

WRITER

The message of Ecclesiastes was from the "Teacher." The word "Teacher" comes from a Hebrew word (*koheleth*) which has the root meaning "to assemble." Some translations have used the word "preacher" to translate this word, but "teacher" is the better translation. A teacher was one who called others before him in order that he deliver information to them.

King Solomon is the one who is commonly given credit for writing this inspired book, as well as the Song of Solomon. However, some Bible students question this because 1:12 uses a past tense verb in reference to the writer who was a king in Jerusalem. "*I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem.*" Since Solomon never ceased being a king over Israel until he died, some have assumed that he could not have written the book. However, the use of the past tense in 1:12 should be regarded as a retrospective statement. The text could be translated, "*I have been king over Israel*" The writer was king over Jerusalem to the time these words were penned.

In 1:16 the Teacher refers to himself as acquiring more wisdom than all those who were before him (See also 2:7). It is affirmed by some that it would have been unlikely for Solomon to say this in reference to his father David or Saul who were the only two Israelite kings before him. However, in 1:16 the Teacher states that his reign was in Jerusalem. Saul did not reign in Jerusalem. And since the Teacher used the plural pronoun "them" in reference to the kings who reigned before him, then the reference could not refer to Israelite kings, for only one Israelite king, David, reigned in Jerusalem before Solomon. The reference was undoubtedly to the Jebusite kings who reigned in Jebus (Jerusalem) before it was conquered by David.

In Jewish records of genealogy, the phrase "son of David" was used to refer to any descendant of David. The fact that the Teacher of 1:1 is noted to be the "son of David" could mean that he was someone of latter

descent who was a king, and then deposed from the throne. However, we would have no reason to think that anyone other than David would be the immediate father of the writer. Since the text does not indicate that the writer was a distant descendant of David, we must conclude that he was an immediate descendant, that is, Solomon.

Some have suggested that the strongest argument against Solomon being the writer is the fact that there are many Aramaic words used in the text that were not in Hebrew literature during the time of Solomon. The conclusion, therefore, was that the book was written sometime after the Babylonian captivity when Aramaic was commonly spoken among the Jews. But recent archaeological studies have identified some Aramaic words that were used in a dialect of Hebrew that was spoken in the northern regions of Palestine as far back as the reign of Solomon. Solomon's worldwide trade would have also brought him into contact with many Aramaic words, which words he would have used in writing both Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon. We would assume that Solomon would use Aramaic words in order to reach as many people as possible with the content of the books of Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon.

The fact that the writer described himself to have searched and set in order many proverbs, identifies the writer as Solomon (12:9). The mention of a variety of flora and fauna is also similar to the investigations into the natural world that Solomon made (1 Kg 4:33). In the Song of Solomon there is mention of exotic spices, vegetation, much gold, alabaster and jewels. This would have certainly been the world in which Solomon lived. It would not have been descriptive of the world of Israel after the Babylonian captivity when Jerusalem was the home of a poverty-stricken group of Jews who had previously returned from captivity.

There is no conclusive evidence that Solomon was the writer of either Ecclesiastes or the Song of Solomon. However, neither is there any strong proof against his authorship of the two books. Some have assumed that

some writer took the part of a literary impersonation of Solomon in order to inscribe the words of Solomon for the writer's immediate generation, which generation lived during the 5th century B.C. But the conclusion to the preceding arguments indicates that Solomon was the writer of the two books. This is the only logical conclusion that we conclude from the contents.

DATE

If Solomon were the writer, then the book would have been written sometime during the latter part of his reign, which 40-year reign ended in 931 B.C. If someone other than Solomon wrote the book, according to some Bible students, then it would have been written much later, possibly as late as 200 B.C. If one rejects the Solomonic authorship, then there is no conclusive date that can be established for the writing of the document.

BOOK

The translators of the Septuagint translated the Hebrew word *kohleth* with the Greek word *ekklesiastes*. This is the word from which the book has been named in our Bibles. The root word *ekklesia* was used in the New Testament to refer to an assembly, and specifically to the assembly of God's people on earth.

The nature of the book is that it is an evaluation of all things that pertain to life. The summation of all that the Teacher viewed was that the purpose of life was to fear God and keep His commandments. With this focus in one's life, the Teacher concluded that the pursuit of what the world offers is only vanity.

This is a book that deals with the common problems that face those who acquire great wealth and are very accomplished in the things of the world. It is a book that is directed to those who are in power and have great wealth. It is the book for the materialist who has left God out of his life. The conclusion of the Teacher was that happiness cannot be obtained through wealth or great accomplishments. If God is not a part of one's life, then there is no lasting purpose for life. Since happiness is the goal of all men in life, then all men must

have God in their lives in order to be happy. Happiness is not dependent on either wealth or status in life. God, therefore, must be the centrality of each man's life. If this is not the case in a person's life, then all that is of this world is considered vanity (meaningless) when one faces death.

The theme of the book, therefore, would be the meaningless nature of life if God is left out of one's life. This theme is proved by the personal experience of the writer. The things and ambitions of this world make sense only when one recognizes the One from whom all things have come.

Wealth and accomplishment do bring one to a certain level of happiness. The Teacher would not deny this. However, the happiness about which the Teacher focuses our minds is far beyond this world (Compare Ph 4:7). It is happiness with contentment. It is happiness combined with peace of mind in death. If one is satisfied with the happiness that the world provides through riches, then he will not understand the happiness about which the Teacher writes. Earthly-minded people will not understand this happiness until it is too late.

It seems that Solomon sought for happiness in everything this world could provide (1:3). In search of a meaningful life, he went to science (1:4-11), philosophy (1:12-18), pleasure and drinking (2:1-3), building projects and wealth (2:4-8), entertainment and sexual gratification (2:8), status in life (2:9-11), a philosophy of fatalism (2:12 - 3:15), consumption of the world's goods (3:16-22), and morality (7:1-18). But without God, all was meaningless. He concluded, therefore, that the purpose of life was to fear God and be obedient to His commandments (12:13).

The Bible student must keep in mind that the Teacher used his personal life as a testimony to the vanity of the things of this world. He had lived his own story. He thus placed himself in the literary position of living the meaningless life in order to bring the readers to the conclusion of 12:13, that we fear God and keep His commandments. This is a book of personal testimony. It

is a warning for young people to begin their lives with God, and never leave Him, for in staying close to God one's life will be full.

