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## **“Chasing After The Wind”**

### **“When All Has Been Heard”**

**ECCLESIASTES 12:1-14**

### **Introduction**

1. On September 7<sup>th</sup> of this year we began our study in this book written by Solomon, which we know as Ecclesiastes.
2. Over these past 3 ½ months we have labeled our study “Chasing After The Wind” because that is what Solomon considers our attempts to live life without God.
3. However, as we have learned in the last few weeks, Solomon found life with God at the center follows a different course:
  - a. It is filled with challenging situations, each with its own time and purpose.
  - b. God’s wisdom directs us toward that which is “true, honorable, right, pure, lovely and commendable” (Philippians 4:8).
  - c. We can enjoy the wealth which God provides us and use it to His glory.
  - d. Though death is inescapable, God enables us to enjoy life in the present and make the most of the opportunities He affords us.
4. Tonight, in this final chapter, Solomon . . .
  - a. Advises us to remember our Creator in light of the coming years and our ultimate death (vv. 1-7).
  - b. Reminds us of the futility of life without God (v. 8).
  - c. His purpose in writing this book (vv. 9-12).
  - d. Drives home the truth of what is most important in life (vv. 13-14).

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## A. REMEMBERING OUR CREATOR (VV. 1-7)

1. Live responsibly before the miseries of old age come (12:1).
  - a. The command “Remember your Creator” means more than simply bring Him to mind.
    - 1) It means to revere God, to keep His laws faithfully, to serve Him responsibly.
    - 2) Judges 8:34 contrasts it with . . .
      - a) self-reliance — “every man did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6).
      - b) the worship of false gods — “the sons of Israel again played the harlot with the Baals” (Judges 8:33).
    - 3) Psalm 63:6 compares it to meditating upon God and faithfully following Him.“When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches,” (Psalm 63:6, NASB95)
  - c. “your Creator” — emphasizes God as the Author of life, who gives it and takes it away (Deuteronomy 32:39).“It is I who put to death and give life” (Deuteronomy 32:39).
  - d. “Evil days”
    - 1) The days of old age whose troubles Solomon depicts figuratively in 12:2-5.
    - 2) “The years” in which he said youth would find little or “no pleasure.”  
 The spiritual stability that comes from walking faithfully with God during our youthful years will help us weather those future challenges which *will* come as we grow older.

2. Live responsibly before gloom and decay set in (12:2-5).
  - a. Solomon advises us to such through his use of various figures to depict the declining joy and waning physical powers of old age.
  - b. The miseries of old age (“evil days,” v. 1) and the approach of death (vv. 6-7) are likened to recurring rainstorms.
    - 1) As clouds often block out the light of the sun, the moon and the stars, so old age is a period fo diminishing joy (light) and increasing gloom (dark).
    - 2) Any decrease in the vitality of a person, even a young person, was viewed as the onset of death (cf., Psalms 88:3-5 ).

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- c. Solomon chose various pictures to depict the declining physical and psychological powers of old age:
  - 1) “the day that the watchmen (keepers, KJV, NKJV, ESV, NIV84) of the house tremble” (v. 3a) — our arms and hands grow weak
  - 2) “mighty men stoop” (v. 3b) (“strong men shall bow themselves,” KJV; “strong men bow down,” NKJV; “strong men are bent,” ESV, RSV) — our legs grow bent and feeble
  - 3) “the grinding ones stand idle (grinders cease, KJV, NKJV, ESV, RSV) because they are few” (v. 3c) — our teeth become fewer
  - 4) “those who look through windows grow dim” (v. 3d) — our vision begins to deteriorate

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- 5) “the doors on the street are shut” (v. 4a) — Our hearing declines so that we no longer hear daily noises (the grinding of grain was a common sound in the homes of Solomon’s day)
- 6) “one will arise at the sound of the bird” (v. 4b) — we rise up earlier because of our inability to sleep.
- 7) “all the daughters of song will sing softly” (v. 4c) — our voice starts to quaver and weaken

- 8) “men are afraid of a high place and of terrors on the road” (v. 5a) — we are terrified of heights and afraid of falling while we walk down the street

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- 9) “the almond tree blossoms” (v. 5b) — our hair turns white, like almond blossoms
- 10) “the grasshopper drags himself along” (v. 5c) — our walk is slowed down, like a grasshopper at the close of the summer season
- 11) “the caperberry is ineffective” (NASB95, HCSB) (v. 5d; “the desire fails,” ESV, KJV, NKJV) — we lose our appetite, our physical and mental powers decline.
- 12) “man goes to his eternal home while mourners go about in the street” (v. 5e) —after all this, the body goes to its eternal home (the grave) while people mourn our passing.

