

Study Notes on the Holy Scriptures

*Using a Theme-Based Approach
to Identify Literary Structures*

The Book of Ecclesiastes



Gary H. Everett

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THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES
August 2022 Edition

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All Scripture quotations in English are taken from the *King James Version (Authorized Version)* unless otherwise noted. Some words have been emphasized by the author of this commentary using bold or italics.

All Old Testament Scripture quotations in the Hebrew text are taken from *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia: with Westminster Hebrew Morphology*. Stuttgart; Glenside PA: German Bible Society; Westminster Seminary, 1996. Logos.

All New Testament Scripture quotations in the Greek text are taken from *Greek New Testament, Fourth Revised Edition (with Morphology)*. Eds. Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger, M. Robinson, and Allen Wikgren. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; United Bible Societies, 1993; 2006. Logos.

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**The Three-Tiered Thematic Scheme Shaping the Book of Ecclesiastes:
Foundational, Structural, and Imperative**

Foundational Theme – The Lord God is the One, True God

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD.
Deuteronomy 6:4

***Structural Theme – God Provides Redemption for Mankind through His Commandments
in Order That Man May Fulfill His Own Destiny through Obedience
(Redemption of the Body of Man)***

Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.
What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?
Ecclesiastes 1:2-3

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:
Ecclesiastes 3:1

Imperative Theme – Man is Commanded to Love God with All His Heart

And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart,
and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.
Deuteronomy 6:5

Imperative Theme – Fear God and Keep His Commandments

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:
Fear God, and keep his commandments:
for this is the whole duty of man.
Ecclesiastes 12:13

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INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES¹

The Doctrinal Position on the Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures - *Study Notes on the Holy Scriptures* supports the view of the verbal, plenary inspiration of the biblical text of the Holy Scriptures, meaning that every word originally written down by the authors in the sixty-six books of the Holy Canon were God-breathed when recorded by men, and that the Scriptures are therefore inerrant and infallible. Any view less than this contradicts the testimony of the Holy Scriptures themselves. For this reason, the Holy Scriptures contain both divine attributes and human attributes. While textual criticism engages with the variant readings of the biblical text, acknowledging its human attributes, faith in His Word acknowledges its divine attributes. These views demand the adherence of mankind to the supreme authority of the Holy Scriptures above all else. The Holy Scriptures can only be properly interpreted by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, an aspect of biblical scholarship that is denied by liberal views, causing much misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the Holy Scriptures.

The Message of the Book of Ecclesiastes – Based upon the view of the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, each volume of *Study Notes on the Holy Scriptures* begins with introductory material that develops the central ideas of each book. These introductions present the central message in a three-tiered framework. This framework reveals the literary structure of the book.

The book of Ecclesiastes offers a three-fold thematic scheme that supports the central claim of the Pentateuch, the claim found in Deuteronomy 6:4 and known to the Jews as “the Shema,” a verse that declares the God of Israel is one, true and living God, a theme that undergirds all of the historical books as well. Thus, the foundational theme of Ecclesiastes is the central claim of the Pentateuch, a theme shared by all books of the Holy Scriptures. The secondary, structural theme of the book of Ecclesiastes supports the primary theme of the Old Testament books of Hebrew poetry, wisdom literature, and laments (Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Song of Solomon, and Psalms) by stating that God offers man divine commandments to obey that guides him in this love walk with God. The third theme declares that man is called to love God with all of his heart. In the book of Ecclesiastes, he fulfills this calling by obeying God’s commandments in the fear the Lord. This third theme can also be seen in the fact that the purpose of our lives always points us to Christ, who alone was able to walk in perfect obedience to the commandments of God the Father. With Israel’s laments as our example, we are to endeavour to obey God through the leadership of the Holy Spirit as we grown into a mature relationship of loving God with all of our strength.

Every human being has been endowed by his Creator with an inner witness of divine purpose and design. As His children, humanity searches for purpose and destiny, something that can only be found through fellowship and divine service towards our Creator, which the Preacher describes as fearing God and keeping His commandments (Eccl 12:13). Amidst a world of human depravity and vanity, the upright seek the Lord and endeavor to walk in his predestined plan and purpose as a child of God. Because this journey in life is travelled in a fallen world, which the book of Ecclesiastes describes as vanity, few are able to find and fulfill their God-given destinies. Nevertheless, every human is called to fulfill his divine destiny amidst the hardships of his mortality and this fallen, sinful world.

Because of its focus upon the vanity of the world in which we live, the book of Ecclesiastes has been viewed as a book of extreme pessimism. Because of this pessimism and the lack of Jewish culture and tradition, the Talmud tells us that some Jewish rabbis refused to use it in their teachings, although the Talmud then

¹The book introductions in *Study Notes on the Holy Scriptures* use a nine-level outline that follows an alphanumeric system: [omit] I. A. 1. a) (1) (a) i) α). While the first heading uses bold capital letters and no designation, the next seven levels follow *The Chicago Manual of Style*, while the ninth level incorporates the Greek alphabet. After the main heading, the other eight heading levels use bold and italicized headline style. See *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982, 1993, 2003), 275.

reconciles its message to the Jewish faith (*Shabbath* 30b).² The truth is that the theology of this book fits perfectly into our walk with God. In fact, the Preacher, who takes us through Ecclesiastes, teaches us throughout the book that we are to live our brief stay here on this earth by following God's plan for our lives through His divine providence by obeying His commandments, while enjoying its pleasures in moderation, so that we find joy in each day's blessings despite life's adversities (Eccl 2:24; 3:12–15, 22; 5:18–20; 8:15; 9:7–10; 11:9–10); for this is how we are taught to worship the Lord with all of our strength, which is the underlying theme of Ecclesiastes. The fact that we are learning to enjoy each day's blessings indicates that we are resting in His divine providence for us. Paul the apostle made a similar statement by saying that God gave us richly all things to enjoy in 1 Timothy 6:17-19, "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, *but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.*"

The Preacher teaches us how to find purpose in our everyday tasks by walking daily in the fear of the Lord and by recognizing divine providence; for we are to acknowledge our gifts in this life of wisdom, mirth, labour and wealth, as blessings from God. The book of Ecclesiastes teaches us how inadequate are the pleasures of this world in satisfying the soul of man apart from serving God and fulfilling our divine destiny. It tells us that amidst the injustices, abnormalities, and struggles of life that are beyond our control, there is a God who is intervening in the affairs of mankind through divine providence. We are to fear God, honor the king, become good civil servants, help the poor, and be ever mindful of eternal judgment that awaits every soul of man. Thus, we can take comfort in the fact that there will be a day of reckoning for all of mankind. No book of the Holy Scriptures digs deeper into this truth than does the book of Ecclesiastes.

The book of Ecclesiastes opens with a description of the vanities that mankind has been subjected to as a result of the Fall in the Garden of Eden. Because of Adam and Eve's sins, all of creation has been subjected to vanity, which Paul also mentions in Romans 8:20-21, "For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God."

Ecclesiastes tells us how to live our life productively in the midst of life's vanities; for God has placed within each of us a sense of destiny and purpose. We fulfill our destinies, not by trial and error or by hard work, but by trusting in the Lord on a day-by-day basis. The book of Ecclesiastes shows us that this is not an easy thing to do. It is interesting to note how long it took King Solomon to learn how to lean on God and to stop walking in the vanity of his ways. We know that King David taught his son Solomon about the Lord and the need to fear Him always. Yet, until Solomon had reached the end of his strength, he would not turn loose and depend upon the Lord. We are the same way. We often have to wear ourselves down and come to the end of our strength and ability before we are able to look entirely to the Lord with our problems. We may labour and travail to turn some situation around for the better and find that we have accomplished nothing.

²The Talmud says, "Rab Judah son of R. Samuel b. Shilath said in Rab's name: The Sages wished to hide the Book of Ecclesiastes, because its words are self-contradictory; yet why did they not hide it? Because its beginning is religious teaching and its end is religious teaching. Its beginning is religious teaching, as it is written, What profit hath man of all his labour wherein he laboureth under the sun? And the School of R. Jannai commented: Under the sun he has none, but he has it [sc. profit] before the sun. The end thereof is religious teaching, as it is written, Let us hear the conclusion of the matter, fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole of man. What is meant by, 'for this is the whole of man'? — Said R. Eleazar, The entire world was created only for the sake of this [type of] man. Simeon b. 'Azzai-others state, Simeon b. Zoma-said: The entire world was created only to be a companion to this man. And how are its words self-contradictory? — It is written, anger is better than play; but it is written, I said of laughter, It is to be praised. It is written, Then I commended joy; but it is written, and of joy [I said] What doeth it? There is no difficulty: 'anger is better than laughter': the anger which the Holy One, blessed be He, displays to the righteous in this world is better than the laughter which the Holy One, blessed be He, laughs with the wicked in this world. 'And I said of laughter, it is to be praised': that refers to the laughter which the Holy One, blessed be He, laughs with the righteous in the world to come. 'Then I commended joy': this refers to the joy of a precept. 'And of joy [I said], what doeth it': this refers to joy [which is] not in connection with a precept. This teaches you that the Divine Presence rests [upon] man] neither through gloom, nor through sloth, nor through frivolity, nor through levity, nor through talk, nor through idle chatter, save through a matter of joy in connection with a precept, as it is said, But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him." See Isidore Epstein, ed., "Contents of the Soncino Babylonian Talmud," [on-line]; accessed 27 October 2009; available from http://www.come-and-hear.com/shabbath/shabbath_30.html#PARTb; Internet.

We normally have to walk through some of these challenging times before we begin to learn how to trust in Him for an answer. It is something that we must learn rather than being taught. This is the journey that Solomon describes in the book of Ecclesiastes. For example, Abraham did not learn to trust God fully regarding the fulfillment of His promise of a son through Sarah his wife until he was tested by God on Mount Moriah. After this event, we never see Abraham trying to make his own decisions. In addition, Jacob was a man who tried to get somewhere in life by doing things his way. He stole his brother's birthright, and then tricked his father into giving him the blessing. He managed to increase his flocks by keeping the strong ones and giving his father-in-law Laban the weak. One day Jacob could go no further. His brother Esau was marching towards him with an army of men fully intending to kill him. It was that night that Jacob wrestled with an angel at a place called Peniel and it was there that the angel struck him so that Jacob limped from a weak thigh the rest of his life. That night Jacob died to himself and learned how to trust God for his welling being, for he had no choice.

Regarding the underlying theme in Ecclesiastes of serving the Lord with all of our strength, we are reminded of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11-32 who did not come to himself until he was financially broke, hungry and desperate. Some people do not come to themselves until their bodies are consumed and overcome. Then they say, "How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof; And have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me!" (Prov 5:11-13) This is why Psalm 127:1 says, "Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it." Because if we do not find God's plan for our lives by daily walking in fellowship with Him, all that we have gathered in this life will be vain. Jesus said, "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mk 8:36) Like Jacob, we all want something good in life and God certainly wants us to have good things. We all have a sense of destiny, for God has placed these needs within us, but it is not our job to make things happen. It is our job to fear God and keep His commandments while we trust Him to make a way for us. Why did God make it happen this way? The answer is easy. He designed the Christian walk this way so that He could have daily fellowship with us because of His great love for everyone.

The Three-Fold Structure of the Book Introductions – In order to identify the central message of each book as a three-tiered statement, the book introductions in *Study Notes on the Holy Scriptures* address three major aspects of approaching the biblical text. These three aspects or sections are entitled (1) the Historical Setting, (2) the Literary Style (Genre), and (3) the Theological Framework.³ These three sections of the book introductions coincide with the chronological development of historical and literary criticism.⁴ More

³Someone may associate these three categories with Hermann Gunkel's well-known three-fold approach to form criticism when categorizing the genre found within the book of Psalms: (1) "a common setting in life," (2) "thoughts and mood," (3) "literary forms." In addition, the *Word Biblical Commentary* inserts sections entitled "Form/Structure/Setting" preceding its comments. Although such similarities were not intentional, but rather coincidental, the author was aware of them and found encouragement from them when assigning the three-fold scheme of historical setting, literary style, and theological framework to his introductory material. See Hermann Gunkel, *The Psalms: A Form-Critical Introduction*, trans. Thomas M. Horner, in *Biblical Series*, vol. 19, ed. John Reumann (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1967), 10; see also *Word Biblical Commentary*, eds. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, and Glenn W. Barker (Dallas, Texas: Word Incorporated, 1989-2007).

⁴Historical criticism, a term often used to encompass the fields of critical studies called source, form, and redaction (composition) criticism, has been an important tool in the effort to bridge the gap between what the ancient author recorded in the biblical text and what the text means to the modern reader. Dissatisfaction with the weaknesses of existing, critical approaches for each generation of critical studies has been the driving force behind the "evolution" of modern biblical scholarship. For example, James Muilenburg's 1968 address to the Society of Biblical Literature expressed the need for a new approach to the biblical text that went "beyond form criticism" because "historical criticism had come to an impasse, chiefly because of the excesses of source analysis." He proposed a new methodology called redaction criticism. See James Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969): 1, 18. With the recent focus upon literary criticism, Paul House says, "[L]iterary criticism arose at least in part because of impasses in older ways of explaining Scripture. Just as scholars began to look for a better way to understand the Scriptures when the various fields of historical criticism appeared to fragment the biblical text rather than reveal its intended meaning, scholars today are searching for new ways to identify hermeneutical sections and their respective meanings." See Paul R. House, "The Rise and Current Status of Literary Criticism of the Old Testament," in *Beyond Form Criticism: Essays in Old Testament Literary Criticism*, ed. Paul R. House, in *Sources for Biblical and Theological Study*, vol. 2 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 3, 7; Grant Osborne, "Redaction Criticism," *New Testament Criticism and Interpretation*, eds. David Alan Black and David S. Dockery (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 199; In summarizing the historical development of critical approaches to Mark's

specifically, the twentieth century offered three major approaches to biblical research, generally recognized as source, form, and redaction (composition) criticism. These three approaches developed as scholars searched for better ways to understand the meaning of the biblical text and its application to the modern reader. Over the past three decades, biblical research has adopted a wide array of approaches collected under the field of study called literary criticism.⁵ In the course of biblical scholarship, particularly in the writing of commentaries, book introductions have progressively become more complex through the advancement of critical studies in recent centuries. The book introductions found in *Study Notes on the Holy Scriptures* associate source criticism with the advancement of research in the book's historical setting; it associates form criticism with the advancement of research in a book's literary style; and it associates redaction (composition) criticism and literary criticism with the advancement of research in the theological framework of a book. These three aspects of introductory material serve my readers as an important foundation for understanding what the authors of the books of the Holy Scriptures were saying to their audience under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The book summaries within the third section of this introductory material include exegetical, theological, and homiletical ideas for each pericope as a guide for those who desire to preach or teach through this book. These central ideas reflect homiletical research by serving as a summary of the central ideas of the book's theological framework. This framework of a book is the key to bridging the difficult gap between exegesis and homiletics. In other words, these ideas help the student of God's Word to take that final step to not only understand what the ancient author meant to say to his original audience, but to apply the meaning of the biblical text to a modern audience. The appendices contain a collection of these exegetical, theological, and homiletical ideas to serve as an outline for those preparing sermons and lessons.

Gospel, Bruce Bain begins by saying, "The apparent lack or sufficiency in one method seems to have given impetus for the birth of the next method." See Bruce Alan Bain, "Literary Surface Structures in Mark: Identifying Christology as the Purpose of the Gospel," PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1997 [on-line]; accessed 29 August 2013; available from <http://search.proquest.com.aaron.swbts.edu/pqdtthss/docview/304487757/1402E6CEA4242E4E21D/1?accountid=7073>; Internet, 4.

⁵Jeffery Weima offers an excellent discussion on literary criticism. The surveys of Stanley Porter and Craig Blomberg concerning the various sub-disciplines that make up today's literary criticism expose the reason for such a variety of literary structures found in today's biblical commentaries and studies. In other words, these different approaches of literary criticism are the reason behind the variations in proposed literary structures of a book found in modern commentaries. See Jeffery A. D. Weima, "Literary Criticism," in *Interpreting the New Testament: Essays on Methods and Issues*, eds. David Alan Black and David S. Dockery (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2001), 150-151; Stanley E. Porter, "Literary Approaches to the New Testament: From Formalism to Deconstruction and Back," in *Approaches to New Testament Studies*, eds. Stanley E. Porter and David Tombs (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 77-128; and Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 87-96.

HISTORICAL SETTING

“In-depth study of the historical setting is indispensable for sound exegesis.”⁶
(William Warren)

“We dare not divorce our study from understanding the historical setting of every passage of Scripture if we are going to come to grips with the truth and message of the Bible.”⁷
(J. Hampton Keathley)

Each book of the Holy Scriptures is cloaked within a unique historical setting. An examination of this setting is useful in the interpretation of the book because it provides the historical context of a passage of Scripture under examination. However, it helps when reading book introductions to understand that the discussions concerning historical setting for the books of the Bible have evolved through the centuries from simple to complex as biblical research has progressed.