The Search For Meaning

(1:1 - 2:26)

Outline: (1) Prologue (1:1-11), (2) Vanity of all things (1:12 - 2:26)

Chapter 1

PROLOGUE

1:1-7 Teacher: This is from the Hebrew word *koheleth* that comes from *kahal*, referring to one who assembles people for teaching. The writer thus introduced himself as a teacher to those whom he wanted to direct the message of this book. **All is vanity:** This would be the theme of the book. Life without God is meaningless. The Hebrew word from which "vanity" is translated is *hebhel*, meaning "vapor" or "breath." All that constitutes life, therefore, is as a vapor or breath if it is either consumed or enjoyed without God. All that is of this world will pass away. The mood of the book is thus introduced with the frustration of the writer who has sought the things of the world by placing God in second place. The nature of the book, therefore, is pessimistic, if not fatalistic in some parts. But the reader must understand that the writer places himself in this pessimistic mood in order to convey to the readers the truth of his theme. He writes as one who is living the meaningless life, not as one who had lived it, and then wrote about it, though it is certain that Solomon would have written the book in the last years of his life and reign. **What profit:** All is vanity to the one who labors and acquires riches and fame solely for the purpose of seeking pleasure in life. If one's life is simply for pleasure and fame, then he eventually comes to the point in his life where he concludes that all is meaningless. When the materialist comes to the end of his life, he realizes that all was meaningless because he has no hope beyond the grave. **Generation passes away:** The world continues beyond the life of every man. Great grandchildren fail to remember the names of their great

grandparents. Life is but a breath that soon passes, and we are forgotten by succeeding generations. If life is not lived with immortality in view, then one views life as not worth living, for life is truly meaningless if there is no eternal life. We must study Ecclesiastes, therefore, with the understanding that those to whom the writer addressed the book had little understanding of life after death. The writer is obsessed with death in the book because it is near this event in one's life that he finally realizes that life was vanity without God. **The sun also rises ... goes down:** If one does not live for eternal things, then life is monotonous. The natural world carries on with the passing of every generation. Life goes on no matter how much one may enjoy the fame and riches that he might acquire in life. When we die, all that for which we worked in our lives is disbursed to others.

1:8-11 Life continues in a cycle. Great things continue to happen in the physical world, but nothing changes in the life of ordinary men who live with the monotony of life. The frustrations of man's sense perceptions of the continuous activity of the physical leads one to conclude that the activity of the physical world will bring no peace of mind. Though one is blessed with seeing and hearing the wonders of the physical world, the writer concludes that the repetition of the natural wonders of the world do not bring emotional or spiritual satisfaction. At the end of the day, the environmentalist is left frustrated because he realizes that the world will continue after he is claimed by death. **No new thing:** Life is only a passing vapor during which one encounters that which has been experienced by thousands before him. There are no inventions, only discoveries of that which God created to be possible. That which is "new" is new only to the next generation who is yet to experience the wonders of God's creation. Advances may be made in science and technology, but the basic human spirit remains unchanged throughout time. **No remembrance:** The writer argued in verse 9 that life is vain because there is nothing new. In verse 11 he argues that it is vain because nothing is remem-

bered. Because things are usually forgotten, men build monuments or write books in order not to be forgotten. They establish legacies by which they might be remembered, for such is the reason this very book was written. The Teacher did not want us to forget the legacy of his life, that it was vanity without putting God first. But we must remember that though man may forget, God does not (Ps 56:8). He chooses to remember all His saints and all the good that they do throughout their lives (See 2 Co 5:10). The difference between the materialist and the believer is that the believer stores up good works that are remembered by his Creator, while the materialist builds monuments of his good works solely from that which was created. The works of the believer, therefore, are not in vain (1 Co 15:58). *“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘so that they may rest from their labors, for their works follow them’”* (Rv 14:13).

VANITY OF ALL THINGS

1:12-18 *I ... was king over Israel:* The verb tense of this statement seems to exclude Solomon from being the author of the book, since Solomon reigned continuously over Israel until his death. The book could have been written by another king of Israel at a later date. Though the life-style of Solomon may be a natural setting for the content of the book, we must not assume that the other kings of Israel did not also live a similar life of vanity. However, because of the nature and content of this book, as well as a similar writing style of the Song of Solomon, we would translate the verb in a retrospective manner, that is, that the Teacher identifies himself as having been the king of Israel to the time of the writing of this document. Solomon, therefore, is the best candidate for being the author. **To seek and search:** This was characteristic of the inquisitive mind of Solomon (1 Kg 4:33). If one's acquisition of wisdom and knowledge of things of this world is the primary goal of life, then he will be left with frustration. In this case, the Teacher, as a king, used all his wealth to make his search successful. Though he diligently searched

that which is of the world in order to find satisfaction and happiness, he could not. If a king could not discover that life was more than the vanity of its possessions, then certainly the common man would surely fail. If the king could not discover enough, then certainly we cannot learn more. With all our science and technology today, we still cannot discover all that is to be discovered. All scientists, therefore, end their lives in frustration because they could not learn all that they wanted to learn. ***Crooked cannot be made straight:*** The more one searches, the more one discovers that we live in an imperfect world. We always die with unfinished business. With God's gift of creative imaginations, we seek to accomplish all that we can. We want to learn everything. But at the end of life we are left in frustration concerning those things we could not complete, or those things we did not have enough time to learn. ***Madness and folly:*** The Teacher sought to know wisdom from contrasting perspectives. The thought here may be that he sought to live in the realm of both madness and foolishness in order to understand the wisdom of life. But such led to his own frustration. Living in the realm of madness and folly will certainly provide the opportunity to learn from the school of hard knocks, but one will graduate from the school with a great deal of emotional wounds, if not physical disabilities. One will learn that a life of personal drug abuse is meaningless when he is left with a debilitated mind. ***Knowledge increases sorrow:*** The more one knows, the more he realizes that he does not know. He is sorrowed because he often becomes arrogant in his knowledge, but humbled in knowing that one person can never know everything. The urge that drives a person to know, also frustrates him because he can never know enough. Nevertheless, knowledge is to be chosen over ignorance, for in ignorance a person becomes the victim of his own lack of knowledge.

Chapter 2

2:1-8 *Pleasure ... wine:* Many people have tried to party throughout their lives in order to be happy. Drunken

parties only lead to misery the day after. Drug abuse only encourages the addict to continue in a life wherein he is in the bondage of a chemical of this world. Entertainment and drugs are only occasional diversions from the real issues one has that cause unhappiness.