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3. Live responsibly before death comes (12:6-7).
  - a. While “Remember your Creator” is included in the NKJV, and “remember Him” in the NASB & NIV84 versions, neither is in the Hebrew text — these are included to connect the reader back to verse 1.
  - b. Solomon urges us to live responsibly “before” death.
  - c. In verses 6-7, Solomon graphically describes death.
  - d. He provides us with two images that describe the suddenness of the moment of our departure from this world.
    - 1) A “golden bowl” is supported by a “silver chord” which suddenly breaks causing the bowl to be damaged beyond repair.
    - 2) The “wheel” by which “the pitcher” is raised and lowered at the well is “crushed” and “the pitcher” which holds the water is “shattered” as a result.
  - e. Finally, Solomon uses a description of death to motivate people toward

responsible living:

- 1) In Genesis 2:7, Moses recorded for us, “Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.”
- 2) Solomon, here, informs us that upon our death, “the dust” (our body) “will return to the earth as it was” (v. 7a).
- 3) “The spirit” (the breath of life) “will return to God who gave it” (v. 7b).
  - a) The last words which Luke recorded from Jesus as He died on the cross were “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit” (Luke 23:46).
  - b) As Stephen was being stoned, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” (Acts 7:59).
- f. The fact of death is never far from us but, we as Christians have the powerful hope of resurrection.
- g. Through Christ’s death and resurrection, this process is irrevocably reversed for those of us who are believers: “For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.” (1 Corinthians 15:53, NASB95)

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**B. THE FUTILITY OF LIFE WITHOUT GOD (v. 8)**

1. In (1:12-6:9) Solomon demonstrated the limitations of all human efforts.
2. In (6:10-11:6) he extended it to all human wisdom.
3. Now in 12:8 he reiterates the theme with which he opened the book (1:2):
  - a. “Vanity of vanity, all is vanity!” (NASB95, KJV, NKJV, ESV).
  - b. “Meaningless! Meaningless! Everything is meaningless!” (NIV84).
4. What is not included in this assessment is the advice to enjoy life as God enables, a course which Solomon repeatedly recommended (cf. 2:24-26);

3:12, 22; 5:18-20; 8:15; 9:7-9

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“There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God. For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him? For to a person who is good in His sight He has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, while to the sinner He has given the task of gathering and collecting so that he may give to one who is good in God’s sight. This too is vanity and striving after wind.”  
(Ecclesiastes 2:24–26, NASB95)

“I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one’s lifetime;” (Ecclesiastes 3:12, NASB95)

“I have seen that nothing is better than that man should be happy in his activities, for that is his lot. For who will bring him to see what will occur after him?” (Ecclesiastes 3:22, NASB95)

“Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one’s labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward. Furthermore, as for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, He has also empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God. For he will not often consider the years of his life, because God keeps him occupied with the gladness of his heart.” (Ecclesiastes 5:18–20, NASB95)

“So I commended pleasure, for there is nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat and to drink and to be merry, and this will stand by him in his toils throughout the days of his life which God has given him under the sun.” (Ecclesiastes 8:15, NASB95)

“Go then, eat your bread in happiness and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works. Let your clothes be white all

the time, and let not oil be lacking on your head. Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun." (*Ecclesiastes 9:7-9, NASB95*)

5. He has just discussed this topic explicitly in relationship to the fear of God (11:7-12:7).
  - Apart from enjoying one's lot in life in the fear of God, life is truly meaningless.

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**C. THE PURPOSE OF SOLOMON'S ENDEAVOR (vv. 9-12)**

- a. Solomon begins with a reference to his personal qualifications as a wisdom Teacher:
  - 1) He declared himself "a wise man" and said that he also "taught the people knowledge".
  - 2) He described the care he took in producing this book:
    - a) "he pondered" ("weighing" (ESV), "weighed" (HCSB)), ( i.e., carefully weighed in his mind),
    - b) "searched out" ("studying" (ESV), "explored" (HCSB))
    - c) and arranged" ("set in order" (NKJV, NIV84)), (i.e., carefully arranged) "many proverbs."
- b. Solomon also sought to make the book aesthetically pleasing to the reader without sacrificing truth — he "sought to find delightful words and to write words of truth correctly" (v. 10).

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- c. He set forth the purpose and goal of "the words of wise men" as well as their ultimate source of authority:
  - 1) They are like "goads" and "well-driven nails".
    - a) One provides a guide and stimulus to godly living.
    - b) The other gives one a secure basis for living.