Source critical studies that emerged during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were concerned in its early stages with investigating the sources used by the Gospel writers because of their parallel passages. This interest spread to other relevant books of the Bible as well, such as the Pentateuch. These studies necessitated a re-evaluation of the various aspects of the historical setting of the books of the Bible. Source criticism required biblical scholarship to give greater attention to the book's title, historical background, authorship, date and place of writing, and recipients when searching for the original sources of various passages within the book. Interest in source criticism stimulated more extensive book introductions in commentaries, which became characteristic of this period of biblical research as scholars argued about various proposed views of the historical setting. Prior to this era, the book introductions to biblical commentaries were generally brief because they simply reflected the traditions handed down from the church fathers. Therefore, *source criticism* has made positive contributions to biblical scholarship despite its widespread use by liberal theologians who argued against divine inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. Its positive effects are seen as conservative scholars are able to these various aspects of a book's historical setting to defend the integrity of the Scriptures.

This discussion supports the Jewish tradition that Solomon was the author of the book of Ecclesiastes, writing during his reign as king over Israel. As evidence to support this claim, this section on the historical setting addresses the issues of (I) Title, (II) Historical Background, (III) Authorship, (IV) Date and Place of Writing, and (V) Recipients.

I. The Title

There are a number of ancient titles associated with the book of Ecclesiastes throughout its history as it first became a part of the sacred Jewish Scriptures and was later adopted into the early Church canon. This resulted the book's title and text to be translated into the primary languages of each period of history.

A. The Ancient Jewish Title “Qoheleth” – Henry Swete groups the Old Testament Scriptures into three classifications when dealing with book titles: (1) books whose titles reflect its theme found in the opening verses [Gen-Deut, Prov, Lam], (2) books whose titles reflect the author or a key individual in the story [the early and latter prophets, Ezra, Neh, Esth], and (3) books whose titles reflect its contents [Ps, Songs, Chronicles].⁸ The Jews called the book of Ecclesiastes “Qoheleth” (קהלת) (preacher), which is the second word in the Hebrew text. Origen (A.D. 185-254) was familiar with this ancient Hebrew title.⁹ Jerome (A.D.

⁶William F. Warren, Jr., “Interpreting New Testament Narrative: The Gospels and Acts,” in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture*, second edition, eds. Bruce Corley, Steve W. Lemke, and Grant Lovejoy (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 323.

⁷J. Hampton Keathley, III, “Introduction and Historical Setting for Elijah,” (Bible.org) [on-line]; accessed 23 May 2012; available from <http://bible.org/seriespage/introduction-and-historical-setting-elijah>; Internet.

⁸Henry B. Swete, *An Introduction to Old Testament in Greek* (Cambridge: University Press, 1902), 214.

⁹Origen writes, “The twenty-two books of the Hebrews are the following . . . the book of Psalms, Sphartheleim; the Proverbs of Solomon, Me-loth; Ecclesiastes, Koelth; the Song of Songs (not, as some suppose, Songs of Songs) . . .” (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.25.2) See Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. Arthur C. McGiffert under the title *The Church History of Eusebius*, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the*

342-420) was familiar with this title.¹⁰ The Hebrew title (לְהִקָּדֵשׁ) can be found in the Masoretic Text of the standard work *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*.¹¹

B. The Modern English Title “Ecclesiastes” - The English title “Ecclesiastes” is derived from Latin Vulgate title “Liber Ecclesiastes,” which borrowed its title from the Greek *LXX* title “Ἐκκλησιαστικὸς,” literally meaning “one who sits (or speaks) in the ἐκκλησία,” (*Liddell-Scott*) and derived from the Greek word “ἐκκλησία,” or “assembly” (*BDAG*). The *LXX* translated the Hebrew title using the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word “Qoheleth,” meaning “a preacher, a teacher or lecturer,” which is found in the opening words of the book. Thus, we can easily see how the English title originates from the book’s ancient Greek title found in the *LXX*. However, Jewish scholars tell us that the name “Ecclesiastes” literally means, “member of an assembly,” although it is popularly understood to mean, “preacher” because of the influence of Jerome (see *Liddell-Scott*).¹² The Greek title “Ἐκκλησιαστικὸς,” was known by Melito, bishop of Sardis (d. c. 190) and by Eusebius (A.D. 260-340),¹³ and by the Church fathers that followed.

II. Historical Background

The setting of the book of Ecclesiastes finds itself in the reign of King Solomon, the greatest king that ever lived. His reign was a time of peace and could be called the “golden age” of Israel. It was a time when men could turn their hearts from mere survival and war and into the enjoyment of liberal arts. It was a time when men had time to search for a deeper meaning in life. Of anyone who was in a position to explore this question throughout history, King Solomon becomes the most likely candidate. His wealth, wisdom and reign of peace positioned him to devote his attention to such theological questions. The book of Ecclesiastes that he authored is an expression of this pursuit to find the purpose of man’s existence here on earth.

At first, Solomon sought the answer on his own, within his own reach of wealth and pleasure. With his endowment of great wisdom, he amassed to himself great wealth. He built beautiful gardens and massive buildings, including Solomon’s Temple. Yet, in all of these pursuits, he did not find lasting fulfillment and satisfaction in life. He then sought for answers within the intricate workings of his society, where men worked together for a common good. Yet, he only found injustice there, as the strong oppressed the weak and the seat of judgment failed to deliver the innocent. He ultimately came to the conclusion that every person has a divine destiny in life and that God would judge each man by his works. He concludes that the essence of life is simply to fear the Lord and to keep his commandments. Jesus summarized Solomon’s conclusion well when He said, “. . . Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” (John 4:13-14) In other words, mankind cannot be satisfied with the things of this world alone. He can only find fulfillment in a relationship with God who created all things.

Christian Church, A New Series, vol. 1, eds. Henry Wace and Philip Schaff (Oxford: Parker and Company, c1890, 1905), 272.

¹⁰Jerome writes, “. . . To the third class belong the *Hagiographa*, of which the first book begins with Job, the second with David, whose writings they divide into five parts and comprise in one volume of Psalms; the third is Solomon, in three books, Proverbs, which they call *Parables*, that is *Masaloth*, Ecclesiastes, that is *Coeleth*, the Song of Songs, which they denote by the title *Sir Assirim* . . .” See Jerome, “Prefaces to the Books of the Vulgate Version of the Old Testament: The Books of Samuel and Kings,” trans. W. H. Freemantle, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series, vol. 6, eds. Henry Wace and Philip Schaff (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1893), 489-90.

¹¹*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, eds. A. Alt, O. Eißfeldt, P. Kahle, and R. Kittle (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, c1967-77).

¹²David S. Margoliouth, and Morris Jastrow, Jr., “Book of Ecclesiastes,” in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 5, ed. Isidore Singer (New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., n.d.), 32.

¹³Eusebius writes, “I learned accurately the books of the Old Testament, and send them to thee as written below. Their names are as follows: Of Moses, five books: Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus, Deuteronomy; Jesus Nave, Judges, Ruth; of Kings, four books; of Chronicles, two; the Psalms of David; the Proverbs of Solomon, Wisdom also, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Job; of Prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah; of the twelve prophets, one book; Daniel, Ezekiel, Esdras. From which also I have made the extracts, dividing them into six books.’ Such are the words of Melito.” (*Ecclesiastical History* 4.26.14) See Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. Arthur C. McGiffert under the title *The Church History of Eusebius*, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, A New Series, vol 1, eds. Henry Wace and Philip Schaff, (Oxford: Parker and Company, c1890, 1905), 206.

Finally, we must remember that oral tradition held strong roots in the Oriental culture. Thus, the Preacher, as well as his predecessors, could have recited the words that have been recorded in the book of Ecclesiastes many times before they were put into written form.

III. Authorship

The general consent of Jewish antiquity (*Shabbath* 30a-b),¹⁴ as well as many modern conservative scholars, credits the authorship of the book of Ecclesiastes to Solomon, the king of Israel, who reigned over Israel 970-930 B.C. Both internal evidence and external evidence supports this view. However, there is a growing group of modern scholars who oppose this designation, and date it much later.

A. Internal Evidence - We find no internal evidence that supports this book as a compilation of multiple authorships, as is found in the books of Psalms and Proverbs. It appears to have had one person as its author. Within its pages, one has to conclude that Solomon, the son of David, was its author. There is strong internal evidence to support this widely held belief among biblical scholars.

1. The Author's Description of Himself - The author's description of himself can only fit King Solomon. The author was the son of David, as well as a king who reigned in Jerusalem, as stated in Ecclesiastes 1:1, "The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem." In addition, the author reigned over the entire nation of Israel from its capital Jerusalem, as he states in Ecclesiastes 1:12, "I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem." Only King Solomon fits the descriptions of 1:1 and 1:12. After him, the kingdom was divided

2. The Many Indirect References to the Author's Wisdom, Wealth, Servants, Pleasures, and Building Activities - The many indirect references to the author's wisdom, wealth, servants, pleasures, and building activities lead us to a clear description of the life of King Solomon as described in Scriptures. In fact, there is nothing within the book of Ecclesiastes that contradicts Solomonic authorship. Note the following comparisons of Solomon's life in 1 Kings with the book of Ecclesiastes.

"The author had 'more wisdom than all who were before' him (1:16; 1 Kin. 3:12); (2) he gathered for himself 'silver and gold and the special treasures of kings' (2:8; 1 Kin. 10:11-23); (3) he 'acquired male and female servants' in great numbers (2:7; 1 Kin. 9:20-23); (4) he engaged in extensive building projects (2:4-6; 1 Kin. 9:1-19); (5) he developed a great understanding of plants, birds, and natural phenomena (2:4-7; 1 Kin. 4:33); (6) he declared, 'there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin' (7:20; 1 Kin. 8:46); and (7) 'he pondered and sought out and set in order many proverbs' (12:9; 1 Kin. 4:32)."¹⁵

We find a statement in Ecclesiastes 7:20, "For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not" that is similar to King Solomon's prayer in 1 King 8:46, "for there is no man that sinneth not."

The Author's Wisdom (1:13, 16-18; 12:9): The author was a man of great wisdom, above all others before him, as he states in Ecclesiastes 1:16, "I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge." He was a man who sought out much wisdom, as we read in Ecclesiastes 1:13, "And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven," and Ecclesiastes 1:16-18, "And I gave my heart to know wisdom," and Ecclesiastes 12:9, "yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs."

Of all the Old Testament figures, King Solomon appears as the one whom most qualifies as an author of wisdom literature, as is found in the book of Ecclesiastes. He was endowed by God with divine wisdom.

¹⁴See Isidore Epstein, ed., "Contents of the Soncino Babylonian Talmud," [on-line]; accessed 27 October 2009; available from http://www.come-and-hear.com/shabbath/shabbath_30.html#PARTb; Internet.

¹⁵Earl D. Radmacher, Ronald B. Allen, and H. Wayne House, eds., "The Book of Ecclesiastes," in *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Pub., 1999), "Introduction," Logos.

He was at the crossroads of international trade and culture. We find in the book of Proverbs that he collected, studied and wrote wisdom literature.

The Author's Wealth and Influence: The words given in Ecclesiastes 2:1-26 describe a king of enormous wealth and influence. We read about his pleasures (2:3), his building activities (2:4-6), his servants (2:7), and his wealth (2:8). We know from the Scriptures that Solomon built magnificent buildings, cities and gardens, that he hired many male and female servants and accumulated vast wealth. Only King Solomon, of all the kings of Judah and Israel, fits such a description.

3. Evidence of the Unity of the Book - The book of Ecclesiastes opens and closes with the same verse, which confirms the unity of this book: Ecclesiastes 1:2, "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity." Ecclesiastes 12:8, "Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity."

4. Comparison of Book of Ecclesiastes to the Books of Proverbs and Canticles – It is the traditional view that Solomon composed and wrote the three books of wisdom: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Canticles. Upon examination, we can find a number of similar phrases and expressions within these three books. When comparing Ecclesiastes to Proverbs, we note that its poetry, phrases and theme closely resemble the book of Proverbs, which was written mostly by King Solomon. Both books use the phrase "the words of the wise" (see Proverbs 22:17; 24:13 and Ecclesiastes 9:17; 12:11), which is not found elsewhere in the Old Testament. Like the book of Solomon, the author contrasts the wise man with the fool in Ecclesiastes 1:17, "And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit." In addition, the theme of the fear of the Lord is woven throughout both books.

5. Ecclesiastes in the New Testament – Although the book of Ecclesiastes is not directly quoted in the New Testament, we find an allusion to it in Romans 8:20, "For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope," in which Paul makes a comment about the vanity of this world.

Some scholars have suggested a New Testament allusion to Ecclesiastes 7:20, "For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not." This allusion is found in 1 John 1:8, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

Some scholars have suggested a New Testament allusion to Ecclesiastes 11:5, "As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all." This allusion is found in John 3:8, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

Some scholars have suggested a New Testament allusion to Ecclesiastes 9:10, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest." This allusion is found in John 9:4, "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work."

Some scholars have suggested a New Testament allusion to Ecclesiastes 11:9, "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment." ; Ecclesiastes 12:14, "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." This allusion is found in 1 Corinthians 4:5, "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God." 2 Corinthians 5:10, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."

B. External Evidence – We find strong external support for Solomonic authorship. Ancient Jewish tradition supports Solomonic authorship to the book of Ecclesiastes.¹⁶ However, its authorship is not without differing views among the Jews. One rabbinical tradition attributed its authorship to Hezekiah,¹⁷ but this simply means that it may have been compiled by him at a later date. Martin Luther is believed to be the first to question its authorship (although some argue that he was referring to the book of Ecclesiasticus), after which other scholars began to accept alternate views.¹⁸ German scholars initially followed Luther's line of reasoning at a later date, along with British and American scholarship. Thus, today a wide range of views has developed as to authorship and date of writing of Ecclesiastes.

Although the authorship of Ecclesiastes has been debated among the Jews and Christians, all agreed to its canonical status. The fact that it is found in the *LXX*, and that fragments of the book of Ecclesiastes were discovered at Qumran, testify to its important to ancient Jewish societies.¹⁹

IV. Date and Place of Writing

Determining the date and place of writing of the book of Ecclesiastes must be based upon one's view of authorship. I date this book during the time of King Solomon in the tenth century B.C.

A. Date - With the view of Solomonic authorship, we are compelled to date the writing of Ecclesiastes within the reign of King Solomon, which scholars assign to 970-930 B.C. We may also be inclined to place the date of writing towards the end of Solomon's life, since the book of Ecclesiastes describes a lifetime of accumulated wealth and pleasure (2:1-11). We also see a description of old age (Eccl 11-12), probably from his personal experience. He describes an elder man who has seen it all by saying, "All things have I seen in the days of my vanity" (7:15). The author addresses the youth as a man who is mature in age (11:9, 12:1). In Ecclesiastes 7:26 he describes the ensnarement of women as one who has lived to experience much. The book of Ecclesiastes leads us to believe that King Solomon repented in his later years after backsliding from God (1 Kings 11:1-8). Ronald Hawkins says, "One Rabbinic source declares that he wrote the Song of Songs, with its accent on love, in his youth; Proverbs, with its emphasis on practical problems, in his maturity; and Ecclesiastes with its emphasis on the vanity of life, in old age (Midrash, *Shir Hashirim Rabba*, 1:1, Sec. 10)²⁰

However, some scholars believe that Ecclesiastes was written during the time of Ezra (about 450 B.C.). They base their arguments upon several assumptions:

I. Linguistic Studies – Perhaps the most popular argument used to argue for a late dating of many of the Old Testament books is based upon linguistics. Some scholars argue that the Hebrew text in the book of Ecclesiastes shows evidence of Aramaic and Phoenician influences. However, it is possible that Solomon may have used Phoenician scribes to write the text, or that later compilation influenced the text. Such arguments are found to be weak by scholastic standards; for it can be argued that the language is compatible with the time of Solomon; for Solomon was exposed to a wide variety of linguistics from neighbouring nations.

¹⁶The Babylonian Talmud reads, "Did not then Solomon well say, wherefore I praised the dead that are already dead? . . . And as to what Solomon said, 'for a living dog is better than a dead lion'" (*Shabbath* 30a, b) See Isidore Epstein, ed., "Contents of the Soncino Babylonian Talmud," [on-line]; accessed 27 October 2009; available from http://www.come-and-hear.com/shabbath/shabbath_30.html#PARTb; Internet.

¹⁷The Babylonian Talmud reads, "King Hezekiah and his company wrote Isaiah, Proverbs, Songs, and Ecclesiastes." (*Babylonian Talmud, Tract Baba Bathra* 15a) See Michael L. Rodkinson, *New Edition of the Babylonian Talmud*, vol. 13 (New York: New Talmud Publishing Company, 1902), 45-46.

¹⁸Martin Luther writes, "The author of the book of Ecclesiasticus preaches the law well, but he is no prophet. It is not the work of Solomon, anymore than it is the book of Solomon's Proverbs. They are both collections made by other people." See Martin Luther, *The Table Talk of Martin Luther*, trans. William Hazlitt (London: H. G. Bohn, 1857), 11.

¹⁹Cave four provided manuscript fragments containing text from Eccl. 5:13-17; 6:3-8; 7:7-9 (4QQoh a, 4QQoh b). See Harold P. Scanlin, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Modern Translations of the Old Testament* (Wheaton, Ill: Tyndale House Publishers, 1993), Logos.