With wisdom: Some feel that they can succeed in finding happiness if they control a hedonistic life through wise choices. But to excite one's thinking with alcohol and drugs only diverts one from the real problems that hinder happiness. True wisdom leads one away from those diversions that we use to acquire momentary happiness or emotional bliss. **Works:** Another diversion from the problems of life is to involve oneself in obsessive work that takes one's mind off pressing problems. In the case of Solomon, great efforts were made to accumulate great wealth by receiving treasures from passing dignitaries who came to honor the king (See 1 Kg 10:1,2,10). The king involved himself in every sort of entertainment with his crowd of the rich and famous in order to stimulate joy. He thus engaged in every facet of life that might generate within him peace of mind and happiness. He abused his body with drink. He abused his time with much work. He abused his idle time with parties. But in the end, all these things came to an end, and there was no real happiness. All was vanity and the wasting of one's time with the futility of things of this world.

2:9-11 Because of his wealth and status as a king, he had the privilege of venturing into everything that life had to offer in order to find that which all men want, that is, to be happy. Though he had all that money could buy, and enjoyed the status of being a king, he still concluded that all was vanity. If wealth and power could have brought happiness, then certainly Solomon would have been the happiest person in the world at the time. Wealth will certainly bring a level of joy and happiness, but we must keep in mind the context of the Teacher's theme. True happiness is acquired only when one mentally transcends the things of this world. This comes only when one's mind is set on those things that are above, not on the things of this world (See com-

ments Cl 3:1,2). **Vexation:** His efforts to acquire that which he so desired led him to be a frustrated person. And frustrated people are unhappy. The problem with seeking happiness through self-centered activities is that no person can be truly happy by focusing on oneself. True and permanent happiness comes through giving of oneself to others (See comments Jn 13:17). It is the nature of the human spirit to be truly happy when serving others. The self-consumed person, therefore, can never be truly happy.

2:12-16 Happiness could not be found in wealth and activities. Therefore, the king turned to exercising the mind in wisdom and knowledge. Wisdom does prevent getting involved in senseless folly, and thus the wise person uses his wisdom to guide himself away from foolish behavior. But since the final end of both the wise and foolish is the grave, then there is vanity in much learning. If one's learning does not lead him to focus in life on that which is above life, then his much learning is useless in acquiring that which makes one happy. **No remembrance:** The wise man does not have the privilege of being remembered by the living. Thus knowledge, though prized by men, does not guarantee that one will establish a legacy among men. Men will learn the knowledge of a previous generation of scholars, but will forget the scholars.

2:17-23 **I hated life:** The Teacher found that with all that life offered it could not provide peace. Thus life without God is meaningless and without peace of mind. There is nothing in life that one can do that would add meaning to life, if life is to be lived without God. One of the greatest deceptions of Satan is to bring people to a level of happiness in life that is satisfying, and thus one does not aspire to those things that are beyond this life. **I must leave it:** When one dies, he leaves everything. What bothered the Teacher was that everything for which he had worked must be left to one who did not work for it. In this case, he wondered if the person who inherited his wealth would be wise enough not to squander that for which he had worked so hard to amass. The son who did not work to build the empire

of his father will often squander the inheritance of his father's labors. Because the Teacher had experienced this in the lives of so many people, it brought him to despair. If one works to amass wealth, then he would do well to give of his wealth while living, and thus enjoy the fruit of happiness that comes from giving to others. There is a greater use of wealth than building an inheritance for those who will consume it upon themselves.

2:24-26 Enjoy good in his labor: Living simply for the purpose of gaining wealth is folly. One should have enough in life in order to live without worry. A person should be in a position to enjoy his work, without his work being his obsession. **Who can have enjoyment without Him:** This should be one's focus in life. It is the theme of the book. One can have true joy in his labors only when he is laboring with God in his life. Life is vain if labor is only for survival on this earth. But when one works in view of eternal life to come, then that which he earns is used in life for the glory of God. God gives wisdom in order that men understand the meaning of life, that life is for the glory of God, and not for oneself. God gives knowledge in order that man comprehend the work of God in His creation. The result is that man labors with joy, knowing that though he lives in a world of suffering, all things will work together for the good of those who love Him (Rm 8:28).

Dealing With The Facts Of Life

(3:1 - 5:20)

Outline: (1) A world of order (3:1-8), (2) The foundation of faith (3:9-15), (3) The problem of sin and death (3:16-22), (4) Disappointments of life (4:1-16), (5) The problem of (5:1-7), (6) Vanity of possessions (5:8-20)

Chapter 3

A WORLD OF ORDER

3:1-8 In Hebrew poetry, the Teacher expressed in these verses his philosophical view of the world. These are not words that express the fatalistic occurrence of events from which one cannot escape. These verses express a divine order of things into which one must plug his life in order to enjoy the contentment that comes

from knowing that God has all things under control. Thus the Teacher deals with the actions of man, not things that are established as inevitable. Since the series of statements are in poetry, one would not assume that the interpreter must understand every statement as literal. There are symbolic meanings to the statements that lead us to understand the sovereignty of God over an environment wherein man is allowed freedom of will to exist. **Born ... die:** God has established the natural process of procreation. No man in his physical body can live forever. **Plant ... harvest:** God established seasons during which man should plant and harvest crops for the sustenance of life. **Kill ... heal:** God has established law by which justice must be served to the guilty, as well as a time for reconciliation between the forgiving. **Break down ... build up:** The old buildings stricken with mildew and decay should be destroyed, and new buildings constructed to replace them. **Weep ... laugh:** There is an appropriate time for weeping over things that are sad, as well as a time to rejoice over things that are good. **Mourn ... dance:** There is an appropriate time to mourn over the death of friends and family, as well as a time to dance over joyous events. **Cast away stones ... gather stones:** There is a time for casting stones out of the land in preparation of the soil for a vineyard, and a time to gather them to build a fence around the vineyard. **Embrace ... refrain from embracing:** There is a time to embrace for friendship, and a time to reject an unrighteous person from being a companion. **Gain ... lose:** There is time for profit, and a time to give of one's wealth. **Keep ... cast away:** There are times to retain what one has. But for improvement or security in life, there is a time to discard that which one possesses. **Tear ... sew:** Metaphorically, there is a time to tear apart companions or kingdoms, and a time to reunite or sign alliances. **Silence ... speak:** Speaking at the appropriate time with words of wisdom will heal and bring parties together. There is a time to be silent in order to avoid conflict, and a time to speak in order to bring reconciliation. **Love ... hate:** There is a time to manifest love for reconciliation, but a time to cause

division because one detests sin and betrayal. **War ... peace:** There is a time to guarantee freedom by opposing those who would bring nations into bondage, and a time to celebrate because opposing parties have agreed to terms of peace.