- 2) Their ultimate authority is divine — “they are given by one Shepherd” (v. 11b) — a reference to God (cf. Genesis 49:24; Psalm 23:1; 80:1; 95:6-7)

“For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.” (1 Peter 2:25, NASB95)

“And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.” (1 Peter 5:4, NASB95)

- d. Solomon warned his “son” and all his readers not to seek answers beyond those God had given through the wise:
  - 1) Don’t test God’s truth by the “many books” written by men.
  - 2) Test men’s books by the truth of God’s Word.
    - a. It should be the standard by which we judge the things we read.
    - b. If we keep looking for answers in many other books, they would wear themselves out.

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**D. WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT IN LIFE (VV. 13-14)**

- a. As Warren Wiersbe stated in his commentary on this passage, “we don’t own our lives, because life is the gift of God (Acts 17:24-28).”
- b. “We are stewards of our lives, and one day we must give an account to God of what we have done with His gift.”
  - 1) Some people are only spending their lives.
  - 2) Some people are wasting their lives.
  - 3) Some are investing their lives.
- c. Corrie ten Boom, a survivor of the German concentration camps in WWII and author of “The Hiding Place,” said, “The measure of a life, after all, is not its duration but its donation.”
- d. If our lives are to count, we must fulfill three obligations:

- 1) Fear God (v. 13)
  - a) Ecclesiastes ends where the Book of Proverbs begins (Proverbs 1:7), with an admonition for us to fear the Lord.
  - b) The “fear of the Lord” is an attitude of reverence and awe that we show to Him because we love Him and respect His power and His greatness.
  - c) When we fear the Lord we pay attention to His Word and obey it.
  - d) We do not tempt the Lord by deliberately disobeying or by “playing with sin.”
  - e) An unholy fear causes us to run away from God, but a holy fear brings us to our knees in loving submission to God.
  - f) Oswald Chambers, best known for his book *My Utmost for His Highest*, wrote “The remarkable thing about fearing God is that, when you fear God, you fear nothing else.”
  - g) The prophet Isaiah states it perfectly in Isaiah 8:13, “It is the Lord of hosts whom you should regard as holy. And He shall be your fear, and He shall be your dread.”
- 2) Keep His Commandments (v. 13b)
  - a) God created life and He alone knows how it should be lived.
  - b) He wrote the ultimate “instruction manual” and if we seek to be wise, we will read and obey it.
  - c) Our fear of the Lord must result in obedient living.
  - d) As Christians, we will want to spend time on a daily in His Word, getting to know the Him better and discovering His will.

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.” (Proverbs 1:7)
  - e) The NASB95 translates the last phrase in verse 13 as “this applies to every person” — others translate it as “this is the whole duty of man” (KJV, ESV, NIV84, RSV).

- i) The NKJV translates it as “for this is man’s all”.
  - ii) When Solomon looked at life “under the sun,” everything was fragmented and he could see no pattern.
  - iii) However, when he looked at life from God’s point of view, everything came together into one whole.
    - If you and I want to have wholeness, we must begin with God.
- 3) Prepare for final judgment (v. 14)
- a) Earlier in this book Solomon wrote,
    - i) “God will judge both the righteous man and the wicked man” (*Ecclesiastes 3:17*).
    - ii) “Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things” (*Ecclesiastes 11:9*).
  - b) While many may seem to get away with sin (8:11), Solomon wants us to know that their sins will eventually be exposed and judged righteously.
  - c) Six times in this book, Solomon told us to enjoy life while we can; but at no point did he advise us to enjoy sin.
  - d) No, we must remember that “God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil” (v. 14).

## Conclusion

1. We have come to the end of our study of Ecclesiastes.
2. The question for each of us is two-fold:
  - a. Do you fear God?
  - b. Are you keeping His commandments?

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3. At the end of Psalm 16, Solomon's father, David, wrote of God . . .

"You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever" (Psalm 16:11, NASB95).

**13a**

4. At the end of Psalm 23, after writing of all that God does for him as His Shepherd, David concluded, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Psalm 23:6, ESV).

**13b**

5. At the end of Psalm 140, another psalm by David, he wrote, "Surely the righteous will give thanks to Your name; the upright will dwell in Your presence" (Psalm 140:13, NASB95).
6. In 2 Timothy 4:7-8, the apostle Paul assures us that for those of us who, like him, "have fought the good fight . . . finished the course [and] kept the faith" there is laid up for us in the future "the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge" will award to us on that day (i.e., the day of His return in judgment).

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7. However, for those who choose to ignore Solomon's wise counsel, the apostle Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 1:7-9, of our Lord's return in judgment and said that "the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power," (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9, NASB95)

**14a**

8. In Hebrews 10:31, the writer of that letter reminds us, "it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God."