²⁰Ronald E. Hawkins, "Proverbs," in *The KJV Bible Commentary*, ed. Edward E. Hindson and Woodrow M. Kroll (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Pub., 1994), 1257, Logos.

2. A Pseudepigraphal Writing – If it was a later writing, then such a view must acknowledge that an unknown author attempted to identify himself as King Solomon, the son of David. Although pseudepigraphal writers are found frequently in non-canonical literature, the ancient Jews did not accept such literature into their sacred books of the Holy Bible.

3. An Apostate Solomon Could Not Have Written Inspired Scriptures – Some scholars claim that the apostate state of Solomon described in Scripture would exclude him from writing inspired Scriptures. But we can easily assume that Solomon returned to the Lord.

4. The Conditions Described in the Book do not Describe the Prosperity of Israel During the Reign of Solomon – Some scholars argue that the conditions described in Ecclesiastes of oppression, death, childish leadership, etc., is descriptive of the later times of the writer, and not that of Israel during the prosperous reign of King Solomon. However, we must be willing to acknowledge that Solomon's evaluations of man's depravity looked beyond his nation of Israel and into neighbouring nations.

B. Place of Writing – The book of Ecclesiastes makes five references to the city of Jerusalem (1:1, 12, 16; 2:7, 9). Thus, we are left with the impression that Solomon wrote this book while ruling in Jerusalem. In addition, the preacher describes a man who built great words and beautiful gardens, which could easily be a description of events that took place in Palestine during the reign of King Solomon.

V. Recipients

Universal Application – The three books that Solomon wrote, the book of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon, are designed for all people everywhere, both Jews and Gentiles, so that they have a universal application. There are three primary recipients identified in God's Word: the Jews, the Gentiles and the Church, as we read in 1 Corinthians 10:32, "Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God." (1) *The Jews* - The Old Testament placed emphasis upon the Jews as the nation of Israel. (2) *The Gentiles* - The book of Daniel stands alone in the Old Testament in much the same way that the book of Revelation is unique to the New Testament. Both are apocalyptic in nature, using symbolic figures to prophesy of future events. Daniel takes us through the Times of the Gentiles when God divinely works in this group of people to carry out His divine plan of election and redemption. (3) *The Church* - The New Testament reveals God's plan of redemption as He works through the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Under the New Covenant, God created a third group of people. He took the Jews and the Gentiles and made one new man in Christ called the Church. This was the mystery that was kept hidden under the old covenant and revealed only in the New Testament. The writings of Solomon stand unique in the Holy Scriptures in that all three people-groups serve as primary recipients. This is because King Solomon was a type and figure of Jesus Christ, who will reign as King of Kings over all the earth, beginning in the Millennial reign.

King Solomon was a king of kings. That is, his realm of dominion included other Gentile nations. Thus, in no place in these three books is the nation of Israel mentioned, nor a mention of the Jewish laws, rituals, feasts, ceremonies, sacrifices, the Sabbath day, or the tithe. There are also no prophetic passages about the coming of the Messiah. Nor are there any references to angels or Satan. It is clearly a Jewish writing that is designed for universal application for all ages and cultures. This is why both Jews and Christians have found comfort a clear application to their lives in these three books.

In 2 Chronicles 6:32-33 King Solomon prayed for the Gentiles who would come to the Temple in Jerusalem to call upon the name of the God of Israel. Such Gentiles would have heard and seen the great works of God and would come to receive His salvation and deliverance in their own lives. This shows that the Temple was to serve as a testimony to the nations of the earth that there was a God in heaven who could be approached. This prayer revealed that Solomon understood his office and ministry extended beyond the land of Israel and unto the nations. This would help explain why Solomon's writings of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon are not designated for the Jews alone, but address all mankind.

LITERARY STYLE (GENRE)

“Perhaps the most important issue in interpretation is the issue of genre. If we misunderstand the genre of a text, the rest of our analysis will be askew.”²¹
(Thomas Schreiner)

Form critical studies followed on the heels of source criticism in the first half of the twentieth century in an effort to identify the evolution of the text from its original form as oral tradition to the stage of canonization. John Hayes and Carl Halloday describe the four primary aspects of form criticism, which are (1) the *content* “what is said,” (2) the *form* “how it is said,” (3) the *life setting* “in what setting or occasion it is said,” and (4) the *function* “the purpose of what is said.” They believe these aspects of form criticism allow the books of the Bible to be classified into their various genres as well as associate these genres with “sociological realities in the life of ancient Israel and the early church.”²² In other words, form criticism reveals biblical genres through the book’s content and form; it reveals the occasion of the book through its life setting; and it reveals its purpose through its function. This section of the book introduction will address these four aspects of form critical studies in three sections in the following order:

1. Life Setting – Discussions on the occasion
2. Form and Content – Discussions on the type of genre occasioned by the author and the characteristics of the book in light of its genre
3. Function – Discussions on the purpose

These three categories follow Hermann Gunkel’s well-known three-fold approach to form criticism when categorizing the genre found within the book of Psalms: (1) “a common setting in life,” (2) “literary forms,” and (3) “thoughts and mood.”²³ In addition, the *Word Biblical Commentary* uses “Form/Structure/Setting” preceding each commentary section.²⁴

I. Occasion

“Identifying the occasion and purpose for writing any document is usually important for fully understanding the content and meaning of the message conveyed.”²⁵
(Thomas Lea)

When we look for clues as to what would have occasioned the writing of the book of Ecclesiastes, we are faced with the words of a man who had done everything in life and had experienced all the pleasures that one could hope to experience. Yet, in all of life’s pursuits, the Preacher has found vanity. Thus, the Preacher’s pursuit of the true meaning of life seems to have occasioned this writing.

A careful study of the Scriptures reveals how the Lord revealed to King David that his son Solomon would be heir to the throne. As such, the king took his son aside and instilled within him a love for God and His Word. We see that God had previously spoken to King David about a son being born to him and that his name would be called “Solomon” (1 Chron 22:8-9). The birth and naming of Solomon took place in 2 Samuel 12:24-25. God also revealed to King David that Solomon was to succeed him on the throne (1 Chron 28:5-6). We also see evidence in Proverbs 4:3-4 that King David favored his son Solomon above his other sons. As he groomed Solomon for the kingship, his other sons appear to be raised without discipline and training. We read about the immorality in Amnon in raping his sister, about the murder and rebellion in Absalom, and insurrection and pride in Adonijah. Thus, we see how Solomon received correction in the smallest of areas, while his brothers remained without discipline in their sins. This was because King David

²¹Thomas R. Schreiner, *Interpreting the Pauline Epistles*, second edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, c1990, 2011), 11.

²²John H. Hayes and Carl A. Halloday, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner’s Handbook*, revised edition (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1987), 83-84.

²³Hermann Gunkel, *The Psalms: A Form-Critical Introduction*, trans. Thomas M. Horner, in *Biblical Series*, vol. 19, ed. John Reumann (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1967), 10.

²⁴*Word Biblical Commentary*, eds. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, and Glenn W. Barker (Dallas, Texas: Word Incorporated, 1989-2007).

²⁵Thomas D. Lea, and Hayne P. Griffin, Jr., *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, in *The New American Commentary*, vol. 34, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 41, Logos.

gave Solomon special attention during his youth. As King David taught Solomon wisdom, he not only instilled within his son divine truths, but also the passion to seek God for divine wisdom, as Solomon must have seen his father seek the Lord passionately. Not only did Solomon inherit good behavior from these teachings, but he also inherited a yearning for wisdom. He would have sought the deepest meaning of the most noble of all the commandments, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, mind and strength.” (Deut 6:4-6) As king, Solomon’s international exposure would have given him the opportunity to hear the wisdom of Egypt and of the East, as we read in 1 Kings 4:30, “And Solomon’s wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt.” Acts 7:22, “And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds.” Scholars suggest that he gathered the collection of proverbs which we call “the words of the wise” from abroad. Thus, Solomon’s upbringing would occasion the writing of the book of Proverbs. His role as king gave him the opportunity to explore the pursuits of pleasure, wealth and power, thus inspiring the book of Ecclesiastes. His relationships with his harem of wives would have occasioned him to explore the aspects of true love between a man and a woman, thus inspiring the Song of Solomon.

II. Genre and Characteristics of the Book

The book of Ecclesiastes has a number of issues regarding its literary style that distinguish it from the other books of the Holy Scriptures: (A) it is classified under the literary genre of didactic Hebrew poetry, or wisdom literature, (B) it has a number of literary devices, and (C) its theme is reflected in a number of key words.

A. The Old Testament Books of Hebrew Poetry – Karl Keil classifies six Old Testament books as Hebrew poetry: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and Lamentations. He divides these books into two sub-classes called *lyric* and *didactic*, arguing that this two-fold distinction is found in the two Hebrew words (שִׁיר) and (מְזֻזָּל). He groups Psalms, Song of Solomon, and Lamentations as lyric poetry (שִׁיר) and Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes as didactic poetry (מְזֻזָּל).²⁶ Modern scholarship defines didactic poetry under the literary genre of “wisdom literature.”

Within the historical setting of the early kingdom of Israel, the author of the book of Ecclesiastes chose to write using the literary style of the ancient wisdom literature. Also included in this list are the books of Job and Proverbs, with certain psalms (notably Ps 19; 37; 104; 107; 147; 148) as well as some non-canonical Apocrypha literature, such as Ecclesiasticus (*Wisdom of Solomon*).

B. Literary Devices in the Book of Ecclesiastes – There are a number of literary devices used by the author within the book of Ecclesiastes, which are called aphorisms, didactic narrative, and admonitions. Most prominent in literary forms in Ecclesiastes are aphorisms, which are short, pithy sayings, also called proverbs (7:1-8, 10:1-3, 8-15). We can find didactic narrative in Ecclesiastes, which is a short story with a moral (4:13-16, 5:13-17, 9:13-16). We can find passages in Ecclesiastes that admonish the reader by using the imperative, or jussive, constructions within the text (5:1-4).

C. Grammar and Syntax: Key Words that Identify the Theme of the Book – The most frequently used words in a book of the Bible will reflect its theme. When we examine the book of Ecclesiastes, we find a number of words that reflect its theme.

“good, better, well, pleasure, precious, joyful, merry” (52 uses),
“vanity” (38 uses),
“I perceived, I know, I discerned” (36 uses),
“under the sun” (29 uses),
“joy, mirth” or “rejoice” (16 uses),
“profit” (10 uses),
“vexation of spirit” (9 uses), and
“I said in my heart” (5 uses).

²⁶Karl Friedrich Keil, *Manual of Historico-Critical Introduction to the Canonical Scriptures of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, trans. George C. M. Douglas, in *Clarke’s Foreign Theological Library*, fourth series, vol. XXIII (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clarke, 1869), 437-438.

III. Purpose

The Old Testament books of Hebrew poetry served a number of purposes for the nation of Israel and for the Gentiles. These books were written primarily to testify that the God of Israel is the true and living God; thus, they served a doctrinal and apologetic purpose. However, the authors chose to frame their testimonies within the genre of poetry; thus, they served an historical and didactic purpose. Finally, the books of Hebrew poetry served a hortative and kerygmatic purpose in calling mankind to serve the Lord with all of his heart. Israel was set apart as a holy nation through which God would reveal His divine plan of redemption for mankind through the promises/prophesies of the coming Messiah.

A. The Doctrinal and Apologetic Purpose: To Establish and Defend the Central Claim of the Pentateuch that YHWH is the True and Living God - The primary purpose of the Old Testament books of Hebrew poetry was to reveal YHWH, the God of Israel, as the only true and living God, which was the foundational doctrine of the nation of Israel. This primary purpose is stated in Deuteronomy 6:4, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD." Throughout Israel's history, prophets used the Old Testament Scriptures to defend YHWH's claim as the God of Israel in order to call His people to Him as well as the nations that served pagan gods. The Old Testament books of Hebrew poetry share this primary, doctrinal-apologetic purpose.

Conclusion: The Purpose Reflects the Theme – This doctrinal-apologetic purpose reflects the foundational theme of the books of Hebrew poetry, which is the central claim that the God of Israel is the one true and holy God, who is orchestrating a plan of redemption for mankind through the nation of Israel.

B. The Historical and Didactic Purpose: To Testify that YHWH is the Only True God through Hebrew Wisdom Literature – The primary purpose of wisdom literature is instructional, or didactic.

1. The Historical Purpose - The book of Ecclesiastes records the wisdom literature ancient history, revealing the mindset of the Hebrew culture as well as the cultures from which Solomon obtained some wisdom literature. Thus, this book serves an historical purpose.

2. The Didactic Purpose - The purpose in writing the book of Ecclesiastes is to instruct and advise young men about the true meaning of life. We know that a young man is characterized by a passion for exploring and experiencing life. For example, he is inclined to equate true wisdom with a vast amount of knowledge experiences. Yet, Solomon had accumulated vast wisdom and found it not to be true; or, perhaps the young man thought that life is most enjoyed when one is carefree and indulges in wine. However, Solomon knew better by experience; or, maybe some young men felt that life was given to accumulating wealth, or accomplishing great feats of renown. Again, Solomon had experienced this also and did not find satisfaction.

The Preacher attempts to tell his readers that serving the Lord and obeying His commandments is the true essence of life. The Preacher teaches us that we are to live our brief stay here on this earth with joy, and to do this he teaches us how to find purpose in our everyday tasks by walking daily in the fear of the Lord; for we are to acknowledge our gifts in this life of wisdom, mirth, labour and wealth, as blessings from God. The book of Ecclesiastes teaches us how little this world can satisfy the soul of man apart from serving God. It tells us that amidst the injustices, abnormalities and struggles of life that are beyond our control, there is a God who is intervening in the affairs of mankind. We can take comfort in the fact that there will be a day of reckoning for all of mankind. No book of the Holy Scriptures digs deeper into this truth than does Ecclesiastes.

Conclusion: The Purpose Reflects the Theme – The historical-didactic purpose of the book of Ecclesiastes reflects the secondary, structural theme of the book, which states that God provides redemption for mankind through His commandments in order that man may fulfill his own destiny through obedience.

C. The Hortatory and Kerygmatic Purpose: To Exhort the Children of Israel to Serve the Lord God with All of Their Heart by Obeying His Commandments through Their Fear of the Lord - The hortatory-kerygmatic purpose of the book of Ecclesiastes is to exhort the children of Israel to serve the Lord God with

all of their heart by obeying His commandments through their fear of the Lord. Israel was equipped to testify to the nations about the true and living God through the testimony of divine blessings resulting from their obedience.

Conclusion: The Purpose Reflects the Theme – The hortatory-kerygmatic purpose of the book of Ecclesiastes reflects its third, imperative theme, which states that man must fear God and keep His commandments. Although God gave Israel divine commandments to follow so that they would receive His blessings, Israel failed to serve the Lord their God with all of their heart by disobeying the Law because they did not have the fear of the Lord. The book of Lamentations demonstrates man's inability to keep all of God's commandments; thus, Israel's cry unto God to provide their redemption.

D. Conclusion of the Three-fold Purpose of the Old Testament Books of Hebrew Poetry, – Having identified three purposes to the Old Testament books of Hebrew poetry, it is logical to conclude that there are three themes embedded within these writings, with each theme supporting a particular purpose. Therefore, the three-fold thematic schemes of these books will be discussed next.

THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

“Scholarly excellence requires a proper theological framework.”²⁷
(Andreas Kösenberger)

Redaction (composition) criticism built upon earlier forms of critical studies known as *source criticism* and *form criticism* to better understand the final composition of a book. This research asks how the literary authors edited and assembled their material into its final form. As a result, scholars began to approach the books of the Bible as independent, literary works rather than a compilation of fragmented parts gathered from various sources. A study in the evolution of the writing of commentaries reveals that extensive book outlines did not find their way into biblical commentaries until this recent era of biblical studies. Such outlines emerged during the trend of *redaction criticism*, so that by the mid-nineteenth century most commentaries offered book outlines in their introductory material. Earlier outlines existed in commentaries, but they were generally simplistic in form because scholarship lacked the necessary hermeneutical tools developed only recently in biblical scholarship.

During the last two decades of the twentieth century, biblical scholarship took a further step, using a number of approaches collectively known as *literary criticism*. This approach allowed modern critical studies and commentaries to propose greater detail in literary structures in an effort to reveal the book’s theological framework. The current trend in *literary criticism* allows greater accuracy in book outlines. As a result, these outlines become valuable tools in exegesis as well as homiletics because of the recognition of a book’s theological framework.

Based upon the historical setting and literary style of the book of Ecclesiastes, an examination of the thematic scheme and the literary structure with its respective outline to this book of the Holy Scriptures will reveal its theological framework. This introductory section will sum up its theological framework with a set of exegetical-homiletical outlines, which are used to identify smaller units or pericopae within the book of Ecclesiastes for preaching and teaching passages of Scripture while following the overriding message of the book. By following these outlines, the minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ takes his followers on a spiritual journey that brings them to the same destination that the author intended his readers to reach.