THE FOUNDATION OF FAITH

3:9-15 *Eternity in their hearts:* Man was created a religious being. It is natural for him to seek that which is beyond the physical world. It is unnatural to deny God. No civilization of the world has been discovered that does not have a concept of a supreme being. **Work that God has done:** All that God has created is good (Gn 1:4,12,18,21, 25,31). When man sinned, and was driven from the garden of Eden, God destined that he toil with his hands for his survival. One thus works to live, but if he works only to live in this life, then eventually his toil will end in frustration. We must understand that our toil in life is not for life alone, but for others in this life and that which is beyond life. With God in view, one works for his own good, but also for the good of others. Though we will never in this life understand the totality of God's work, we must work to the best of our knowledge in compliance with the plan of God for creating this world. By doing this, we come to understand why God created all things. We begin to understand why He destined us to labor in this world for the purpose of stimulating fear and obedience. **What is has been already:** God created an orderly universe. The uniformity by which the universe is continued by natural laws guarantees the future. We must not think, therefore, that we have discovered something new in life. Others have already lived through similar events through which men commonly live every day in this world.

THE PROBLEM OF SIN & DEATH

3:16-22 Life is complex when there are contradictions in moral behavior among men. The contradictions are manifested in the fact that where there should have been justice, there was wickedness. Iniquity was

in the place of righteousness. A good God created a good world. However, in His creation there is evil. The existence of evil is the result of man being created a free-moral individual who could choose. Immoral men choose evil and consequently inflict great suffering in the lives of others. God, however, will stand just in judgment by bringing the free-moral works of all men into account in a final judgment (2 Co 5:10). The supposed contradictions that we see in the world, therefore, will eventually be sorted out in the just judgment of God of all things. **The estate of the sons of men:** The status of all men is the same as all animals in reference to the body. All die and return to the dust of the earth. **The spirit of man:** The view of the Teacher in the context of the statements in verse 21 is not in reference to immortality. He was simply giving a statement in reference to man's observation of the death of both man and animals. From this view point, man does not know the aftermath of either man or animals when either die. That the spirit of man does return to God (12:7) is not in the mind of the Teacher in this context. To use this passage to affirm that there is an immortal spirit within animals is to assume something that is not in the meaning of what the Teacher is trying to convey. Animals have not been given immortal spirits as men. This is the point of the Teacher's thought. If there is no life beyond this life, then we simply die as animals, who have no immortal soul.

Chapter 4

DISAPPOINTMENTS OF LIFE

4:1-3 What is stated in this context is probably the Preacher's continuation of thoughts that were made in reference to 3:16. **Oppressions:** The social and political environment sometimes produces a society wherein there is no freedom. The Teacher says that the dead do not have to live under the tyranny of the dictatorship of an oppressing king. He says that it is better for those who have not yet been born into such an evil world.

4:4-6 This is a world wherein one person envies the skills of another. There is competition of one against

another. There is no satisfaction or peace of mind when working because one envies the work of another. A person never feels that he is good enough because he continually measures himself against the accomplishments of others. Nevertheless, one must work lest he consume himself away in poverty, or separate himself from friends and relatives because he has sought to live off their means. It is thus better to live in contentment with a little, than having great wealth that comes with the turmoil of competitive work in reference to one's neighbor.

4:7,8 To work only for one's self is to live a life of loneliness. But if one works in companionship with friends and family, then his work is satisfying. There is contentment in working for the benefit of others (See comments At 20:34).

4:9-12 The wisdom of two working together is that one must make an effort to find others with whom to work. Cooperation with others adds meaning to one's own efforts. Companionship is the result of working in order to help others. Those who do good to others will never be working alone, for their good works will draw others to their side. Selfless people are never lonely people.

4:13-16 There is an ambiguous nature to the Hebrew construction of these verses. Reference may be to Jeroboam who fled into Egyptian exile, but later became the king of the northern kingdom of Israel (1 Kg 11:26-43; 12:1-33). He was not born of royal blood, but was given kingship over the ten northern tribes of Israel. **Wise youth:** Though people may admire and covet the position of a king, it is better to be a wise youth than an old king who is too proud to receive instruction. You are wise when they understand that wisdom is not confined to those in power.

Chapter 5

THE PROBLEM OF VAIN PROMISES

5:1-3 One must guard himself against irreverent behavior while living in the presence of God (See comments Rm 12:1,2). One must always be receptive to the

instructions of God, for such portrays a godly person. Godly people search the Scriptures daily, for they realize that God is talking to them through the Scriptures (See comments At 17:11). It is better to obey God than to legalistically perform religious rites (See comments 1 Sm 15:22; Mt 23; intro. to Gl). The problem with the foolish is that they do not understand that they are living contrary to the will of God. Many foolish religious people who have created religions after their own desires or traditions do not realize that they are vainly worshiping God (See comments Mk 7:1-9). **Let your words be few:** See comments Js 2:1-10 (see Js 1:19,26). Too much speaking eventually leads one to saying those things that are not true, or making promises that one cannot keep. **A dream comes:** One can set goals. However, he must work hard in order to reach those goals.

5:4-7 Vow a vow: When one made a vow before God, it was a self-imposed law that he had to keep (Dt 23:21-23). If he did not keep the vow, he sinned against God, for he had made a promise to God and did not keep it. It is good to make a vow (promise) before God, because in doing such one sets spiritual goals for himself in order to bring glory to God. **Your flesh to sin:** One should not allow his mouth to bring him into sin. **Messenger:** Probably a reference to the priest (Ml 2:7). When one makes a vow before a representative of God, then he must keep the vow. If a person does not keep his vows to God, then he makes God angry. **But fear God:** One must not do that which would cause God to be angry. Making promises to God and not keeping them, is a mockery of God. One should behave in a way to make God one's friend, not in a manner that would irritate God (Compare Js 4:4).

VANITY OF POSSESSIONS

5:8,9 When oppression exists and justice is not served by officials, then corrupt officials will have to give account to the officials who are over them. The higher officials must give account to the king, and the king to God. God is the final authority before whom all will give account. **Profit of the land:** Everyone in the world is dependent on the productivity of the land. So-

ciety, therefore, should guard the farmers of the land, lest those in urban centers suffer as a result of oppressed farmers.

