

Ecclesiastes

Chapter 12

The End of the Matter

[Slide 2] What do you want on your tombstone? (Anyone remember the pizza commercial?)

In other words, how do you sum up your life?

Chapter 12 has two parts. The first 8 verses wrap up the “Vanity of vanities” section we’ve been in since chapter 1.

[Slide 3] Read Ecc 12:1-4

¹Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, “I have no pleasure in them”; ² before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain, ³ in the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those who look through the windows are dimmed, ⁴ and the doors on the street are shut—when the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low—

Notice that verses 1-7 comprise a single sentence. There are a lot of “and” in this set of verses. At first glance it looks depressing, but it’s part of the “hebel” – the fleeting, mysterious, breath we’ve been looking at.

He mentions “evil days”, which sounds similar to the “days of darkness” which the teacher discussed in 11:8, “So if a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them all; but let him remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity.”

They are related, but two distinct ideas. In 11:8. The teacher was discussing death, and here he is referring to old age – the future time when one can no longer enjoy life in the same way.

These verses contain a series of metaphors related to the aging process. The teacher uses comments out the decay of a house to refer to the decay of the human body. As we've seen before there are literal (L) and figurative (F) similarities that apply.

(12:2) before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened.

L: Failing eyesight – everything becomes dimmer.

F: Brightness or enjoyment of life is dimmed. “No pleasure” in 12:1

(12:3) the keepers of the house tremble

L: Older people have shaky hands.

F: Fear, not being able to protect the household.

(12:3) the strong men are bent

L: Stooped back, less powerful bodies.

(12:3) the grinders cease because they are few

L: reference to teeth. Dentures are in use today.

(12:3) those who look through the windows are dimmed.

L: Dimming eyesight that comes with old age.

(12:4) one rises up at the sound of a bird.

L: As people get older it is increasingly difficult to sleep through the night. Also, tendency for older people to wake up early as the birds.

(12:4) daughters of song are brought low

L: deafness

[Slide 4] Read Ecc 12:5-8

⁵ they are afraid also of what is high, and terrors are in the way; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along, and desire fails, because man is going to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets— ⁶ before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern, ⁷ and the dust returns to the

earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. ⁸ Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity.

(12:5) afraid also of what is high, and terrors are in the way

L: Moving from place to place is a physical struggle. Climbing stairs or walking on a hill is very difficult when you are old. Fear of fatigue.

(12:5) almond tree blossoms

L: almond trees bloom white. Reference to hair color as we get old.

(12:5) Desire fails

L: no desire for physical relations.

(12:6-7) before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern, 7 and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

L: physical death.

This section ends with the familiar “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.” This is the inclusio – the second bookend. 1:1-12:8 is that section.

So verse 9 starts the conclusion. Some scholars believe this last section was written by a later editor.

Some possibilities:

1. Same author, he just changes to the 3rd person voice to separate the section literarily (not literally)
2. Addition by an editor who is trying to bring the many thoughts to a conclusion.

[Slide 5] Read Ecc 12:9-14

⁹ Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care. ¹⁰ The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth.

¹¹ The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd. ¹² My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.

Goads – pointed sticks to prod oxen to go in the direction you want.

Discuss: How are collected sayings like nails firmly fixed?

Wise guidance and words of wisdom are foundational. Work and study are good things, but it is easy to get out of balance and overdo it.

[Slide 6]

¹³ The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. ¹⁴ For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

V13-14 tie it all up. This is the meaning of life.

[Slide 7] Main points from study (shown on p128 of Why Are We Here?):

- Importance of fearing God & keeping His commandments.
- “hebel” the briefness and mystery of life.
- The things people chase after lack lasting significance (money, fame, relationships, accomplishments)
- Carpe Diem – make the most of what God has provided.
- Human wisdom is valuable but has its limits.
- Work is a good thing, but not the only thing.
- God is in control, even when it seems He is not.