I. Thematic Scheme

“. . . a statement of theme is the first step in formulating the message of the work within its historical context or in setting up guidelines within which future readings or interpretations of the work in different historical contexts may be considered legitimate.”²⁸
(David Clines)

“If we are to hear the words of the prophets in a way that is both faithful to their original context and of contemporary usefulness to us, we must first determine the basic theme or purpose of each prophetic book from which we wish to preach. It will also be helpful to show how the purpose of the book fits in with the overall unifying theme of the whole Old Testament and the theme or central plan of the whole Bible.”²⁹
(Walter Kaiser, Jr.)

Introduction - Each book of the Holy Scriptures contains a three-fold thematic scheme in order to fulfill its intended purpose, which is to transform each child of God into the image of Jesus Christ (Rom 8:29). The primary, or foundational, theme of a book offers a central claim that undergirds everything written by the author. The secondary, or structural theme, of the book supports its primary theme by offering reasons and evidence for the central “claim” made by the author as it fully develops the first theme. Thus, the secondary theme is more easily recognized by biblical scholars than the other two themes because they provide the literary content of the book as they navigate the reader through the arguments embedded within the biblical

²⁷Andreas J. Kösenberger, *Excellence: The Character of God and the Pursuit of Scholarly Virtue* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2011), 173.

²⁸David J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch, second edition* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd., 2001), 20-21.

²⁹Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament: A Guide for the Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2003), 102-103, Logos.

text, thus revealing themselves more clearly.³⁰ The third theme is imperative in that it calls the reader to a response based upon the central claim and supporting evidence offered by the author. Each child of God has been predestined to be conformed into the image and likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Scriptures, and they alone, have the power to accomplish this task. This is why a child of God can read the Holy Scriptures with a pure heart and experience a daily transformation taking place in his life, although he may not fully understand what is taking place in his life. In addition, the reason some children of God often do not see these biblical themes is because they have not fully yielded their lives to Jesus Christ, allowing transformation to take place by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Without a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit, a child of God is not willing to allow Him to manage his life and move him down the road that God predestined as his spiritual journey. This journey requires every participant to take up his cross daily and follow Jesus, and not every believer is willing to do this. In fact, every child of God chooses how far down this road of sacrifice he is willing to go. Very few of men and women of God fulfill their divine destinies by completing this difficult journey. In summary, the first theme drives the second theme, which develops the first theme, and together they demand the third theme, which is the reader's response.

The Thematic Scheme of the Books of the Old Testament - The underlying theme of the Old Testament Scriptures is the office and ministry of God the Father as He works out His divine plan of redemption for mankind through His divine foreknowledge and sovereign intervention in the affairs of man. The primary theme of the Pentateuch is the central claim that YHWH is the true and living God. For this reason, man is to love him with all of his heart, mind, and strength. The books of Hebrew poetry emphasize man's love towards God with all of his heart. The prophetic books emphasize loving the Lord with all of one's mind. The historical books emphasize loving the Lord with all of one's strength.

The Three-fold Thematic Scheme of the Books of Hebrew Poetry – The books of Hebrew poetry are woven together as a major division of the Holy Scriptures with a three-fold thematic scheme.

1. *Primary Theme* - The primary, foundational theme of these books is the claim found in Deuteronomy 6:4 and known to the Jews as “the Shema,” a verse that declares the God of Israel is one, true and living God, a theme that undergirds all five books of the Pentateuch.

2. *Secondary Theme* - Each one of these books has a secondary theme that supports this central theme, providing the evidence to prove that the God of Israel is one God, who had dominion over all other gods worshipped by depraved humanity. Collectively, the secondary themes of the Hebrew poetry reveal God's efforts to restore man fully back into fellowship with Him. God gives to mankind wisdom so that man can understand His ways with his mind (Proverbs); God gives to mankind commandments so that man can obey Him with his physical body and fulfill his purpose and destiny in life (Ecclesiastes); and God gives to mankind a personal call of fellowship and intimacy with Him so that man can love God from a heart of sincere and pure devotion (Song of Solomon).

- a) Proverbs – Wisdom Calls Mankind to Understand God's Ways (The Redemption of the Mind)
- b) Ecclesiastes – God Calls Mankind to a Purpose in Life When We Serve Him (The Redemption of the Body)
- c) Song of Solomon – God Calls Mankind to Walk With Him in Personal Intimacy (The Redemption of the Heart)

The themes of the books of the Holy Bible can be often found in the opening verses, and we now can see these three themes in opening passages of the writings of Solomon. Proverb's opening verses emphasize the need to make sound decisions through wisdom, instruction, and understanding, saying, “To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding;” (Prov 1:2). Ecclesiastes' opening verses emphasize the vanity of human labour when one does not serve the Lord, saying, “What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?” (Eccl 1:3) The Song of Songs emphasizes the intimacy of love that proceeds from man's heart, saying, “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine.” (Songs 1:2)

³⁰For an excellent discussion on the use of claims, reasons, and evidence in literature, see Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams, *The Craft of Research* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).

It is easy to see why King Solomon would follow such a three-fold structure in his writings. Since Deuteronomy 6:4-5 was one of the more popular passages of Scripture for the children of Israel, it would make sense that Solomon, in his quest for the meaning of life, would follow this three-fold approach in his analyze of what it meant to worship God. Although the book of Proverbs places emphasis upon serving the Lord by making wise decisions, a careful study of the book of Proverbs will reveal that this three-fold emphasis upon the spirit, soul, and body is woven throughout the book. In addition, the book of Job gives us an extension of the theme of Proverbs, as both of these books serve as wisdom literature, teaching us through poetry to serve the Lord with our mind. The book of Lamentations gives us an extension of the theme of Ecclesiastes, as both of these books serve as poetic explanations for the vanities of life, teaching us through poetry to serve the Lord with our strength. The book of Psalms gives an extension of the theme of Songs, as both of these books serve as poetry to edify the heart, teaching us through poetry to serve the Lord with our heart. Finally, the redemptive message of the poetical books reveals that even when a man like Job walks in wisdom, he finds himself in need of a redeemer. Lamentations reveals a nation who has a divine destiny and purpose, yet the children of Israel find themselves in need of a redeemer. The psalms of David reveal that even when man is at his best intimacy with God, like David, he still finds himself in need of a redeemer.

3. The Third Theme of the Books of Hebrew Poetry - The third theme of the books of Hebrew poetry is an imperative theme, and it is also found in the Shema, where Moses commands Israel to love YHWH their God with all of one's strength (Deut 6:5). This theme testifies of man's efforts to love God with all of his heart. The journey of loving God with all of one's heart begins with the fear of the Lord (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes), and culminates in intimacy with Him (Song of Solomon).

- a) Proverbs - The Fear of the Lord is the Beginning of Wisdom. The virtuous woman is a reflection of a person walking in wisdom and the fear of God.
- b) Ecclesiastes – Fear God and Keep His Commandments. The man who keeps God's commandments has a purpose and destiny in Christ.
- c) Song of Solomon – Loving God is Mature as We Abide in Christ & Labour in His Vineyard. The man who abides in Christ and produces fruit that remains.

Combining these three themes to see how they flow together in each of Solomon's writings, we see that Proverbs addresses our mind as the fear of the Lord moves us to wise choices above foolishness. The outcome of this journey is the development of a person who is strong in character, symbolized by the virtuous woman. This is illustrated in the story of Job. Ecclesiastes addresses our physical actions by obeying God's commandments because of his fear of the Lord. The outcome of this journey is the development of a person who walks in his purpose and destiny, rather than in the vanities of this world. This is illustrated in the book of Lamentations. The Song of Solomon reveals the most mature level of serving the Lord with all of one's heart. This person yields to God's love being poured into him by learning to abide in constant holy communion with the Lord. The outcome of this journey is the development of a person who overflows in the fruits and gifts of the Spirit. This is illustrated in the book of Psalms. Unfortunately, many New Testament believers never develop a personal relationship with the Lord, as reflected in the Song of Songs and the book of Psalms. Although they are saved and they fear the Lord, they never mature into children of God who fall in love with Him amidst the struggles of our mortal life. They have never had personal encounters with Him. Yet, this is the goal of the writings of Hebrew poetry.

This walk of love is demonstrated in the lives of Job, Jeremiah (who wrote the book of Lamentations), and David (who wrote much of the psalms). No three men suffered greater than the authors of the books of Job, Lamentations, and Psalms; for we see in their lives a testimony of how to love God with the greatest demonstration of devotion in the midst of hardships. Their hardships were not occasioned by sin in their lives; but rather, God chose these vessels to reveal every man's need of redemption and His genuine love towards mankind to provide this redemption. Those who suffer for His namesake become the greatest testimonies of His power to redeem anyone who reaches out to Him. Through these chosen vessels, the testimony of God's redemption through His Son Jesus Christ can be declared to all of mankind. Job demonstrated genuine love for God through his life of wisdom in the midst of divine blessings; and he demonstrated love towards God when those blessings were removed from him by

abstaining from sin and blaming God foolishly for his difficulties (Job 1:22). Jeremiah demonstrated genuine love for God through his life of obedience to God, who commanded him to preach in the midst of persecutions (Jer 1:17-19). David demonstrated genuine love for God through his life of intimacy with God, being called a man after God's own heart (1 Sam 13:14, 1 Kgs 15:5). David was the first person to describe the fatherly attributes of God (Ps 68:5; 103:13).

The books of Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Song of Solomon, and the Psalms reveal that man initially demonstrates his love for God by fearing him and walking in divine wisdom and obedience to His commandments. As man comes to know God's love towards him along his spiritual journey, he learns to obey God because he loves Him, which is the walk of spiritual maturity for God's children, whether he is an old covenant Israelite or a new covenant believer in Christ Jesus. Thus, the heart expresses itself in its fullness with Hebrew poetry (Songs, Psalms), laments (Ecclesiastes, Lamentations), and wisdom literature (Proverbs, Job).

The Three-fold Thematic Scheme of the Book of Ecclesiastes - The book of Ecclesiastes offers a three-fold thematic scheme that supports the central claim of the Pentateuch, the claim found in Deuteronomy 6:4 and known to the Jews as "the Shema," a verse that declares the God of Israel is one, true and living God, a theme that undergirds all of the historical books as well. Thus, the foundational theme of Ecclesiastes is the central claim of the Pentateuch, a theme shared by all books of the Holy Scriptures. The secondary, structural theme of the book of Ecclesiastes supports the primary theme of the Old Testament books of Hebrew poetry, wisdom literature, and laments (Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Song of Solomon, and Psalms) by stating that God offers man divine commandments to obey that guides him in this love walk with God. The third theme declares that man is called to love God with all of his heart. In the book of Ecclesiastes, he fulfills this calling by obeying God's commandments in the fear the Lord. This third theme can also be seen in the fact that the purpose of our lives always points us to Christ, who alone was able to walk in perfect obedience to the commandments of God the Father. With Israel's laments as our example, we are to endeavour to obey God through the leadership of the Holy Spirit as we grown into a mature relationship of loving God with all of our strength.

A. The Primary Theme of the Book of Ecclesiastes (Foundational): The Central Claim of the Pentateuch Declares that YHWH is the True and Living God - The Primary Theme of the Holy Bible - The primary theme of the Holy Bible is God's plan of redemption for mankind. This theme finds its central focus in the Cross, where our Lord and Saviour died to redeem mankind. The central figure of the Holy Scriptures is the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, the Cross is the place where man meets God and where we die to our selfish ambitions and yield our lives to the God who created all things. Therefore, the Holy Scriptures are not intended to be a complete or comprehensive record of ancient history. Rather, its intent is to provide a record of God's divine intervention in the history of mankind in order to redeem the world back to Himself through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on Calvary. The Holy Scriptures are "Redemptive History."

Every book of the Holy Bible makes a central claim that undergirds one particular aspect of man's redemptive history. For example, the central claim of the Pentateuch is found in Deuteronomy 6:4, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD," to which all additional material is subordinate. The bulk of the material in the Old Testament is subordinate in that it serves as reasons and evidence to support this central claim. This material serves as the secondary theme, offering the literary structure of the book. In addition, the central claim calls for a response, which is stated in the following verse, "And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." (Deut 6:5) Such a response is considered the third, imperative theme that runs through every book of the Holy Scriptures.

This central claim is the primary, or foundational, theme and is often obscured by the weight of evidence that is used to drive the central message, which weight of evidence makes up the secondary theme; and thus, it contains more content than the primary theme. Therefore, the secondary themes of the books of the Holy Scripture are generally more recognizable than the primary theme. Nevertheless, the central claim, or truth, must be excavated down to the foundation and made clearly visible in order to understand the central theme driving the arguments contained within the book. Only then can proper exegesis and sermon delivery be executed.

The Primary Theme of the Book of Ecclesiastes - The foundational, underlying theme of the book of Ecclesiastes is the central claim of the books of poetry of the Old Testament, a claim stating that YHWH is the true and living God in Deuteronomy 6:4, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD." He is orchestrating a plan of redemption for mankind. The books of poetry develop this central claim through the four-fold plan of redemption: predestination, calling, justification, and redemption (Rom 8:29-30). These books collectively reveal God's unfolding plan for mankind as He supernaturally intervenes in the affairs of His people Israel, as we read in Proverbs 16:9, "A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps." These books require Israel's response to Him.³¹ Thus, the books of poetry testify of the office and ministry of the Heavenly Father as the One who has divinely elected His people to salvation from their sins and eternal rest in Heaven through His foreknowledge, which the apostle Peter mentions in 1 Peter 1:2, "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied."

B. The Secondary Theme of the Book of Ecclesiastes (Structural): God Provides Redemption for Mankind through His Commandments in Order That Man May Fulfill His Own Destiny through Obedience (Redemption of the Body of Man) - The secondary themes of the books of Hebrew poetry support their primary theme by offering the testimony of God's covenant love to bring Israel into its promised rest as supporting evidence that YHWH is the true and living God.

1. The Secondary Themes of the Holy Scriptures - The secondary themes of the books of the Holy Scriptures support the primary themes by offering reasons and evidence for the central "claim" of the book made by the author. Thus, the secondary themes are more easily recognized by biblical scholars than the other two themes because they provide the literary structure of the book as they navigate the reader through the arguments embedded within the biblical text, thus revealing themselves more clearly.

The Secondary Themes of the Pentateuch - The central claim of the Pentateuch declares that the Lord God of Israel is the true and living God, a statement found in the Shema of Deuteronomy 6:4-5, which is the foundational theme of the Old Testament. The secondary themes of the five books of the Pentateuch provide supporting evidence. In Genesis, God predestined mankind to take dominion upon the earth and He called the patriarchs and commissioned them to fulfill this task. In Exodus, God redeemed Israel and justified them as His people, and He delivered the Law to them in covenant as their foundational doctrine and teaching. In Leviticus, God provided mankind the service of the Tabernacle so maintain fellowship with man. In Numbers, God divinely provided for His people during the wilderness journey. In Deuteronomy, God made a provision for Israel to choose between the blessings and the curses. In Joshua, God brought His people into the Promised Land as their place of rest and redemption, while Judges reveals Israel's failure due to disobedience.

The Secondary Themes of the Historical Books - The historical books provide supporting evidence to the claim that YHWH is the true and living God by creating the nation of Israel and exalting it above all nations. However, the children of Israel disobeyed their God and brought divine judgment upon them. God predestined the Davidic lineage (Ruth), called David to be Israel's king and justified him before the people through divine providence (1-2 Samuel), indoctrinated Israel under the reign of Solomon's (1-2 Kings), instituted Temple service (1-2 Chronicles), restored a remnant of Israel from Captivity (Ezra-Nehemiah) and divinely watched over His people until the coming of the Messiah (Esther).

The Secondary Themes of the Hebrew Poetry - The books of Hebrew poetry provide evidence to the claim that YHWH is the true and living God by expounding upon God's provision for man to love Him with all his heart. God provided wisdom literature to offer the knowledge of God to redeem his mind (Proverbs, Job); God provided the commandments of the Law for the Jews and legal institutions for the nations to guide man to his destiny and redeem his body (Ecclesiastes, Lamentations); and God offers a personal call to mankind for fellowship and devoted service to redeem man's heart (Song of Solomon, Psalms).

³¹Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, c2006), 234.

The Secondary Themes of the Prophets - The books of the prophets provide supporting evidence to the claim that YHWH is the true and living God through the testimonies of the later prophets so that Israel could set her hope upon God's future redemption. Isaiah predicts Israel's redemption through the coming of the Messiah. Jeremiah predicts God the Father's time-table of seventy weeks for their redemption. Ezekiel predicts the restoration of the nation of Israel and victory over its enemies. The twelve minor prophets offer supporting testimonies to the three major prophets. Finally, Daniel testifies of God's time frame for Israel's redemption, which Jesus called "the Times of the Gentiles."

The Secondary Themes of the Gospels and Acts - The central claim of the four Gospel writers states that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, which is the foundational theme of this division of the Holy Scriptures. In addition, each Gospel writer offers evidence as its secondary theme to support his claim. The Gospel of John offers the five-fold testimony of God the Father, John the Baptist, the miracles of Jesus, the Old Testament Scriptures, and the testimony of Jesus Christ Himself as its secondary theme. Matthew expounds upon the testimony of the Old Testament Scriptures as its secondary theme; Mark expounds upon the testimony of the miracles of Jesus as its secondary theme; Luke expounds upon the testimony of John the Baptist and other eye-witnesses and well as that of the apostles in the book of Acts as its secondary theme.