5:10-12 The problem with wealth is that it encourages the wealthy to always want more. It is not that wealth is wrong. It becomes wrong only when one has made it his sole purpose in life to become rich (See comments Lk 12:15; 1 Tm 6:10). If one acquires wealth for the purpose of helping others, then he is doing a good work (See At 20:34). The more wealth one has, the more responsibility he has in distributing his wealth to others. He cannot simply take an account of his wealth on a regular basis in order to take pride in what he has accomplished. There is no satisfaction in considering one's wealth, for in doing so, one's mind is not set on eternal goals. True fulfillment in life comes in helping others with what one has gained (See comments 1 Tm 6:6-10,17). **Sleep:** The disadvantage of being wealthy is that one has to worry continually about who is going to take his wealth, as well as those who ask for one's wealth.

5:13-17 **Hoarded:** See 2:21; 3:16; 4:13. **Misfortune:** In this case one hoarded his wealth. However, in a bad business adventure to gain more, he lost it all. Subsequently, he had nothing to leave to his son. **Take nothing from his labor:** The foolishness of hoarding is based on the principle that all should work for their own livelihood. A son does not have the right to an inheritance, only the privilege. He is responsible for his own livelihood. Upon this principle, therefore, the one who gains much should use some of what he gains for the benefit of others, for he can take nothing to the grave. The one who hoards, therefore, cheats himself because he has lost the opportunity in life of having the satisfaction of doing good to others (See comments Jn 13:17). God is a giver, and in order to be like God (godly) one must behave as God (See comments Js 1:27).

5:18-20 It is right for a man to work for his food, and then enjoy the productivity of his toil (See comments 2 Th 3:6-10). The problem with many is obsessing over what one has acquired, hoarding it, and then

seeking more for the sake of becoming wealthy. One must guard against becoming fascinated with his own abilities to acquire riches, and in doing so forget that he must live in a community of needs that must have his help (At 20:34). For those who have given themselves to work in service of others, God answers with the blessing of happiness. If one has no wealth by which he can bless others, then he has his time by which he can serve others. Giving of one's time to others brings the blessing of happiness (Jn 13:17).

Vanity Of Materialism

(6:1 - 8:17)

Outline: (1) Vanity of earthly wealth (6:1-12), (2) Living in a sin-cursed world (7:1-29), (3) Adjusting to an imperfect world (8:1-17)

Chapter 6

VANITY OF EARTHLY WEALTH

6:1,2 In this context it is the man of wealth who has no satisfaction with his wealth. In 2:18-23 the wealth of the rich man was squandered by foolish heirs. In 5:13-17 the wealthy man lost his riches through bad business deals. One may have riches, property and honor among the people, but if his purpose for wealth is to serve his own needs, then he lives a meaningless life. Having the gift to acquire wealth is uselessly wasted if one does not have the gift of giving.

6:3-6 To the Israelites, a large family was a blessing and an occasion for rejoicing. But if one had a large family and found no pleasure in his family, then what would be the value of a large family? If one lived a thousand years, but had no honorable burial by which the living honored him, then the Teacher questioned the value of life. A stillborn baby who never experienced consciousness is better off than a life without meaning. In other words, it is better not to have known life, than to have lived with a life that is empty and void of fulfillment. **A thousand years twice:** The longer the unfulfilled life goes, the worse it is. As the stillborn babe, it is better not to have experienced life, than live an emotionally agonizing life. Two thousand years of

life without God would be meaningless.

6:7-9 If one's labor is solely for the enjoyment of life, then he will spiritually starve. A person may satisfy the lust of the flesh by enjoying many delicacies, but famish his soul if his thinking is confined to the things of this world. Even if living is for the benefit of acquiring wisdom alone, then one is no better off than the fool who lives selfishly (see 2:12-17). Whether one labors to satisfy himself with great feasts, or acquires great wisdom, both end up in the same place at death. Thus the worldly wise man has no advantage over the fool, if the man of understanding lives only unto himself.

6:10-12 The lesson of the Teacher is pessimistic if all that is in life leads one to a meaningless existence without God. If there is nothing beyond this life, then all that is of life leads one to despair. **Has already been named:** God knows the future, but He does not predestine it to happen. In this context, the meaning is that God knows where we are going, but allows our free-moral choices to determine our individual destinies. God has determined the destiny of the world. We individually determine our own destinies within the world, and within God's plan for the world. It is for this reason that man must connect with God in reference to God's purpose for the existence of the world. If the mind of a person is confined to this world alone, then he will make decisions that are bound to this world, and thus he is destined to bring despair into his own life. Since it was not within the power of man at the time to know what was beyond the grave, then the Teacher concluded that it was imperative that man invest his life in the spiritual wealth of God's will.

Chapter 7

LIVING IN A SIN-CURSED WORLD

7:1-12 This is a chapter of proverbial statements that reveals thoughts of wisdom concerning what is good for man in this life. **1** Wise men live to produce a good reputation for themselves. As perfume draws others to oneself, so a good reputation will draw others who come with opportunities. One should approach life,

not as a party, but as an existence that demands one's earnest desire to live a fulfilled life. For this reason, it is better to be serious about life, than to live it foolishly. **2** When a person comes away from a funeral, he takes life more seriously, realizing that it is so brief. We never live long enough to accomplish all that we wish to do. This is especially true for the servant of God who has dedicated himself to the edification of the church and the business of populating heaven. **3** Sorrow makes one think. It makes one examine himself in reference to where he is in life. When one allows himself to have a good cry, he will relieve himself of stored up emotion. **4** The one who seeks to be wise will approach life with seriousness. **5** The humble in heart will welcome the correction of the wise. Listening to the counsel of the wise is better than listening to those who seek to flatter our egos, while at the same time they conceal the truth. **6** The foolish advice of some is like the quick burning thorn bush. It looks good for a moment, but it does not last long enough to cook the food. **7** If a wise man submits to extortion or oppression, he becomes foolish. It is as a bribe offered to an official who distorts judgment. **8** It is better to make one's decision that is based on a final goal, than on things that are only incidental. It is thus best to be patient when making a decision. **9** When one becomes angry, he cannot make an objective decision. He will often make a rash decision that will result in dire consequences with which he must live. **10** A wise person will not complain about the past. Though we may learn from the past, focusing on misfortunes of the past may lead us to make wrong decisions in the present. **11** The greatest inheritance that a parent can leave a child is a heritage of wisdom. **Those who see the sun:** That is, man in his earthly life. **12** One's wealth cannot buy a relationship with God. Only wisdom brings one into submission to God, and thus the opportunity to lead the fulfilled life.

7:13,14 The true believer will rejoice in the day of prosperity, as well as in the day of calamity (Jc 1:1,2). He will be able to do so because his wealth is not the foundation of his relationship with God. Since we live

within the purpose of God for which He created the world, then we must submit to His providential work in His creation, whether it means wealth or poverty.

