it. By learning these proverbs, we find straight paths for our feet. The most level path to take through life. He recorded only precise and exact truths, truths weighed out in the most precise and even balancing scales and found to be precisely truth. There can only be one source for such truth, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

11. The words of the wise are like goads,

It is clear from the context of this passage that the wise here are narrowed down to a very exclusive group of people. These are the wise whose words are “given by one Shepherd.” Hence our author speaks of Scripture, and of those who are inspired by the Holy Spirit. He speaks of those who “have received the Spirit which is from God.”(I Cor 2:9-13). What he is affirming therefore is that Scripture is like goads.

“The iron-pointed part of a goad; the wooden part or rather the whole instrument, being called by another name;” (Wilson p 195)

Words written by inspired (and thus truly wise) men are like goads. The pointed metal end has only one purpose, to prod, prick and motivate to a different path, speed or effort. This in itself is a proverb about the proverbs. Just as an animal needs direction for its owner to convey what he wants, so God uses inspired words to prod and prick man to go in the direction He wants.

O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps. 24 O LORD, correct me, but with justice; not in Your anger, lest You bring me to nothing. Jer 10:23-24

And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: “My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; 6 For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.” 7 If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? Heb 12:5-7

and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails,

and as nails well fastened are (the words of) the masters of assemblies (ASV)

and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails, (NKJ)

their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails (NIV)

and masters of {these} collections are like well-driven nails; (NAS)

As is noted from the various translations, there are some technical difficulties in interpreting one of the terms. What we know for certain is that this is a further elaboration of the previous thought (Hebrew Poetry). That they are given by one shepherd (inspiration), and that they are words (sayings) like “well driven (fastened) nails. The difficulty stems from the term “scholars”

which is actually two Hebrew terms that the ASV accurately translates “masters of assemblies.”

The term “master” is where the difficulties lie. It is used to describe a “master” in the sense of “sir/lord,” a “husband,” or “a deity other than . . . God..”

ba'al 1167, “master; baal.” In Akkadian, the noun belu (“lord”) gave rise to the verb belu (“to rule”). In other northwest Semitic languages, the noun ba'al differs somewhat in meaning, as other words have taken over the meaning of “sir” or “lord.” (Cf. Heb. 'adon.) The Hebrew word ba'al seems to have been related to these homonyms. The word ba'al occurs 84 times in the Hebrew Old Testament, 15 times with the meaning of “husband” and 50 times as a reference to a deity. . . The primary meaning of ba'al is “possessor.” Isaiah's use of ba'al in parallel with qanah clarifies this basic significance of ba'al: “The ox knoweth his owner [qanah], and the ass his master's [ba'al] crib: but Israel does not know, my people doth not consider” Isa. 1:3. Man may be the owner [ba'al] of an animal Exod. 22:10, a house Exod. 22:7, a cistern Exod. 21:34, or even a wife Exod. 21:3. A secondary meaning, “husband,” is clearly indicated by the phrase ba'al ha-ishshah (literally, “owner of the woman”). For example: “If men

strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband [ba'al ha-ishshah] will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine" Exod. 21:22. . . . Thirdly, the word ba'al may denote any deity other than the God of Israel. Baal was a common name given to the god of fertility in Canaan. In the Canaanite city of Ugarit, Baal was especially recognized as the god of fertility. The Old Testament records that Baal was "the god" of the Canaanites. The Israelites worshiped Baal during the time of the judges Judg. 6:25-32 and of King Ahab. Elijah stood as the opponent of the Baal priests at Mount Carmel 1 Kings 18:21ff. . . . Among the prophets, Jeremiah and Hosea mention Baal most frequently. Hosea pictured Israel as turning to the baals and only returning to the Lord after a time of despair Hos. 2:13, 17. . ." (Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words)

It seems safe to eliminate the meaning "husband" and "deity other than . . . God." This leaves the idea of master. Perhaps the (NAS) "masters of *these* collections" is the best way to put what the Spirit here seeks to get across. All the books of the Bible are "masters of collections" they are the very best of all that can be collected and assembled for man to study and learn. Because they are the best, they are like "well driven nails." Those who listen to them are therefore stable, solid and fixed. They are set in place by God's "well driven nails" put together by those he has chosen to be "masters of collections."

Just as there is nothing quite like well-driven nails to hold a house together during all the storms and winds that come up and seek to move it. So too in the life of a man there is nothing like well driven nails to keep them firm under the severe trials and tribulations that come. Job had these well-driven nails himself, and all others after him have had even more. With all the revealed will of God clearly before the Christian, they are the most fortunate of all to have so many well-driven nails to secure themselves upon.

given by one Shepherd.

This one shepherd can only be Jehovah.

But his bow remained in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the Mighty God of Jacob (From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel), Gen 49:24

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. Ps 23:1

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock; you who dwell between the cherubim, shine forth! Ps 80:1

12. And further, my son, be admonished by these.

Though the NKJ translates "further" Koheleth is repeating the same term translated "moreover" in verse nine. It once again suggests that he is again giving something above and beyond what he has previously said.. He is about to make an admonition based upon the previous statement. The term "admonished" can mean "to teach" or "to warn."