The Secondary Themes of the Pauline Church Epistles - The central claim of the Pauline Church Epistles states that the Gospel of Jesus Christ alone how the power to redeem and transform man into the image of Jesus. These epistles deliver the doctrine of the Gospel to the New Testament Church. The epistle of Romans supports this claim by offering evidence of mankind's depravity and God's plan of redemption to redeem him as its secondary theme. The epistles of Ephesians and Philippians expound upon the role of God the Father in His divine foreknowledge as their secondary theme; the epistles of Colossians and Galatians expound upon the role of Jesus Christ as the head of the Church as their secondary theme; the epistles of 1, 2 Thessalonians and 1, 2 Corinthians expound upon the role of the Holy Spirit in sanctifying the believers as their secondary theme.

The Secondary Themes of the Pastoral Epistles - The central claim of the Pastoral Epistles states that God calls faithful believers into divine service in order to establish and grow the New Testament Church. The secondary themes of these epistles support their primary theme by giving instructions on the order of the Church. The epistle of 1 Timothy establishes the structure of the offices and ministries of the local church so that believers can serve the Lord within their local church with a pure heart. The epistle of 2 Timothy expounds upon this theme as Paul exhorts Timothy to develop his gifts and calling within the structure of the church. The epistle of Titus provides instructions on the importance of establishing the Church doctrines within the local church. The teaching of Church doctrines renews the mind of the believer, providing redemption for the mind. The epistle of Philemon expounds upon the theme of the love walk among fellow believers, providing redemption for men's bodies. Collectively, the secondary themes of the Pastoral Epistles provide redemption for the three-fold make-up of the believer, spirit, soul, and body.

The Secondary Themes of the General Epistles - The central claim of the General Epistles states that believers must persevere in the Christian faith in order to obtain eternal redemption. The epistles of Hebrews, James, and 1 Peter modify this theme to reflect perseverance from persecutions from without the Church. The epistle of Hebrews expounds upon the High Priesthood of Jesus Christ, which is its secondary theme. The epistle of James expounds upon a lifestyle of perseverance through the joy of the Holy Spirit, which is its secondary theme. The epistle of 1 Peter expounds upon our hope of divine election through God the Father, which is its secondary theme. The epistles of 2 Peter, 1, 2, 3, John and Jude reflect perseverance from false doctrines from within. The epistle of 2 Peter expounds upon growing in the knowledge of God's Word with a sound mind, which is its secondary theme. The epistles of 1, 2, 3 John expound upon walking in fellowship with God and one another with a pure heart, which is its secondary theme. The epistle of Jude expounds how living a godly lifestyle with our bodies, which is its secondary theme.

The Secondary Theme of the Book of Revelation - The secondary theme of the book of Revelation reveals the judgment upon the earth through the Tribulation Period and Second Coming of Jesus Christ, giving believers a vision of the hope that is laid up before them as a source of encouragement for those

who persevere until the end. The primary theme of the book of Revelation is the revelation of Jesus Christ, who is coming to take His Bride the Church to Glory. The secondary theme supports this claim with the prophecies concerning the Great Tribulation Period and Second Coming.

2. The Secondary Themes of the Books of Hebrew Poetry – A Summary of the Secondary Themes - The secondary themes of the books of Hebrew poetry follow the thematic scheme of the triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) redeeming triune man (spirit, soul, and body). Thus, these themes also give these books their structure, or outline. These books testify of how God provides redemption for mankind by providing divine wisdom so that he may know God's ways, by providing divine commandments so that he may obey God's plan for his personal life, and by extending a personal call of intimacy and fellowship with him so that his love towards God might reach full maturity.

In the book of Proverbs, God provides redemption for mankind through wisdom literature in order that man may choose the paths of blessings. This wisdom offers redemption for the mind of man. The book of Job testifies of the power of walking in wisdom to bring blessings in one's life. However, even Job realized his human failures and cried out for a Redeemer, who is realized in Christ Jesus (Job 19:25-27). Our Saviour was the only man that walked in perfect wisdom. Under the old covenant, the redemption or sanctification of man's mind was accomplished by understanding divine wisdom, which taught man the ways of God Almighty. For this reason, God reveals His unsearchable wisdom to Job (Job 38-41). Under the new covenant, this sanctification is accomplished by the believer's hope and understanding of His eternal redemption through God the Father's plan of salvation: predestination, calling, justification, and glorification.

In the book of Ecclesiastes, God provides redemption for mankind through obedience to His commandments in order that man may fulfill his own destiny. Obedience to these commandments offers redemption for the body of man, as King Solomon testifies. Yet, even Solomon realized the vanities of life. The book of Lamentations testifies of Israel's failures to walk in obedience to God and as a result, this nation's inability to fulfill its destiny. Under the old covenant, the redemption or sanctification of man's body was accomplished by obedience to the Mosaic Law. Only Christ Jesus fulfilled the Law in its fullness. Under the new covenant, this sanctification is accomplished by the believer's obedience to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which is being led daily by the Spirit.

In the Song of Solomon, God provides redemption for mankind through intimacy with Himself. This song offers redemption for the heart of man. The book of Psalms record men's efforts to walk in perfect intimacy and love with God, yet the psalmists cried out for redemption throughout their writings. Only Christ Jesus walked in perfect fellowship with God the Father. Under the old covenant, the redemption or sanctification of man's heart was accomplished by the proclamation of the prophets. Under the new covenant, this sanctification is accomplished by the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, so that man responds in faith to have communion with Him.

Thus, the secondary themes of books of Hebrew poetry support their primary theme by offering the testimony of God's covenant love to bring Israel into its promised rest as supporting evidence that YHWH is the true and living God. While the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon testify of the way to find God's blessings and fellowship, the books of Job, Lamentations, and Psalms testify of man's inability to fulfill these requirements.

Testimony from Biblical Scholarship - Scholars have recognized these secondary themes for the writings of Solomon since the time of the early Church fathers. Origen (A.D. 185-254) recognized a three-fold aspect to the books of Solomon by saying Proverbs focused on morals and ethics, Ecclesiastes focused on the natural aspect of man's existence, and the Song of Songs focused on the divine, spiritual realm of man. He says:

“First, let us examine why it is, since the churches of God acknowledge three books written by Solomon, that of them the book of Proverbs is put first, the one called Ecclesiastes second, and the book of Song of Songs has third place . . . We can give them the terms moral, natural and contemplative . . . The moral discipline is defined as the one by which as honorable manner of life is equipped and habits conducive to virtue are prepared. The natural discipline is defined as the

consideration of each individual thing, according to which nothing in life happens contrary to nature, but each individual thing is assigned those uses for which it has been brought forth by the Creator. The contemplative discipline is defined as that by which we transcend visible things and contemplate something of divine and heavenly things and gaze at them with the mind alone, since they transcend corporeal appearance . . ." (PG 13, col. 74a-b)³²

Theodoret of Cyrrihus (A.D. 393-466) makes a similar three-fold evaluation of the writings of Solomon, saying:

"It is also necessary to say by way of introduction that three works belong to Solomon: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs. Proverbs offers those interested moral benefits, while Ecclesiastes comments on the nature of visible realities and thoroughly explains the futility of the present life so that we may learn its transitory character, despise passing realities and long for the future as something lasting. The Song of Songs . . . brings out the mystical intercourse between the bride and the bridegroom, the result being that the whole of Solomon's work constitutes a kind of ladder with three steps – moral, physical and mystical. That is to say, the person approaching a religious way of life must first purify the mind with good behavior, then strive to discern the futility of impermanent things and the transitory character of what seems pleasant, and then finally take wings and long for the bridegroom, who promises eternal goods. Hence this book is placed third, so the person treading this path comes to perfection." (*Preface to Commentary on Song of Songs*) (PG 81, cols. 46d-47a)³³

John Calvin (1509-1564) refers to the theme of the book of Psalms and the writings of Solomon in his argument to the epistle of James, saying:

"The writings of Solomon differ much from those of David, both as to matter and style. Solomon directs his view, chiefly, to form the external man, and to deliver to us the precepts of political life: David constantly chooses the spiritual worship of God, peace of conscience, or the gracious promise of salvation, for his theme." (*Argument to the Epistle of James*)³⁴

3. The Secondary Theme of the Books of Ecclesiastes and Lamentations: God Provides Redemption for Mankind through His Commandments in Order That Man May Fulfill His Own Destiny through Obedience (Redemption of the Body of Man) - The secondary theme of the book of Ecclesiastes states that God provides redemption for mankind through His commandments in order that man may fulfill his own destiny through obedience. The secondary theme gives the book its structure, or outline. Mankind has been predestined to reflect the image of Christ by following the plan God has designed for his life. God initiates man's spiritual journey on earth by subjecting him to vanities. It is God's intent to burden every man with vanity and the sorrows of this world so that he will look unto God for direction in his life. Through life's vanities, God appeals to our physical bodies to understand His ways.

Ecclesiastes teaches us that as we pursue wisdom, wealth, pleasure, position and other things of this life, there is much frustration to be experienced. We must look to God for a higher purpose as we partake of these things in life. Without an awareness of obedience to the Lord, all of our efforts in life will become vanity. Man must begin each day's journey by realizing that God has a purpose for him for that day. In finding God's purpose one finds meaning in the physical pursuits of life. He must realize that God will intervene in His time and season and divinely direct his journey in this life. If we will do so, we can eat and drink and enjoy each day despite the vanity of life all around us. It may be summed up in Paul's statement to Timothy, "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in

³²J. Robert Wright, ed., *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament IX*, ed. Thomas C. Oden (Downer Grover, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 278-288; Rowan A. Greer, trans., *Origen: An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer and Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Rowan A., 1979), 231-232, 234.

³³J. Robert Wright, ed., *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament IX*, ed. Thomas C. Oden (Downer Grover, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 288; Pauline Allen, et al., eds., *Early Christian Studies* (Strathfield, Australia: St. Paul's Publications, 2001), 2.32.

³⁴John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentary on the Epistle of James: Newly Translated from the Original Latin* (Aberdeen: J. Chalmers and Co., 1797), iii.

uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy;" (1 Tim. 6:17) For God has truly given to every man the things of this world to enjoy, only he is to use them in a life of obedience to God.

The book of Lamentations demonstrates God's provision for redemption to the children of Israel through the Mosaic Law, and Israel's failure to obey it; Thus, Israel failed to enter into its destiny of divine blessings and rest.

C. The Third Theme of the Book of Ecclesiastes (Imperative): Israel's Charge to Love the Lord Their God with All of Their Heart – The imperative theme of the book of Ecclesiastes reflects the third theme of the Pentateuch, which is the command to love the Lord God with all of one's heart.

1. The Third, Imperative Themes of the Holy Scriptures - The third theme of each book of the Holy Scriptures is a call by the author for the reader to apply the central truth, or claim, laid down in the book to the Christian life. It is a call to a lifestyle of crucifying the flesh and taking up one's Cross daily to follow Jesus. Every child of God has been predestined to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ (Rom 8:29), and every child of God faces challenges as well as failures in the pursuit of his Christian journey. For example, the imperative theme of the Old Testament is that God's children are to serve the Lord God with all of their heart, mind, and strength, and love their neighbour as themselves (Deut 6:4-5).

The child of God cannot fulfill his divine destiny of being conformed into the image of Jesus without yielding himself and following the plan of redemption that God avails to every human being. This 4-fold, redemptive path is described in Romans 8:29-20 as predestination, calling, justification, and glorification. The phase of justification can be further divided into regeneration, indoctrination, divine service, and perseverance. Although each individual will follow a unique spiritual journey in life, the path is the same in principle for every believer since it follows the same divine pattern described above. This allows us to superimpose one of three thematic schemes upon each book of the Holy Scriptures in order to vividly see its imperative theme. Every book follows a literary structure that allows either (1) the three-fold scheme of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: or (2) the scheme of spirit, soul, and body of man; or (3) the scheme of predestination, calling, justification (regeneration, indoctrination, divine service, and perseverance), and glorification in some manner.

2. The Third, Imperative Themes of the Books of Hebrew Poetry - The third imperative themes of the books of Hebrew poetry states that "Man is Called Worship the Lord with all of His Heart." This type of literature is written to express the mood of man's heart. When we read this literature, we are emotionally moved as we identify with the poet or psalmist. Although there are many poetic passages in the Scriptures, for the purposes of identifying thematic schemes, this division of the Old Testament includes Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and Lamentations, although scholars group these biblical genres differently. The first book of Hebrew poetry we encounter as we read through the Old Testament is the book of Job, which opens with an account of this man worshipping God at an altar of sacrifice (Job 1:5). The psalms of David show us how to worship the Lord during all seasons of life while the book of Job and Lamentations teaches us how to worship during the times of the greatest tragedies in life. As we journey through this life, we will have times of ecstasy when we are caught up in worship and we will have times of trials when we cry out to God for deliverance. However, most of our days are given to simple routines and decisions that determine our future well-being. We must then look to the book of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Songs for a pattern of how to worship the Lord with our hearts during such uneventful days.

Although all three writings of Solomon emphasize man's relationship with God, it is important to note that each one places emphasis upon a different aspect of man's make-up. Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon address three phases of man's spiritual journey in learning to love God with all his heart, mind, and body, while Job, Lamentations, and Psalms provide real life illustrations of people who have experienced these aspects of a devout life of faith in God. Proverb addresses man's mind and understanding, his decision-making; Ecclesiastes addresses man's lifestyle; and the Song of Solomon addresses man's heart-felt devotion. The journey of loving God with all of one's heart begins with the

fear of the Lord (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes), and culminates in intimacy with Him (Song of Solomon).³⁵ (1) *Proverbs and Job* - The imperative theme of the book of Proverbs calls us to make wise decisions in life by pursuing God's wisdom. It is structured in a way that teaches us how to take our mental journey through this life. We begin this spiritual journey by responding to wisdom's call to learn of God's ways as the book of Proverbs reveals. It is by the fear of the Lord that we embark upon this initial phase of learning to love the Lord by understanding and following the path of divine wisdom. The story of Job serves as an excellent illustration of a man that feared God and walked in wisdom with his fellow men, and thus serves as an excellent illustration of the teachings of Proverbs. (2) *Ecclesiastes and Lamentations* - As we walk in wisdom, we soon perceive that God has a divine plan for our lives in the midst of the vanities of life, as taught in the book of Ecclesiastes. It is at this phase of our spiritual journey that we offer our bodies in obedience to God purpose and plan for our lives as we continue to fear the Lord, which is the secondary theme of Ecclesiastes. The writer of Lamentations teaches us about the results of fearing God and keeping His commandments, and thus serves as an excellent illustration of Ecclesiastes. (3) *Song of Solomon and Psalms* - We then come to the phase of our spiritual journey where we learn to enter into God's presence and partake of His intimacy, which is the secondary theme of Songs. The Song of Songs tells us about the intimacy and love that man can have in his relationship with God. It is structured in a way that teaches us how to take our spiritual journey through this life. The Song of Solomon teaches us to move from a level of fearing the Lord into the mature walk of loving God with all of our hearts. The Psalms of David teach us about a man that learned to love the Lord with all of his heart, and thus serves as an excellent illustration of the Song of Solomon. Under the new covenant, a child of God learns the fear of the Lord until he has a divine encounter with Him. At this phase of his spiritual journey, he learn that God desires a personal relationship with Him. Therefore, he moves from fearing the Lord to loving Him in a personal relationship. Unfortunately, many New Testament believers have not learned to walk in a personal fellowship with the Lord, and they simply serve Him at a level of fear. *Summary* - Therefore, Proverbs emphasizes the redemption of our minds, while Ecclesiastes emphasizes our physical bodies, while the Song of Songs reveals to us how to worship the Lord with oneness of heart. In these three books, Solomon deals with the three-fold nature of man: his spirit, mind, and is body. These writings inspire us to find communion with God in our hearts as their ultimate purpose.

The books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Songs are structured as a spiritual journey. Each of these journeys leads us into rest. Proverbs tells us that serving the Lord with all of our mind leads us into rest. The book of Ecclesiastes teaches us that serving God with all of our strength and not mammon leads us into rest. The Song of Solomon teaches us that mature love towards God leads us into rest. Combining these three themes to see how they flow together in each of Solomon's writings, we see that the Song of Solomon reveals the most mature level of serving the Lord with all of one's heart. This person yields to God's love being poured into him by learning to abide in constant holy communion with the Lord. The outcome of this journey is the development of a person who overflows in the fruits and gifts of the Spirit.

3. The Third, Imperative Theme of the Book of Ecclesiastes: Fear God and Keep His Commandments

– The third theme of Ecclesiastes supports its secondary theme by revealing the way in which man labours with the purpose of serving God. He loves the Lord God with all of his heart by obeying His commandments in the fear of the Lord. As a result, he fulfills his personal purpose and destiny in life. This theme is easily seen in Ecclesiastes, which declares that we are to fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. The third themes of Ecclesiastes and the book of Proverbs are the same, which is to fear the Lord. Note that the key verses in each book are Proverbs 1:7, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction." Ecclesiastes 12:13, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man."