7:15-20 In this context one must avoid the temptation of being self-righteous, and thus avoiding wickedness. The writer contrasts legal righteousness with immoral living in wickedness. What one must understand is that the rewards or consequences that are experienced in this life are not adequate to determine one's course of life. We reap what we sow. But the true rewards for behavior in this life will be given in the final judgment of all men (See Mt 25:46; 2 Th 1:6-9). **Overly righteous:** The legalistically pious person seeks to judge others by his own standards of religious behavior. **Foolish:** This is the one who is determined to live wickedly. One must not live in the confines of religious extremity, but realize that all men sin and fall short of the glory of God (Rm 3:9,10,23). The self-righteous must understand that he is a sinner. **Overly wise:** The one who is puffed up in his wisdom has judged himself foolish. Those who are such have little patience for others. Those who exalt themselves through their great knowledge often judge as ignorant those who have little knowledge. **Overly wicked:** All have sinned, and thus one should not add to his sin by deliberately sinning (See comments Hb 10:26). **He who fears God:** The one who is directed by the commandments of God will guard himself from following after self-imposed religiosity, as well as overt sin. Wisdom will morally strengthen those who seek to be wise in God's will. **Does not sin:** See comments Rm 3:9,10,23.

7:21,22 A person should not become overly upset with criticism. We must remember that we ourselves have criticized others in the past, and thus our criticism often returns to ourselves.

7:23-26 By reflecting on what he has just written, the Teacher confessed that he had thought he would become wise. Unfortunately, wisdom was out of reach because knowledge and the reality of all things is beyond the reach of normal man (See 8:16,17; Jb 11:7,8). The point of the writer is that no one can have all wis-

dom, for there is much wisdom that is beyond the grasp of man. **I applied my heart to know:** One should certainly seek wisdom and knowledge. In doing this we can discover that wickedness is to follow after folly. One learns that foolishness is madness when compared to the consequences of both wickedness and foolishness in this life and the judgment to come. **More bitter than death:** What the Teacher discovered that was worse than death was the woman who used her sexual charms to enslave the foolish (Compare Rv 2:20).

7:27-29 Not all women would scheme to ensnare a man to commit fornication. But what the Teacher found was that some women sought to lay traps for unwise men. Those men who seek out sin are easily entrapped by a woman who would seek to ensnare them. **Schemes for evil:** The problem of all men is that they would seek disobedience, rather than conform to the will of God. Their minds have gone astray, and subsequently their behavior follows their evil desires (Js 1:13-15). The allure of sin is always present. If one has given himself over to the schemes of evil, then he will fall victim to all sorts of wickedness. There are consequences for doing evil, and when one does evil, he or she must take ownership of the consequences that result from evil behavior.

Chapter 8

ADJUSTING TO AN IMPERFECT WORLD

8:1-9 These statements are made in reference to the reign of an unjust king, or one's life in a state with a corrupt government. **I counsel you:** See comments Rm 13:1-5. **Oath:** If one has given his oath to be obedient to the king, then he must follow through with the oath, for the oath was made before God. **Leave his sight:** Do not quickly rebel against a king. A person must remember that the king is the final authority of the land, and thus he does what he wants to do. **Keeps the commandment:** If one is obedient to the king, he will not suffer the wrath of the king that is poured out on the rebellious. Civil law is established in order to prevent civil disobedience. **There is a time:** Though the demands of

a king may be unjust, the wise will know that there is a time when the unjust king will meet his judgment. Since one does not know what the future holds, then with patience he should wait until judgment is brought down on an unjust king. No wicked ruler can live beyond death, and thus it may be that one must wait for deliverance in the death of the wicked. **Neither will wickedness deliver:** Those who follow wicked schemes to be delivered from a wicked ruler, will only sink further into wickedness. Two wrongs never make something right.

8:10-13 Soon forgotten: Though an official may be wicked and rule with injustice, he will eventually die. And he will be forgotten. **Sentence against an evil work:** One may think that the delay of punishment of the wicked is unjust, however, one must keep in mind that the wicked will eventually face judgment before God. In this context, the Teacher was assured that it would be well with the righteous regardless of any judgment in this life on the wicked. For this reason, the righteous must focus on the blessings of God that they enjoy, regardless of the delay of judgment that will eventually come on unjust rulers. **As a shadow:** The wicked cannot prolong his life as a shadow becomes longer as the sun sets. Since it is not within the power of the wicked to prolong their lives, it is sometimes necessary for the righteous to be patient for deliverance when the unjust die.

8:14,15 The Teacher again expressed his despair because of the inequities of life that he saw between the lives of the wicked and the righteous. He saw just men rewarded according to the deeds of the wicked. He saw that the wicked received that which should be given to the righteous. In a world where inequities existed, his conclusion to the matter was that one must simply eat, drink and be merry in the moment. This may be true if one's focus is only on this world (3:22; 5:18). But if one understands the purpose for which God created the world, then the philosophy of life—"eating and drinking"—is worldly. Life is more than that which is of this world.

8:16,17 If a person focuses solely on the world in order to understand the purpose of the world, then he will be frustrated, for he will not discover the purpose of the world. The Teacher lost sleep over trying to understand the meaning of life in a world that seems to have gone wrong. By focusing exclusively on the world, one cannot understand the good that is in life. The point by which we could conclude the matter is that without God, even the wisest person in the world cannot come to an understanding of the purpose of life in a world filled with evil and suffering (See Is 55:6-11). The answer to why humanity suffers can be answered only in view of the fact that there is a God who has a purpose for the existence of the world.

Living Within The Hands Of God

(9:1 - 10:20)

Outline: (1) Living with the inevitability of death (9:1-18), (2) Disruptions of life through folly (10:1-20)

Chapter 9

LIVING WITH THE INEVITABILITY OF DEATH

9:1-3 *In the hand of God:* The Teacher is almost fatalistic in these pronouncements. He sees that one is born into the world without any advantage concerning his faith. It seems that he is saying that all people come into the world on an equal basis. God is working His purpose for the world, but man must resign himself to work himself throughout life until he is eventually conquered by death. The Teacher thus portrays death as the end of all things in reference to the living. He writes from the perspective of the worldly man ("sons of men") who has no hope beyond the grave.

9:4-6 Once one is dead, he no longer has any influence in this world. But while he is alive, he has all the hope that is presented by this world. The living enjoy the benefits of life, whereas the dead are cut off from what happens in life. The advantage of the dead is that they no longer suffer from the calamities that are presented to the living.