2094 zahar- to admonish, to warn, to teach, to shine, to send out light, to be light, to be shining a) (Niphal) to be taught, to be admonished ..." (BDB)

The goads and well fashioned nails of God's inspired Scripture must be taken to heart. All must be warned and taught by them. They are the "Master collection" of God's thoughts for man to ponder and learn. The period placed by the NKJ makes this thought and the one to follow separate. Other translations make this next phrase the admonition.

be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh. (KJV)

be warned: the writing of many books is endless, and excessive devotion {to books} is wearying to the body.(NAS)

Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them. Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body. (NIV)

be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh. (ASV)

There are things to like about several of these translations. The NIV offers an additional passage to use against the worthlessness of human wisdom and thought, while the rest make it a warning against writing books and studying them.

Of making many books there is no end,

The obvious contrast is between the words of the wise(God's inspired writers) and the making of books(those who are not inspired). The sixty-six books of God's Word contain the words of the wise, the goads and well-placed nails of God's own mind. The books of men go on and on. There is not end to man's books. Koheleth

admonishes and warns about this, and about what will happen if we try to study them all.

and much study is wearisome to the flesh.

Since there are so many books, and since much study is extremely wearisome to the flesh and thus makes it impossible to sustain for long periods of time, one must choose wisely what he will study. The collected works of the revealed will of Jehovah or the multitudes of books written by men. We need to be admonished by God's word, we might choose carefully the works of men, but such a careful choice must be guided by the goads and well placed nails of God's chosen authors and words.

13. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:

Koheleth's final words sum up everything. He exhorts us now to hear what we ought to have learned and ought to have gleaned from the book. If we were paying attention, and if the goads and nails have done what they were intended to do by God, then we will be exactly this and nothing more. This is the conclusion to the entire matter that was discussed in this book.

Fear God

This is the sixth time this term has been used in the book, four of which refer to fearing God. This term is used of terror and dread when there is a threat to our safety and of reverence and respect when we are viewing awesome and great things that hold no direct danger to us.

"To fear from an apprehension of danger and a sense of our own weakness, joined therefore with trembling,... to fear, venerate, religiously reverence: hence it is put for the whole of ta religions character, as fear is put for the whole of the doctrine which teaches the fear of God; to worship God..." (Wilson p. 159)

When we are doing things that violate God's law and bring down His wrath upon us, we should feel dread and terror, when we are serving and honoring Him, we should feel awe, reverence and respect. All that Ecclesiastes contains has been written to lead us to see the proper fear and respect that God deserves. God wants us to tremble at His word(Isa 66:1-2).

and keep His commandments,

The term "keep" is used in the sense of "*tending and taking care of,*" "*watching over,*" "*giving attention to,*"

shamar 8104, "to keep, tend, watch over, retain." This verb occurs in. . . Biblical Hebrew. . . about 470 times . . . Shamar means "to keep" in the sense of "tending" and taking care of. So God put Adam "into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it" Gen. 2:15... The word also means "to keep" in the sense of "watching over" or giving attention to. David, ironically chiding Abner for not protecting Saul, says: "Art not thou a valiant man? and who is like to thee in Israel? wherefore then hast thou not kept thy lord the king?" 1 Sam. 26:15. In extended application this emphasis comes to mean "to watch, observe"... Another extended use of the verb related to this emphasis appears in covenantal contexts. In such cases "keep" means "to watch over" in the sense of seeing that one observes the covenant, keeping one to a covenant. God says of Abraham: "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment..." Gen. 18:19... When used in close connection with another verb, shamar can signify carefully or watchfully doing that action... In a third group of passages this verb means "to keep" in the sense of saving or "retaining."(Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words)

God wants us to make His commandments the very highest priority of our "life under the sun" In the long run, this will its most important outcome. His commands must be carefully tended and taken care of. They must be watched over and given attention.

"Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. 8 "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Josh 1:7-8

For this is man's all.

Though the other translations have added words to make this flow more smoothly in English, the original Hebrew's short succinctness still makes perfect sense, though one must choose between two possible thoughts. The NKJ represents the first, the LXX the second: "*for this is the whole man.*" The term "whole" or "all" is defined:

kol- 3605, "all; the whole." The noun kol, derived from kalal, has cognates in Ugaritic, Akkadian,

Phoenician, and Moabite. Kol appears in biblical Hebrew about 5,404 times and in all periods. Biblical Aramaic attests it about 82 times.... The word can be used alone, meaning “the entirety,” “whole,” or “all,”... Kol can signify everything in a given unit whose members have been selected from others of their kind: (Vine)

Since it is used alone here, it signifies “*the entirety*,” “*whole*” or “*all*” of man. The entirety of man can be summed up under fearing God and keeping His commandments. It is why he was created and what his existence was designed to do. Only in this way can he be happy and fulfill his mission and purpose. And only through this can he gain praise, approbation, and approval from God.

14. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing.

This is offered as the reason why man should fear God and keep his commandments. “Life under the sun” may end at death, but man does not. His life continues after this life is over. When we stand before our Creator and every work we have accomplished is judged, including everything we have done that we have kept secret from everyone else, it will then be in our best interests that we have fulfilled the previous verse. As a matter of fact this is the reason why it is man’s all to have done it. If we have, then when this day comes, all will be well for us. If we have not done so, then everything that really mattered in this life has been for nothing.

The secret things are those things we have concealed.

5956 `alam- to conceal, to hide, to be hidden, to be concealed, to be secret ... (BDB)

Whether it is good or whether it is evil.

Once again he uses the two terms that have been used over and over again in the book. The good pleasant and agreeable things and the bad horrible and wicked things. It makes no difference what we try to hide, it what we really are will come out in the end.

Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one’s praise will come from God. 1 Cor 4:5