³⁵For centuries biblical scholarship has related the writings of Solomon thematically. Citing Origen as the earliest source of this theological approach by the church, Murphy summarizes this view by saying, "Solomon wrote three books, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Canticle, so that humankind would be instructed in three stages of the spiritual life. Proverbs dealt with the first stage and was meant for beginners, teaching them to live virtuously in the world." See Roland E. Murphy, *Proverbs*, in *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 22, eds. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, and Glenn W. Barker (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), xxviii, Logos.

The third, imperative theme of Ecclesiastes states that man is to live this life in fear of eternal judgment. It is by the fear of the Lord that men depart from evil, as we read in Proverbs 16:6, "By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil." This fear is the necessary ingredient of the heart that motivates us to serve Him instead of ourselves.

The key verse to the secondary theme of the book of Ecclesiastes is found in 1:3, "What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?" The question asks what is the meaning of life. In other words, how does a man serve the Lord with all of his strength? He does so by keeping His commandments out of fear and reverence for God, which is the third imperative theme, as stated in the conclusion of this book. We serve the Lord by fearing Him and keeping His commandments, which is stated in the closing verses of Ecclesiastes 12:13-14, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."

A person must overcome covetousness in order to put God first. A person must learn to be content with the things that God has given him and not to covet needlessly the riches of this world, as we read in Ecclesiastes 2:24, "There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God."

Thus, as with the book of Proverbs, we find two classes of people described in Ecclesiastes. There is the God-fearing (3:14; 5:7; 7:18; 8:12-13; 12:13), the righteous (3:17; 7:15-16, 20; 8:14; 9:2), the good man (9:2), and wise (frequently mentioned, e.g., 10:2). There is the fool, called sinners (2:26; 7:26; 8:11; 9:2, 18), the wicked (3:17; 7:15; 8:10, 12-14; 9:2), and the frequent mention of the fool (e.g., 5:4). One walks in the fear of God while the other despises God.

The fear of the Lord is referred to six times in the book of Ecclesiastes (3:14; 5:7; 7:18; 8:12-13; 12:13). The name of God is used some forty times.

Jesus alluded to the imperative theme of Ecclesiastes when warned against covetousness. He tells us that our life was not measured by the abundance of the material possessions (Lk 12:15). Rather, it was in a lifestyle of being rich towards God.

Another way to identify the imperative theme is found in the answer to the Preacher's dilemma when he tells us to enjoy the blessings that God gives us daily and not to strive after vanity. When we devise projects and set goals and work towards them, and after we accomplish some great feat, we are still left empty inside and without purpose if we are not walking in fellowship God. It is better that we take one day at a time and enjoy that day's labours with thankfulness in our hearts. If we are anxious, it is because we feel that something is lacking. This can be a form of covetousness when we strive for more than we have without the peace and presence of God with us. For a child who has no thoughts of tomorrow, this seems to come naturally because he is so focused upon finding things to enjoy and laugh about today. He does not understand the cares of this world. God created the family unit so that we can observe how our children naturally desire to rejoice in the small things of life. If we are not careful, we as adults can allow the cares of this life to choke out the blessings that God gives to us today. The weight of our cares and energies diminishes our joy.

Illustration - God would not ask us to do something that He Himself did not have to do. If we read how God laboured in the six days of creation, we can find Him enjoying each day and not fretting about tomorrow. We read throughout the story of Creation where God steps back at the end of each day to look at what He has just created and says that it was good (1:10, 12,18, 21, 25, 31). Joyce Meyer once asked the Lord why He took seven days in creation when He could have spoken it all into existence in one day. The Lord replied that it was because He wanted to enjoy each step of His beautiful creation.³⁶ In other words, it was because of enjoyment. This is why He ended each day with the words "It was good." Just imagine God enjoying each and every day of creation! Although no single day says that the

³⁶Joyce Meyer, *Life in the Word* (Fenton, Missouri: Joyce Meyer Ministries), on Trinity Broadcasting Network (Santa Ana, California), television program.

work fully completed, God enjoyed each day's accomplishments. This teaches us that God wants us to learn to enjoy each day, for this is His divine plan for us. In a similar way, when I finish a project or job after a long, hard day of work, I take pleasure in standing back and spending time looking at the work I have just accomplished and beholding how good it looks. So did God step back with His creation and enjoy His handiwork. Thus, we are to serve the Lord with all of our strength by living a life of moderation in all things so that we can enjoy each day.

4. The Third, Theme of the Book of Ecclesiastes Applied to the New Testament Believer -The third theme of the book of Ecclesiastes involves the response of the recipient to God's divine calling revealed in its primary and secondary themes. The third theme involves the response of the recipient to embrace the message of Ecclesiastes, which is to live life with purpose and fulfill the destiny given to each human being. A life is wasted when a person puts his energies in worldly pursuits without weighing the consequences of his actions. However, a life finds purpose when one obeys God's commandments, which leads him find his destiny and walk in it with purpose.

Since the writings of Solomon have a universal application, and not addressing the Jews, the Gentiles, or the New Testament Church in particular, there has been an effort for all three people groups to walk in the wisdom of Solomon, and find a purpose in the midst of life's vanity, and express perfect love towards God and man. Unfortunately, because of the depraved nature of mankind, no one has fulfilled the calling of these three books, except the man Jesus Christ. In much the same way the Law revealed the Jew's need for a Redeemer, so do the Solomonic writings reveal all of mankind's need for redemption. Jesus walked in the wisdom revealed in Proverbs, fulfilled His destiny on Calvary in the midst of the vanities of Ecclesiastes, and love the Father with the perfect love of Songs. Only through Christ Jesus can the believer fulfill the third, underlying theme of the Solomonic writings.

As believers, we are to live a crucified life daily through obedience to the divine calling given in this book, which is to fear God so that we can serve Him with all of our strength. We have been predestined to be conformed to the image of God's Son (Rom 8:29). In the book of Ecclesiastes this aspect of conforming to be like Jesus means that we should not labour in useless vanities, but pursue God in each season of our life, while enjoying each day's blessings as a way of resting in Christ. This is manifested by eating and drinking, and enjoying the good of all our labour, since it is the gift of God (2:24; 3:12-15, 22; 5:18-20; 8:15; 9:7-10; 11:9-10). As we rest in God, He divinely orchestrates our lives and moves us into His divine seasons. These divine seasons are our destiny, so that we fear God and keep His commandments by fulfilling our divine destinies.

D. Summary of the Three-fold Thematic Scheme of the Books of Ecclesiastes and Lamentations – The foundational, underlying theme of the books of Ecclesiastes and Lamentations is the central claim of the Pentateuch, a claim stating that the God of Israel is the one true and holy God, who is orchestrating a plan of redemption for mankind. The secondary, structural theme of the books of Ecclesiastes and Lamentations supports the primary theme of these books by offering the testimony of God's provision for the redemption for mankind through His commandments in order that man may fulfill his own destiny through obedience (the redemption of the body of man). The third, imperative theme of the books of Ecclesiastes and Lamentations states that man must fear the Lord and keep His commandments. This three-fold thematic scheme is demonstrated in the book of Lamentations.

Job	Lamentations	Psalms
Proverbs	Ecclesiastes	Songs

Thematic Scheme of the Books of Poetry

II. Literary Structure

“After we have stated the book’s purpose [or theme], we must then mark out the major literary sections that constitute the structure of the book. Usually there are rhetorical devices that mark where a new section begins in the book. However, when such rhetorical devices are not present, one must watch for other markers. A change in subject matter, a change in pronouns, or a change in aspects of the verbal action can all be telltale signs that a new section has begun.”³⁷

(Walter Kaiser, Jr.)

The literary structure of the book of Ecclesiastes must follow the theme of the book. It is important to note that such a breakdown of this book of the Holy Bible was not necessarily intended by the original author, but it is being used as a means of making the interpretation easier. It is hoped that this summary can identify the underlying themes of the book, as well as the themes of its major divisions, sections and subsections. Then individual verses can more easily be understood in light of the emphasis of the immediate passages in which they are found.

The Preacher opens the book of Ecclesiastes by stating his quest for some fixed value, or “profit”, in this life that man lives “under the sun”. His initial evaluation of life is that it is all vanity (1:2). He will conclude the book with the same declaration of vanity (12:8) and conclude that serving God is the only way to find purpose and meaning in this life (12:13-14).

In order to support his statement that all is vanity, he will first reflect upon the frustrations of his own pursuits to find gratification in this life (1:12-2:11). He will then take a broader look into the lives of those in society around him (2:12-26), and he will come to the same conclusion. The Preacher will then take a more in-depth look at life by looking at God’s divine intervention in the affairs of mankind (3:1-15). He will then give illustrations of the vanities of this life (3:16-6:12) as well as some remedies of serving the Lord in the midst of these vanities of life (7:1-11:8) before warning the younger generation to serve the Lord with all of their strength (11:9-12:8). He concludes with a statement that the essence of life is to fear God and keep His commandments (12:9-14). In other words, keep life simple and pursue only the basics of life that will have eternal significance before the throne of judgment, which all men must face.

1. Predestination: The Vanity of Human Life and Creation (1:1-2:26) – The Preacher begins his book by acknowledging that God has predestined this world to mortality and vanity (1:1-11). He bases this conclusion upon his own personal experiences as he expresses the uselessness of his efforts to make things different and better for others (1:12-2:11). In his old age, Solomon looks at the effects of his life on society. He gives examples of his vain efforts. Had he made things better for his nation, for the world around him? In despair, he saw everything the same. He felt that all of his labor and travail had not created the changes that he so desired. He also bases this conclusion upon his evaluation of the people in society around him as he broadens his scope of searching for a meaning in life (2:12-26). We must go back to the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden to understand the vanity to which mankind has been subjected. He concludes this book with the insight that his duty is not to change the world, but to fear and serve the Lord, for each man will give an account of his own life before God.

a) Introduction: The Preacher Concludes that This Life is Vanity (1:1-11) – The book of Ecclesiastes opens with the Preacher acknowledging that God has predestined this world to mortality and vanity (1:1-11). We know from the book of Genesis that all of this vanity was the result of the Fall of mankind in the Garden, although God will one day bring redemption back to man and to His creation. In these first eleven verses the Preacher expresses the uselessness of his efforts to make things better for himself and for others in this life. The theme of this passage is stated in the second verse, which says, “Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.” (1:2). He then asks the rhetorical question, “What profit does a man have of all his labours in this life?” (1:3) He sees the generations of the earth testifying to its course of vanity (1:4-7), and generations of mankind testifying to the same (1:8-11).

³⁷Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament: A Guide for the Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2003), 102-103, Logos.

As a result the preacher will attempt to answer this question throughout the rest of the book of Ecclesiastes, in which the Preacher records his efforts to find the purpose and essence of life. This pursuit of man's purpose is reflected in his repeated statements, "I gave my heart" (1:13), "I communed with mine own heart" (1:16), "I said in mine heart" (2:1), "I sought in mine heart" (2:3) "Then said I in my heart" (2:15), "I said in mine heart" (3:17,18), "I applied mine heart to know" (7:25), "I applied my heart" (8:9), "I applied mine heart" (8:16), and "I considered in my heart" (9:1). Within these passages, the Preacher tests life with knowledge, wisdom, mirth, great works and gardens, and in summary, all of life's pleasures. However, in these pursuits he finds only vanity (2:17).

He will later find a purpose in eternal things, but he will have to look beyond this life in order to find meaning as to why things are the way they are. For example, in 3:1-15 he begins to acknowledge that God intervenes in the affairs of mankind and establishes seasons of purpose in our lives. The Preacher initially notices the repetition of cycles, or seasons of life when he says, "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun." (1:9). He will later acknowledge God's hand in orchestrating these cycles and seasons in 3:1-8.

The opening passage of Ecclesiastes is a cry about the vanity of life on earth. More particularly, it is a cry regarding the vanity seen in the affairs of this life, the natural realm when contrasted to the eternal realm. The Preacher cries out in despair regarding life's vanities (1:2-3) with the realization that man is bound by the realm of time (1:4-11), yet hoping for redemption in eternity.

After the author introduces himself as the Preacher (1:1) he immediately sets the theme for the book of Ecclesiastes by asking the rhetorical question regarding the meaning of man's mortal life (1:2-3). He evaluates man's efforts in this life as being full of vanity. Therefore, he will answer this rhetorical question in the body of this book by giving us things we can do to overcome the vanities of life.

It is important to note that the Preacher does not refer to God at all during this introduction in 1:1-11, although the word "God" is used forty times in this book. This is because he is making his evaluation from the perspective of this life only, without considering the divine perspective. Although his search will soon take this divine perspective into consideration, he begins by assessing the fallen state of man and creation as a result of the Fall in the garden.

In Proverbs 1:2-11 the Preacher presents the question and the dilemma of mankind. In Proverbs 1:12-18, the Preacher begins to seek the answer to this problem. In chapter 2 and the following chapters of Ecclesiastes, the Preacher continues to seek this answer, which will come in the final chapter. The Preacher will conclude by telling us that in this mortal life we are to fear God and keep his commandments, for that is all that God requires of us in this life in order to prepare us for our immortal lives (12:13-14).

In order to understand the Preacher's negative evaluation of this life in the opening passage, we must go back to the book of Genesis. If we go back to the Garden of Eden and the Fall, we find that the curse that God placed upon mankind subjected them to vanity. Why did God place these particular curses upon mankind? We know that the woman's primary job was to be fruitful and multiply while the man's job was to till the ground. Thus, the woman is more focused upon her family and her children while the man is often focused upon his work. Women often talk about their family while men most often talk about their jobs. But after the Fall, God placed a burden upon each of their jobs. Therefore, God placed a burden upon each of these activities so that mankind would look to God for help. Jesus Christ said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matt 11:28-30)

The endless toils and travails of this life now reveal the vanity of our labours. Such vanities turn our hearts towards more eternal issues, such our enduring hope of eternal life and rest in the presence of God our Creator. When man labours and is heavy laden, he looks to God through Jesus Christ and

finds rest. When woman looks to God in fear and reverence, she finds salvation through child bearing, as Paul says in 1 Timothy 2:14-15, “And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.”

Mankind now eagerly awaits the redemption from our mortal bodies in hopes of taking on immortality, as Paul says in Romans 8:23, “And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.” Thus, the curse that God placed upon mankind works for our good so that through our travail we will look to eternal issues.

This is the focus of the book of Ecclesiastes. The Preacher realizes that God has subjected us to vanity and he searches for answers as to man’s role in the midst of such travail.

In Ecclesiastes 1:4-8 the Preacher refers to the elements of God’s creation that were recognized by men during the ancient times. Man believed that all matter and energy could be found in four states: in the heat from the sun, in the solid elements such as the earth, in the liquid elements represented by water, and in the vapor state of elements represented by clouds. He describes these four states of God’s inanimate creation as being in constant motion, or labor. These elements represent the cycles of nature. He concludes that all of creation has been subjected to vanity, which Paul also concludes in Romans 8:19-22.

The repetition of these cycles of nature teaches us that there are also repetitions in the cycles of human history. Therefore, man has been subjected to vanity just like creation.

(1) Title (1:1) - The opening verse serves as the customary Hebrew title to the book of Ecclesiastes.

(2) Opening Statement (1:2-4) – Ecclesiastes 1:2-4 serves as an opening statement upon which the rest of the book of Ecclesiastes is built. In other words, the Preacher offers his opening statement and builds his arguments from it, reaching his conclusion in 12:13. The Preacher realizes that God has set this earth upon a course of mortal decay because of human depravity; and man, whose spirit is immortal, should fear God as a means of overcoming the vanity imposed upon him in this earth-life.

(3) The Three-fold Testimony of the Generations of the Earth to Man’s Subjection to Vanity (1:5-7) – Not only does man’s mortality testify to his subjection to travail and vanity until his future redemption (Eccl 1:4), but all of creation has been subjected to the same (Rom 8:18-23). The second greatest testimony to man’s subjection to travail and labour is characteristics of the earth, which was also cursed at the time of the Fall. Ecclesiastes 1:5-7 describes three primary characteristics of this temporal earth, the sun, wind and rain, which is also described in Genesis 8:22, “While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.” These three characteristics of nature have the most obvious, continuous movement on any aspect of creation, and may be representative of all the other characteristics of the earth. Because of the rotation of the earth, the sun, the wind and water are always in motion and determine weather patterns. Nothing else in nature moves as consistently and swiftly as do these three; yet they seem to go nowhere. Man has been given authority by God to dominate parts of this creation, in a limited capacity; however, he has not been given the power to rule over the sun, the wind, nor the rivers. These elements of earth’s creation behave as they desire, despite man’s knowledge and intervention of them. These movements describe the destiny of this temporal earth in which we must live our lives under the sun. More specifically, they testify to the vanities of this mortal life. As all aspects of creation testify of the glory of God, the endless and seemingly purposeless movements of the sun, wind and rivers testify to us that God has subjected this temporal earth to vanity.

(4) The Testimony of the Generations of Man to His Subjection to Vanity (1:8-11) – In addition to creation (Eccl 1:5-7), time also serves as a testimony to man’s subjection to vanity.