9:7-10 *Eat ... drink ... merry:* This is the philosophy of life for one who has no concept of God, and thus no

hope beyond life (See 2:24; 3:12,22; 5:18; 8:15). If life is all there is, then certainly one must live life to the fullest by partaking of all that life offers. One of the serendipitous aspects of faith is that one can live life for others, since his life will go beyond this world. The worldly selfishly live for themselves, for they do not believe in a life beyond this world. **God now accepts your works:** The meaning is probably a fatalistic view of life, that is, since one cannot truly know God's way, then one must make the most of life. This is certainly a world view that is mostly confined to this world. But in view of the little revelation that was given in the Old Testament concerning life after death, then the Teacher, in his portrayal of the normal man, resigned himself to the best that God had to offer. If there is no existence beyond this life, then the best that God would have for man is existence in this life. Nevertheless, the most successful person in life, with the best family and neighbors, is left with the conclusion that life is vanity if all there is are the things of this world. Life would not be worth living if this world of suffering were all there was to life. **Whatever your hand finds to do:** This statement is in view of the philosophy of the one who believes that this life is all that man has. In order to enjoy this life, therefore, one must be diligent in his work. God meant that man work with his hands in order to enjoy that which life has to offer (Compare Jn 9:4). But the believer works for that which is beyond this life. His work is not in vain, therefore, because his works will following him into eternity (1 Co 15:58; Rv 14:13).

9:11,12 Time and chance: Time will eventually catch up with a man, and he will die. Before he dies, however, he may by chance suffer from some misfortune in life. **Does not know his time:** The wise person on earth does not know his time of death, for he could die at any moment. Through wisdom and the limitations of man's own power, one can win races and accomplish great feats. However, man can accomplish only so much. He is limited and he is mortal. Beyond the limitations of man, God has determined His own destiny for the world, a destiny that is not affected or determined by

the efforts of man. It is the task of every man to discover God's plan for the existence of man, and then live according to His will.

9:13-18 We are not told the true events from which the Teacher takes this story that exalts wisdom. The story reveals that the humblest of society can have the power of wisdom that can deliver an entire city. In this case, once the city was delivered, the residents forgot the poor man. However, they certainly did not forget that the city was delivered because wisdom was exercised by its inhabitants, for the story is here repeated by the Teacher. The Teacher concluded that there was great strength in wisdom. Wisdom will be remembered, though those who possessed the wisdom will be forgotten.

Chapter 10

DISRUPTIONS OF LIFE THROUGH FOLLY

10:1-4 This context is introduced in 9:18. One careless sin will undo a person's great work to build a good reputation. One's unfaithfulness will damage his spirituality and bring doubt into the minds of others concerning his integrity. **Right hand:** The right hand represented the good and right, whereas the left hand represented that which was dark and evil. If one makes hasty judgments without considering all the facts, then he advertises that he is a fool. If a person talks too much, then he will eventually speak that which is not true, or more than he knows, and thus advertise his foolishness. If one is too hasty to resign his position, even though charged by an official, he is a fool.

10:5-7 A political problem is here under consideration. It is the problem of appointing incompetent officials to positions of influence, when at the same time, marginalizing the wise (Pv 19:10; 30:21,22). If the wise are not incorporated within the governing structures of a nation, the nation is doomed to ruin.

10:8-11 In the normal works of life, there are inherent dangers. Therefore, one must exercise wisdom when carrying out his normal works of life. Fools are often revealed by their lack of common sense when do-

ing their work. Before a task is undertaken, wisdom must be exercised. While the task is in the process of being accomplished, wisdom must be used to successfully complete the task.

10:12-15 The foolish man is the victim of himself. He destroys himself through his own words and actions. In this context, reference is to officials who are in positions where their incompetence is manifested to everyone. A politician who speaks out of ignorance of events and issues will soon destroy his political life. **Full of words:** One of the first signs of a foolish man is that he speaks before he has given thought to what he should say. Through much speaking, he reveals his own social insecurity, or his desire for attention. Invariably, his much speaking will reveal that he cannot survey the present in order to predict the future. Even the wise have a difficult time anticipating the future by weighing present circumstances. **How to go to the city:** The many words of the fool wearies people for they come to understand that he does not have enough sense even to find his way to the city.

10:16-20 A nation is in trouble when the king is inexperienced and the officials feast in the morning, having their judgment twisted because of drunkenness during the feast (See Is 5:8-23; Jr 51:57; Hs 7:13; Am 6:1). But if the king has grown up at the feet of a father who tutored him in the affairs of state and governance, then the nation prospers under wise leadership. Such leaders will establish feasts at appropriate times when intoxicated officials do not have to pronounce judgments for the people. **The building decays:** These proverbial statements would probably define the preceding incompetent officials. While they indulge themselves in drunken feasts and look to their own needs, the nation deteriorates. When officials maintain their positions for their own self-interests, a nation will decay into ruin. Officials of nations should be in their offices for the sake of the people. They are officials to serve the people, not that the people should serve them. **Do not curse the king:** Regardless of incompetent and self-serving officials, government is ordained by God in or-

der to prevent anarchy among the people (Rm 13:1-7). The worst government is better than no government at all (8:1-5). Therefore, one should respect the government and be cautious about speaking against government officials, lest he encourage rebellion.

Recommendations For Happiness

(11:1 - 12:14)

Outline: (1) The benevolent and industrious life (11:1-6), (2) The joyous life (11:7,8), (3) God-focused youth (11:9 - 12:8), (4) Worship and obedience (12:9-14)

Chapter 11

THE BENEVOLENT & INDUSTRIOUS LIFE

11:1-6 In chapters 11 & 12 the Teacher is more optimistic about life. He begins with a series of proverbial statements of truth. **Cast your bread:** Live generously and benevolently toward others. The figure comes from possible business adventures that are somewhat hazardous. Regardless of the hazard for failure, one must sow. **Give ... to seven:** Though one might not receive anything in return, true giving is not based on wanting something in return. In order to enjoy a happy life, one must give (See comments Mt 5:44,45; Jn 13:17). **Where the tree falls:** One establishes the pattern of his life by what he does. One determines his future by what he does in the present. Once a pattern of life is established, it is difficult to change it, for we find security in tradition. **Observes the wind:** If one waits for a calm day in order to cast forth his seeds in planting, then he will possibly never sow his seeds, for the wind may continue day after day. What seems to be the context is that there are uncertainties about life and work. We do not live in a perfect and predictable world where we can determine the seasons or times for business. Therefore, by faith one must launch out. **Sow your seed:** Doing nothing will certainly produce nothing. One must not be indecisive, but determine to go forward. The industrious person will always succeed, though he may have temporary setbacks.