The events of man's present life (1:8b), past events (1:9-10), and future events (1:11), all testify to the fact that God has predestined mankind to travail and vanity.

b) Man's Way of Vanity: The Preacher Explains How He Came to a Conclusion of Vanity in This Life (1:12-2:26) – Having acknowledged the predestined vanity of this world, the Preacher begins to explain how he pursued a purpose for his life in the midst of life's vanities. He will describe the vanity of his own personal experiences (1:12-2:11) and those of the society of people around him (2:12-26).

(1) The Preacher Finds Vanity in the Pursuits of Mental, Spiritual, Physical, and Financial Gratification (1:12-2:11) - Throughout the book of Ecclesiastes the Preacher will attempt to answer the question, "What profit does a man have of all of his labours in this life?" (Eccl 1:3) In Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:11 the Preacher describes his pursuits to find pleasure in this life. After introducing himself as the king over Israel (1:12), he explains how he pursued gratification for his mind by pursuing wisdom (1:13-18). He then changed his pursuits to find gratification for his heart through wine and laughter (2:1-3). He then describes how he set out to work with his hands to construct great edifices for himself (2:4-6) and to gather much wealth (2:7-11). But the Preacher concludes that this too is vanity and grasping for the wind. Thus, we see him referring to the three-fold make-up of man: mind, spirit and body as well as finances. We can assume that these three pursuits took place in the Preacher's life in the order that he gives them. He pursued wisdom and understanding first, followed by mirth and then the construction of great projects and the gathering of wealth. This represents the order of pursuits in the lives of many people. For example, in our society, we start out in our youth focusing upon school and education. When we go into our college years, we find that the influences for party and mirth are everywhere. We later find our place in society by focusing upon a career and learning to work hard towards success. For those who achieve financial success, they are left still searching for a meaning and purpose to their lives, having learned that all of these pursuits did not bring inner peace.

Throughout this passage the author searches for the true meaning of life. He asks the question in 1:3, "What profit hath a man of all his labor which he taketh under the sun?" He experiences different interests throughout life for periods of time, just like people today have fads, or hobbies, which are always changing. Illustration: My father would go through phases in his life of being interested in playing the guitar, working on cars, hunting, and various projects. I watched as these interests changed during the course of his life. The preacher will soon recognize the divine seasons that God orchestrates in the lives of those who obey His Word and keep His commandments (12:13). The king has seasons of pursuits in his life. Because he orchestrated them himself, he found no satisfaction in them. Although none of these pursuits are evil in themselves, they are vanity when a person does not follow God's plan for his life.

Just as Solomon, we too can have seasons of interests in various things of this world. These interests seem to fade in one area, and refocus on a new area through the years. When we follow God's plan for our lives, we can still enjoy those seasons of change, but in a greater and more dynamic way. His plan for our lives will take us to new levels of interest and adventures. Our own pursuits will produce vain interests, as Solomon has stated here. However, when we follow God's will for our lives, these seasons of interests will be satisfying. Seasons of changing interests are normal for us, but they do not satisfy until God is directing these seasons. Life is made up of seasons of change. When we learn to go with God's seasons in our lives, we will find that they are not vain, but very rewarding.

(a) The Preacher Pursues Wisdom to Gratify His Mind (1:12-18) – In Ecclesiastes 1:12-18 the Preacher describes his pursuits of wisdom in order to give gratification to his mind. However, in all of his pursuing he found only vanity and grief.

(b) The Preacher Pursues Mirth to Gratify His Heart (2:1-3) – In Ecclesiastes 2:1-3 the Preacher pursues mirth in order to find gratification and pleasure for his heart. But in the end he again finds only vanity.

(c) *The Preacher Pursues Great Works and Wealth to Gratify His Body (2:4-11)* – In Ecclesiastes 2:4-6 the Preacher endeavors to work hard in order to find satisfaction with great accomplishments of building projects. He gathers much wealth in his attempt to find his purpose in life, but finally concludes that this too is vanity and grasping for the wind.

(2) *The Preacher Finds Vanity in the Mortality of Mankind: The Wise Man and the Fool Partake of the Same Fate, Which is Death (2:12-26)* – After the Preacher reflects upon his own frustration, he looks beyond his own personal experiences to find a purpose and meaning in life. Now he begins to observe the people who surround him in society; but alas, he comes to the same conclusion. Although a wise man walks in light and the fool in darkness (2:14), wisdom does not appear to deliver one from the same fate as the fool (2:15). Both must die and be forgotten (2:16). Both will leave their substance to fate when they die (2:18-19). He concludes that man should learn to enjoy each day by recognizing God's blessings and not worry about the things of tomorrow (2:24-26).

2. Calling: God's Calling Through His Divine Intervention in the Affairs of Mankind (The Seasons of Our Life) (3:1-15) – After the Preacher concludes that God has predestined mankind and creation to vanity by reflecting upon his own frustrations of life (1:12-2:11) and upon those of others (2:12-26), he turns himself to a wider search by looking above. He realizes that God has a purpose for mankind based upon the realization that He continually intervenes in the affairs of mankind, and because His divine laws govern the outcome of men's lives. We describe this event as "divine calling," in which we come to realize that God has a redemptive purpose and plan in His creation. His divine calling is reflected through His divine intervention in the lives of men to bring them into their times and seasons of service to Him.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-15 represents the Preacher's next phase of learning when he teaches us that God calls mankind to particular times and seasons of life; therefore, every man's lifespan consists of a series of seasons that He orchestrates for those who obey Him. We learn that these seasons have been divinely placed within our lives by God (3:1). Once the Preacher recognizes these divine seasons of life (3:1-8), he concludes that man should simply rest in God and enjoy each day's journey, knowing that God is at work in his life each day (3:9-15).

For this reason, God has placed a time-clock within every human being. We are born with a sense of destiny because of this divine time-clock that ticks away each day within our hearts. We have an awareness that our lives should reach milestones of accomplishments. For example, the term "mid-life crisis" is used to describe those who face an identity crisis during mid-life. They face this crisis because of an awareness of failing to follow God's time-table of life for themselves. Because God has called each person to progress through predestined phases of life in order to walk above the vanities of life, those who fail to do so find themselves in a crisis at some point in their lifetime. They know in their hearts that they have failed to fulfill their divine destinies.

There are twenty-eight seasons listed in the following verses. It is in these seasons of life orchestrated by God that we find meaning and purpose in our lives. The closing verses to Ecclesiastes will warn us that everything we do in these seasons of life must be undergirded with the fear of God and the keeping of His commandments. The fact that there are twenty-eight is significance. Anytime in historical events the number seven or a factor of seven is used, it serves as a witness of divine intervention. One clear example is found in Matthew's description of Jesus' divine lineage, where God brought Israel through seasons of change every fourteen generations, as we read in Matthew 1:17, "So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations."

We see these divine seasons (and purposes) listed in 3:2-8. We clearly identify with such descriptions of our lives as we recall how we move from birth to childhood to adolescence to adulthood to old age and finally to death. God's involvement in human affairs leads to the understanding that there will be an eternal judgment, as the preacher says in Ecclesiastes 3:17, "I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work." Therefore,

enjoy the goodness that God gives to us in this life, but remember to fear God because His judgment will come upon every man.

Each verse in Ecclesiastes 3:2-8 contains two couplets. Each of these sets of couplets is similar to one another. For example, in verse two birth is contrasted with death. In verse 3 killing and healing are similar to breaking down and building up. In verse 4 weeping and laughter are similar to mourning and dancing.

These couplets appear to represent individual seasons of our earthly lives. Within each season in this life there are both good things and evil things to deal with. This is because mankind has been subjected to vanity because of the Fall. Evil is now a part of this life that must be dealt with during every season of life. Thus, we see the struggle between good and evil, between God's ways and the ways of the devil as we walk through our journey in life.

For example, the joy of the birth of a child will always be overshadowed by the knowledge that he will one day have to die (3:2a). We see this in the birth of our Saviour Jesus Christ. His birth was accompanied with exciting prophecies and visits from wise men from the East. But in the Temple Simeon spoke not only of His office as a Saviour but balanced his prophecy with words of sorrow and grief for Mary. Regarding Proverbs 3:2b, the travail of planting in the field and waiting patiently for the fruit will one day be forgotten by the joy of taking in a great harvest (3:2b). In our times of sorrow we must not forget how God brings us a ray of sunshine during our darkest hours (3:4a). We know that one day sadness will be overcome by joy; for this is how Jesus, because of the joy set before Him, endured the Cross and suffered the shame (3:4b). There is a season in our lives when we hold our children tightly and protect them in our embrace, while knowing that one day we must release them and send them out to pursue their own destinies (5b). We understand that as horrible wars can be, they always produce peace for a nation if fought in righteousness (3:8). Thus, every season and event in our lives is mixed with sadness as well as joy if we will look for God's handiwork in it.

The preacher then asks himself the value of labouring and travelling during the seasons of life (3:9), for God subjected mankind to travail at the time of the Fall in the Garden in order to keep us humble (3:10). It is in humility that we will turn back to God.

Now the answer comes when God reveals to him that there is a beauty to be found within each of these seasons in our lives; because each one will teach us a new lesson that we cannot learn from an earlier season of life (Eccl 3:11a).

God created our life as a series of seasons so that we would better understand that eternity is made up of ages and periods in which God takes mankind from one dispensation into another. This is why Ecclesiastes 3:11b says that God has placed eternity in our hearts. He did this by subjecting us to the pattern of seasons the He has subjected eternity to.

Ecclesiastes 3:11c then tells us that no man can find contentment in these seasons by pursuing earthly works and ambitions. If we try to fully understand the fullness of the world around us during each season of life, just as Solomon, we will realize that we cannot complete such pursuits; for God's creation is far too vast and our lives too short. This causes us to become unfulfilled with earthly pursuits and dreams, because by them we will only find discontentment in watching them go incomplete as we move into another season of life. As Solomon amidst his vast gardens and building projects, we must conclude that contentment and joy will only be found in pursuing our divine assignment on a daily basis. All other pursuits and ambitions will fall incomplete and unfulfilled at the end of one's life. We must find our joy today as we serve the Lord.

We must resign ourselves to serving the Lord with gladness of heart (Eccl. 3:12) and enjoy the benefits that God has given us during our daily service to Him, and this without coveting more than we have been given (3:13). This is the secret of happiness in the midst of our being subjected to travail all the days of our lives.

a) *The Preacher Concludes that God Has a Purpose for Mankind (3:1-8)* – The Preacher comes to the understanding that God has a purpose (or calling) for mankind based upon His divine intervention in the affairs of their lives and the life of his nation. He now attempts to understand the meaning or purpose of life in light of God’s divine intervention, which the Preacher calls “seasons” and “purpose under heaven.” Ecclesiastes 3:1-15 represents the Preacher’s next phase of learning when he tells us that our life is made up of times and seasons, or periods of change; and we learn that these seasons have been divinely placed within our lives by God (3:1). The Preacher lists these divine seasons in 3:2-8. We clearly identify with such a description of our lives as we recall how we move from birth to childhood to adolescence to adulthood to old age and finally to death.

The apostle Paul alludes to God’s work in orchestrating individual lives for His divine purpose by saying, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” (Eph 2:10) The psalmist describes God’s divine guidance for man’s spiritual journey in Psalms 32:8, “I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.”

(1) *General Summary (3:1)* - In a summary of this passage of Scripture, we see that Solomon begins by making a general summary of about the divinely orchestrated seasons in the affairs of mankind (3:1).

(2) *The Vanity of Wisdom (3:2-3)* - Ecclesiastes 3:2-3 reflects upon King Solomon’s conclusion regarding the vanity of his pursuit of wisdom (Eccl 1:12-18), where he realizes that he cannot control life and death, the seasons of this earth, and good and evil. These are events that God alone has determined and can judge. In Ecclesiastes 3:2 the king deals with the issues of life and death, and with the seasons of planting and harvesting, which often determined life and death in these ancient world. In Ecclesiastes 3:3 King Solomon acknowledges that, despite his vast knowledge and wisdom he obtained, he alone cannot control the forces of good and evil, to stop killing and other destructive forces of mankind; neither can he heal and restore things to good. Although he is a king, he does not have the power to control evil or good. Despite his vast wisdom, the king acknowledges that only God determines life and death, and He also judges good and evil upon this earth. These aspects of one’s life are beyond King Solomon’s grasp. These outcomes were in the hands of God.

(3) *The Vanity of Mirth and Pleasure (3:4)* – Ecclesiastes 3:4 reflects upon King Solomon’s conclusion regarding the vanity of his pursuit of mirth and pleasure (Eccl 2:1-3). King Solomon had pursued mirth and pleasure with the greatest of resources that man could obtain; yet, in all of these pursuits he now realizes that he cannot determine the time of a person’s weeping and laughter, mourning and dancing. The reason is because even Solomon could not determine the outcome of every person’s situation, whether it saddened or rejoiced the heart. These outcomes were in the hands of God.

(4) *The Vanity of Strength and Conquest (3:5)* - Ecclesiastes 3:5 reflects upon King Solomon’s conclusion regarding the vanity of his pursuit of strength and conquest (Eccl 2:4-6). The king had embarked upon some of the greatest building projects of the ancient world, carving and moving great stones; yet he could not determine the timing of when these projects could be completed, or even accomplished. His people had gathered stones and cast them away; his hired servants had grasped hold of these projects, and postponed or even cancelled them. The timing of these great building projects was in the hands of God.

(5) *The Vanity of Riches (3:6)* - Ecclesiastes 3:6 reflects upon King Solomon’s conclusion regarding the vanity of his pursuit of riches (Eccl 2:7-11). The king had gathered the greatest accumulation of wealth that had ever been collected upon earth, yet this wealth could not be kept entirely safe and secure. There were times he must give it away, and there were times thieves broke in and stole this wealth. He determined that riches were in the hands of an Almighty God as to whom He would give it to and whom He would take it away.

(6) The Vanity of the King's Rule over Israel and the Nations (3:7-8) – Ecclesiastes 3:7-8 reflects upon King Solomon's conclusion regarding the vanity and limitations of his rule over Israel and the nations. The king had decreed some of the wisest judgment among men, yet these judgments could not fix everyone's problems in the kingdom (Eccl 3:7). In this respect he found himself in the hands of an Almighty God in knowing when to keep silent and let God work things out, and when to intervene and speak his royal judgment. Although King Solomon was the greatest king upon earth during his period of reign, with the divine wisdom to maintain peace over his kingdom, yet he was not able to control love and hate, war and peace upon the earth (Eccl 3:8). These were things too great for him, things he had to look to God for their outcome. In all of his judgments, he could not resolve all conflicts. It was beyond his mortal ability to do so; thus, judgment ultimately rested in God's hands.

b) The Preacher Explains His Conclusion of Man's Purpose (3:9-15) - The Preacher will then acknowledge each man's purpose, or calling, in this life, in 3:9-15 as a calling to rejoice and to do good in this life by enjoying the good of each day's labours (3:13). In other words, mankind has been called to serve the Lord by doing good works and to rest in God's divine provision for his life.

3. Justification: The Depravity of Mankind (3:16-6:12) - The Preacher has concluded that this world has been subjected to vanity (1:1-2:26); yet, God has a purpose for mankind (3:1-15). God's overall plan for mankind involved his redemption. The Preacher now seeks to know God's plan of redemption/justification for mankind in the midst of a depraved humanity, but first he must build a case for man's need of redemption. Thus, in Ecclesiastes 3:16-22 he makes the conclusion that mankind is depraved. In Ecclesiastes 4:1-6:12 the Preacher uses illustrations from life and from creation to support his theme that all is vanity. In this section, he discusses the overall condition of mankind in his fallen state of depravity and his need for redemption. Within the context of these passages of Scripture, the Preacher describes man's justification is a need to walk in God's timetable of times and seasons by being obedient to His Word.

a) The Preacher Concludes that Mankind is Unjust and Mortal (3:16-22) - In Ecclesiastes 3:16-22 the Preacher makes the conclusion that mankind is depraved. He understands that God will judge every man according to his works, both the righteous and the wicked. He observes that wickedness was found in the place of judgment (3:16). He first concludes that God will ultimately give a final and true judgment (3:17). He makes a second conclusion that man is mortal just like beasts (3:18-21). He comes to the conclusion that because of this vanity of unrighteous upon earth a person should respond by learning to enjoy the labours of each day without coveting for more, or worrying about tomorrow; for man is not able to determine his own future, which belongs to God alone (3:22).

(1) Man's Depravity (3:16-17) – The Preacher makes his first observation by stating the wickedness and depravity of mankind. He concludes that God will bring justice upon this sad condition of man since man is not judging himself righteously.

(2) Man's Mortality (3:18-21) - In Ecclesiastes 3:18 the Preacher compares mankind to beasts from the aspect that they are both mortal. He will elaborate on this in 3:19 by saying that death befalls them both. Thus, from an earthly perspective, no one is better than the other, since both die and are no more (3:20). In addition, neither man nor beast is able to determine his individual fate, whether he goes up to heaven, or down to hell (3:21).

(3) Conclusion (3:22) – In Ecclesiastes 3:22 the Preacher makes his concluding remarks about man's depravity and mortality. He decides that man should learn to enjoy those things which God has blessed him with as a result of the works of his own hands.

b) The Preacher Explains His Conclusion (4:1-6:12) – In Ecclesiastes 4:1-6:12 the Preacher uses illustrations from life and from creation to support his theme that mankind is depraved. In this section he discusses the overall condition of mankind in his fallen state of depravity. However, this time he makes his evaluation from the perspective of divine judgment.