THE JOYOUS LIFE

11:7,8 These are what appear to be contradictions. The Teacher began in the book by saying that death was better than life (4:2,3). However, this philosophy must be considered in the context that a meaningless life without God is not worth living. Then he states that life is better than death (9:4). It is better when considering the fact that one can live a productive life in being benevolent to others. If one lives for others, then life is worth living. He now comes in this context to the conclusion that though there is darkness in life, there is room for joy. **Nothingness:** We must understand the world view of the Teacher in view of the limited revelation the Jews had in reference to life after death. Because of this limited revelation, the Teacher affirmed that one should live joyfully, but remember that the days of darkness in life will eventually end in the final darkness of death.

GOD-FOCUSED YOUTH

11:9,10 The conclusion of the Teacher's discourse begins with verse 9 and continues to the end of the book. **The days of your youth:** Young people should not waste their youth on foolish living. In view of the fact that the youth of one's body will soon vanish away, one should use his youthful days for productivity. A person should live in a manner that is controlled by the fact that he knows that he will give account of all his deeds (2 Co 5:10). Knowing that one will give account of himself before God brings sobriety to life, and thus guards one from wasting himself on the vanities of this world.

Chapter 12

12:1-8 Remember your Creator: If one builds a spiritual life from the days of his youth, when he becomes old, he will not live with the regret of having wasted his youth on foolish things. **Evil days:** This would be the difficult days of old age (See 2 Sm 19:33-35). Youth should use their days to do things for God and others before they grow old and lose their mobility. **No pleasure in them:** Living with the aches and pains of old age is not

a joy. The body of the aged slows down before the mind, and thus the aged live with the frustration of not being able to do what one's mind desires to do. In old age one begins to realize his mortality, being frustrated that he will not be able to live long enough to accomplish all his dreams. **Darkened:** One's eyesight is almost lost in old age. **Clouds:** Despair over unfulfilled goals. **Rain:** Tears shed over things of the past. **Keepers of the house:** The arms and hands of the body grow feeble. **Grinders:** Chewing is difficult because one has lost many of his teeth. **Windows:** It becomes difficult to see through the eyes. **Doors:** One's hearing becomes difficult. **One will rise up:** Sleep will be difficult. **That which is high:** Because of unsteadiness, one becomes fearful of heights. **Fear ... in the way:** Walking becomes difficult. **Almond tree:** Symbol for a graying head. **Grasshopper:** Even a small thing will be a burden to bear. **Desire will fail:** Sexual desires will cease, or the natural loss of appetite. **Silver cord:** The cord is cut and the golden bowl (life) is broken. Life is the pitcher by which water is taken from the fountain. It is the wheel by which water is lifted from the cistern. Eventually, everything begins to break down. Since the body was not made to last a great length of time, it begins to break down. **Dust:** See Gn 2:7. **Vanity of vanities:** Life in and of itself is vain, for it is so short and fragile. In old age one realizes that life is short. Youth believe that there is no end to life. The aged weep over the brevity of life, and thus feel that it was a vain adventure.

WORSHIP AND OBEDIENCE

12:9-12 The writer ends his discourse as other inspired writers, writing as if the words are by another person (See 1 Co 7:25). What is said here is the writer's personal conclusion to the purpose of life. It is a realization of the purpose of life to which all men must come. **He taught:** The wisdom of the Teacher was in the fact that he wanted to impart to others that which he had learned by his own experience. We do not forget, however, that it was the Holy Spirit who wanted this wisdom recorded for us today (See 2 Tm 3:16). And

since it was the Holy Spirit giving us this wisdom, then we understand that more is to be learned from these words than simply the experiences of Solomon's life.

Words of truth: We would understand this in view of the fact that the Teacher composed this document by the inspiration of the Spirit. Though the Spirit would have allowed the writer to search out and compose, we conclude that the final writing and composition was by the direction of the Spirit (See comments 2 Pt 1:20,21). The Holy Spirit used the experiences of men to teach us things concerning truth and behavior. By revealing truth through the experiences of those who lived contrary to that which is right, we have a living illustration of what not to do. **Goats ... nails:** As a goat spurs on the ox, and nails (probably pegs) penetrate the wood for construction, so the word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword (Hb 4:12). It can spur on one and build one up (At 20:32). When we observe the negative results of living contrary to the word of God, we are encouraged not to live a disobedient life. When we observe the good life of those who obeyed God, we are encouraged to be obedient. Truth, therefore, is revealed through the obedience or disobedience of individuals. The Bible contains examples of negative and positive responses to the truth of God. *"Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our admonition ..."* (See comments Rm 15:4; 1 Co 10:11).

Shepherd: This is a reference to God who is the source of wisdom that is from above. **Many books:** Many books (scrolls) have been written to understand the meaning of life. But any book that discards God as the Creator, is worthless in determining a correct world view. It is not within man to discover the wisdom that is from above. God is the source of all things, and thus, if one rejects or ignores God, he will never begin to understand that which is reality. Life will thus remain meaningless for those who refuse to believe in God. If one does believe in God, and yet is disobedient to His will, he will not come to a knowledge of the one true and living God. One can never understand the love of God who lives in an unloving manner. **Fear ... keep:** No greater conclu-

sion could be made to a book that was written for the purpose of revealing truth through the disobedience of one who did not live according to the will of God in reference to marital relationships. Life is not about life itself, but about worship of God and obedience to His will (Mt 6:33). This is the theme that the Teacher wanted to convey by focusing on the vanities of life without God. In this case it was not life without believing in God, but life in disobedience to the law of God concerning marital relationships. Solomon lived contrary to the will of God in this matter, and thus experienced first hand the vanity of life if one does not follow God's will. He lived the materialistic life, and thus revealed to us the vanity of a life that focuses exclusively on the things of this world. Life is vain, if at the grave we conclude that an individual has come to annihilation. The motivation for keeping the commandments of God is the fact that all will be held accountable for their deeds in this life (2 Co 5:10). If there is no consciousness of a final judgment, then there is no motivation for keeping the commandments. But when obedience is stirred by fear of God, then one's life has meaning. Life is more than what the world has to offer. In order to make life meaningful, one must consider what God has to offer. Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (Jn 10:10). This abundant life comes only to those who act on their belief in God. Those who are obedient to the will of God enjoy life to its fullest. They understand the purpose for which God created all things. In times of great trial, therefore, they understand that they will exist beyond this world, for this world is not their home.

Commentary by Roger E. Dickson
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ABREVIATIONS

OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philippians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Cl**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1 Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pl**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James - **Js**, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**, Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv**

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