We see a progressive order of events in this passage of Scripture. Man's fall in the Garden of Eden resulted in his mortality. Mortal man became depraved by his sin. This depravity led man into a state of unrighteousness. He now oppresses the weak, labours without rest, toils selfishly all the days of his life, and struggles to gain ascendancy over others. Thus, those who reach positions of power, wealth and leadership over others are no better than those they rule over. This is the Preacher's way of reasoning with us to see his point of view that our mortal lives are full of vanity.

(1) *The Vanity of Oppression on Earth (4:1-3)* – In Ecclesiastes 4:1-3 the Preacher makes an observation about the vanity of oppression in this life. It is man's depravity, discussed in 3:16-22, that causes him to oppress one another. The Preacher notes his *observation* in 4:1 that there is much oppression over those who cannot defend themselves and find a comforter. In 4:2-3 he makes his *conclusion* that the dead are better than the living, and those who are not yet born are better than the both.

(2) *The Vanity of Toil on Earth (4:4-6)* - The man who toils for substance creates envy from his neighbor (4:4). Yet, the lazy fool destroys himself because of his laziness (4:5). Neither choice seems good. There must be a balance in work. The Preacher concludes that a man should work quietly to meet his basic needs only, and not chase after an abundance of riches, so that he can have a peaceful life (4:6).

(3) *The Vanity of Selfish Toil on Earth (4:7-12)* – In Ecclesiastes 4:7-12 the Preacher comments on the vanity of selfish toil in this world. It is futile to labour without end for oneself; for ultimately, there is no reward and joy in such labour.

(4) *The Vanity of Nobility on Earth (4:13-16)* – In Ecclesiastes 4:13-16 the Preacher comments on nobility and kingship. Even when it appears that a person has achieved a life of rest from toil by becoming a king, yet there is vanity his life also.

(5) *The Vanity of External Religion: Exhortation to Fear God (5:1-7)* – Ecclesiastes 5:1-7 describes the man in pursuit of a plan. In one's busy schedule and haste to accomplish a multitude of tasks there come dreams in the night and rash vows to God. In these vows we want God to bless our own plans, when we, in fact, should wait before the Lord and hear His plans for our daily pursuits.

(6) *The Vanity of Riches (5:8-6:12)* - There are two dangers to having riches. The first is that riches can easily cause the heart to become covetous, which is discussed in Ecclesiastes 5:8-20. Man's covetousness results in wealth being accumulated through wicked means. The second vice is that men tend to find no rest and contentment after having accumulated wealth. This negative aspect of riches is discussed in Ecclesiastes 6:1-12. When men gain wealth by honorable methods, he is still in danger of falling prey to discontentment and failing to enjoy the life that God intended him to enjoy.

(a) *Riches and Covetousness (5:8-20)* - We can entitle the theme of Ecclesiastes 5:8-20 as "Riches and Covetousness". The more one toils, the more one is beset by those who deplete it. Even the powerful take the riches that are due the poor because of greed. Yet, when a person dies, he cannot take his possessions with him. God's gift is to be content to enjoy the blessings that He has given to us. Note in chapter three, that God's divine hand is involved in every event in life. God has a plan for each person, so that we can enjoy His daily blessings while being content in the midst of our situations in life, and thus, we learn to enjoy each day as we thank God for His blessings. Otherwise, we complain about what we do not yet have and are prone to covet that which belongs to our neighbour.

(b) *Riches Without Contentment (6:1-12)* – There are two dangers to having riches. The first is that riches can easily cause the heart to become covetous, which is discussed in Ecclesiastes 5:8-20. Man's covetousness results in wealth being accumulated through wicked means. The second vice is that men tend to find no rest and contentment after having accumulated wealth. This negative aspect of riches is discussed in Ecclesiastes 6:1-12.

When men gain wealth by honorable methods, he is still in danger of falling prey to discontentment and failing to enjoy the life that God intended him to enjoy.

4. Indoctrination: Practical Wisdom to Fear God (7:1-11:8) – In Ecclesiastes 7:1-11:8 the Preacher gives illustrations of practical wisdom or doctrine on how to fear God in this life. In other words, these proverbs give us wisdom on how to bring our lives into God’s divine plan that we were created to pursue.³⁸ Much of this passage is delivered as a collection of proverbs, or short, pithy sayings, that summarize wisdom and is very similar to the book of Proverbs in structure. However, I believe that these particular set of Proverbs are designed to guide us into finding the answers for how to serve the Lord with all of our strength.

Why is this section the longest one in the book of Ecclesiastes? Perhaps the reason lies in the fact that the underlying theme of the book is the keeping of God’s commandments in the fear of the Lord. Thus, the Preacher takes the time to list these commandments. In a similar way, the longest section in the book of Proverbs is wisdom’s call (Prov 1-9), since man’s daily walk in wisdom requires him to constantly recognize and hear wisdom’s call in order to make the right decisions each day.

Here are a number of topics discussed in this section:

Wisdom Seen in Being Sober-minded	7:1-6
Wisdom Seen in Patience	7:8-9
Wisdom’s Ability to Protect	7:11-12
Wisdom Found in Recognizing God’s Hand in Daily Life	7:13-14
Wisdom Found in Moderation	7:15-18
Wisdom Found in Ignoring What Others Say About You	7:21-22
The Preacher’s Pursuit of Wisdom	7:23-25
The Tongue of the Wise and the Fool	10:11-14
The Principles of Sowing and Reaping	11:1-6
A Reminder of the Vanities of Life	11:7-8

5. Perseverance: Warning to the Youth to Fear God (11:9-12:7) - In Ecclesiastes 11:9-12:7 the Preacher tells young people to enjoy their days of youthfulness, but to balance their lives by remembering the coming Day of Judgment. The Preacher began his sermon in Ecclesiastes 1:1-2 by asking the rhetorical question, “Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?” Throughout this book, he attempts to answer this opening question. Remember that the book of Ecclesiastes tells us the vanity of our physical labors and of our earthly possessions. It is structured in a way that teaches us how to take our physical journey through this life, from youth to old age. A young person tends to find life adventurous and exciting. He spends much effort in exploring and achieving new feats. However, the Preacher knows how vain these youthful adventures can be because he has pursued them himself. Since he was once a youth, he knows how much more difficult a youth has in seeing the vanities of life. It is only with wisdom and age that anyone can see the vanities of man's fleshly pursuits. The focus upon youth and old age in 12:1-12:7 reflects the theme of Ecclesiastes, which is to serve the Lord with all of our strength. The Preacher could have addresses a number of people in society, but he spoke directly to the youth because once they miss this truth in their early years, their life is too far spent to correct this grave error. If the youth miss their destiny when they are young due to vain pursuits, it is much harder to find fulfillment when they are old and willing to be used by God to fulfill their destinies. We must start early in life in order to fulfill God’s plan for our lives. Although God blesses the righteous even in old age, God does not bring the old man into this divine journey after a lifetime of selfish pursuits.

6. Glorification: Closing Remarks (12:8-14) – The Preacher makes his closing remarks by restating his theme that all is vanity (12:8). He accepts his divine duty to continue to teach the people on this topic (12:9-12). In the final two verses (12:13-14) he summarizes the solution to life’s vanities with the

³⁸In a similar statement, Walter Kaiser describes the central idea of Ecclesiastes 6:1-8:15 as “This plan must be explained and applied.” See Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament: A Guide for the Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2003), 93, Logos.

commandment to fear God because He will judge us in the next life. Within the context of the third responsive theme of Ecclesiastes, we fear Him and keep His commandments by resting in Him as He divinely orchestrates our lives and moves us into His divine seasons. These divine seasons are our destiny, so that we fear God and keep His commandments by fulfilling our divine destinies.

I once heard vanity described this way: a man is born, goes to school, gets a job, finds a wife, raises a family, retires, then he dies. His children do the same. A man works hard all of his life to reach each new phase of life, but for what purpose? Life is vain without a divine purpose. The answer to this dilemma of life's vanities is found in the closing verses of this book, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." (Eccl 12:13)

a) Repetition of Opening Statement (12:8-12) – In Ecclesiastes 12:8 the Preacher repeats his opening statement recorded in 1:2-4. This time he adds the comment that his words will teach and guide the people through this life of vanity (12:9-12).

b) Conclusion (12:13-14) - We see the primary and secondary themes reflected in the concluding verses of Ecclesiastes. Its primary theme is how to serve the Lord with all of our strength. We do this by keeping His commandments. The secondary theme is to fear the Lord; for this is the necessary ingredient of the heart that motivates us to serve Him instead of ourselves.

For the king, as well as the labourer, life does not consist in the abundance of one's possessions or accomplishments. In the end, each man's life will be measured on Judgment Day by amount of fear and obedience that he showed towards God. All of the pursuits that the Preacher described in the early chapters of this sermon are vanity compared to a man's eternal destiny. The Preacher knows that every man will give an account of his life to God, as he states in Ecclesiastes 3:15, "That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past." Ecclesiastes 3:17, "I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work."

III. Outline of the Literary Structure

The reason for preparing an outline of the literary structure of a book is to visualize its theological framework at a glance. This brevity allows one to look at the book's framework from beginning to end in order to understand the author's purpose.

The following outline is a summary of the preceding literary structure; thus, it reflects the theological framework of the book of Ecclesiastes: its purpose, its three-fold thematic scheme, and its literary structure. As a result, this outline offers sermon sections that fit together into a single message that can be used by preachers and teachers to guide a congregation or class through the book of Ecclesiastes. This journey through Ecclesiastes will lead believers into one aspect of conformity to the image of Christ Jesus that was intended by the Lord, which in this book of the Holy Scriptures is to prepare Christians to keep God's commandments for a purpose and destiny in Christ.

1. Predestination: The Vanity of Human Life	1:1-2:26
a) Intro: The Preacher Concludes that This Life is Vanity	1:1-11
(1) Title	1:1
(2) Opening Statement	1:2-4
(3) The 3-fold Testimony of the Earth to Vanity	1:5-7
(4) The Testimony of the Man to His Subjection to Vanity	1:8-11
b) The Preacher Explains His Conclusion	1:12-2:26
(1) The Preacher Finds Vanity in His Own Pursuits	1:12-2:11
(a) In Pursuits of the Mind	1:12-18
(b) In Pursuits of the Heart	2:1-3
(c) In Pursuits of Wealth	2:4-11
(2) The Preacher See Vanity Around Him	2:12-26

2. Calling: God's Calling Through His Divine Intervention	3:1-15
a) The Preacher Concludes God Has a Purpose	3:1-8
(1) General Summary	3:1
(2) The Vanity of Wisdom	3:2-3
(3) The Vanity of Mirth and Pleasure	3:4
(4) The Vanity of Strength and Conquest	3:5
(5) The Vanity of Riches	3:6
(6) The Vanity of the King's Rule over Israel and the Nations	3:7-8
b) The Preacher Explains His Conclusion	3:9-15
3. Justification: The Depravity of Mankind	3:16-6:12
a) The Preacher Concludes Man's Depravity	3:16-22
(1) Man's Depravity	3:16-17
(2) Man's Mortality	3:18-21
(3) Conclusion	3:22
b) The Preacher Explains His Conclusion	4:1-6:12
(1) The Vanity of Oppression on Earth	4:1-3
(2) The Vanity of Toil on Earth	4:4-6
(3) The Vanity of Selfish Toil on Earth	4:7-12
(4) The Vanity of Nobility on Earth	4:13-16
(5) The Vanity of External Religion (Fear God)	5:1-7
(6) The Vanity of Riches	5:8-6:12
(a) Riches and Covetousness	5:8-20
(b) Riches without Contentment	6:1-12
4. Indoctrination: Practical Wisdom to Fear God	7:1-11:8
Wisdom Seen in Being Sober-minded	7:1-6
Wisdom Seen in Patience	7:8-9
Wisdom's Ability to Protect	7:11-12
Wisdom Found in Recognizing God's Hand in Daily Life	7:13-14
Wisdom Found in Moderation	7:15-18
Wisdom Found in Ignoring What Others Say About You	7:21-22
The Preacher's Pursuit of Wisdom	7:23-29
	(8:1-10:10)
The Tongue of the Wise and the Fool	10:11-14
The Principles of Sowing and Reaping	11:1-6
(1) Give with Patience	11:1
(2) Give Bountifully	11:2
(3) The Certainty of Giving and Receiving: A Divine Law	11:3
(4) Giving in Faith	11:4-5
(5) Give Continually	11:6
A Reminder of the Vanities of Life	11:7-8
5. Perseverance: Warning to the Youth to Fear God	11:9-12:7
6. Closing Remarks: Glorification	12:8-14
a) Repetition of Opening Statement	12:8-12
b) Final Conclusion	12:13-14

EXEGESIS AND COMMENTS

1:1-2:26

Predestination: The Vanity of Human Life and Creation – The Preacher begins his book by acknowledging that God has predestined this world to mortality and vanity (1:1-11). He bases this conclusion upon his own personal experiences as he expresses the uselessness of his efforts to make things different and better for others (1:12-2:11). In his old age, Solomon looks at the effects of his life on society. He gives examples of his vain efforts. Had he made things better for his nation, for the world around him? In despair, he saw everything the same. He felt that all of his labor and travail had not created the changes that he so desired. He also bases this conclusion upon his evaluation of the people in society around him as he broadens his scope of searching for a meaning in life (2:12-26). We must go back to the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden to understand the vanity to which mankind has been subjected. He concludes this book with the insight that his duty is not to change the world, but to fear and serve the Lord, for each man will give an account of his own life before God.

Outline – Here is a proposed outline:

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|---|-----------|
| 1. Intro: The Preacher Concludes that This Life is Vanity | 1:1-11 |
| 2. The Preacher Explains His Conclusion | 1:12-2:26 |

1:1-11

Introduction: The Preacher Concludes that This Life is Vanity – The book of Ecclesiastes opens with the Preacher acknowledging that God has predestined this world to mortality and vanity (1:1-11). We know from the book of Genesis that all of this vanity was the result of the Fall of mankind in the Garden, although God will one day bring redemption back to man and to His creation. In these first eleven verses the Preacher expresses the uselessness of his efforts to make things better for himself and for others in this life. The theme of this passage is stated in the second verse, which says, “Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.” (1:2). He then asks the rhetorical question, “What profit does a man have of all his labours in this life?” (1:3) He sees the generations of the earth testifying to its course of vanity (1:4-7), and generations of mankind testifying to the same (1:8-11).

As a result the preacher will attempt to answer this question throughout the rest of the book of Ecclesiastes, in which the Preacher records his efforts to find the purpose and essence of life. This pursuit of man’s purpose is reflected in his repeated statements, “I gave my heart” (1:13), “I communed with mine own heart” (1:16), “I said in mine heart” (2:1), “I sought in mine heart” (2:3) “Then said I in my heart” (2:15), “I said in mine heart” (3:17,18), “I applied mine heart to know” (7:25), “I applied my heart” (8:9), “I applied mine heart” (8:16), and “I considered in my heart” (9:1). Within these passages, the Preacher tests life with knowledge, wisdom, mirth, great works and gardens, and in summary, all of life's pleasures. However, in these pursuits he finds only vanity (2:17).

He will later find a purpose in eternal things, but he will have to look beyond this life in order to find meaning as to why things are the way they are. For example, in 3:1-15 he begins to acknowledge that God intervenes in the affairs of mankind and establishes seasons of purpose in our lives. The Preacher initially notices the repetition of cycles, or seasons of life when he says, “The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.” (1:9). He will later acknowledge God’s hand in orchestrating these cycles and seasons in 3:1-8.

The opening passage of Ecclesiastes is a cry about the vanity of life on earth. More particularly, it is a cry regarding the vanity seen in the affairs of this life, the natural realm when contrasted to the eternal realm. The Preacher cries out in despair regarding life's vanities (1:2-3) with the realization that man is bound by the realm of time (1:4-11), yet hoping for redemption in eternity.

After the author introduces himself as the Preacher (1:1) he immediately sets the theme for the book of Ecclesiastes by asking the rhetorical question regarding the meaning of man's mortal life (1:2-3). He evaluates man's efforts in this life as being full of vanity. Therefore, he will answer this rhetorical question in the body of this book by giving us things we can do to overcome the vanities of life.

It is important to note that the Preacher does not refer to God at all during this introduction in 1:1-11, although the word "God" is used forty times in this book. This is because he is making his evaluation from the perspective of this life only, without considering the divine perspective. Although his search will soon take this divine perspective into consideration, he begins by assessing the fallen state of man and creation as a result of the Fall in the garden.

In Proverbs 1:2-11 the Preacher presents the question and the dilemma of mankind. In Proverbs 1:12-18, the Preacher begins to seek the answer to this problem. In chapter 2 and the following chapters of Ecclesiastes, the Preacher continues to seek this answer, which will come in the final chapter. The Preacher will conclude by telling us that in this mortal life we are to fear God and keep his commandments, for that is all that God requires of us in this life in order to prepare us for our immortal lives (12:13-14).

In order to understand the Preacher's negative evaluation of this life in the opening passage, we must go back to the book of Genesis. If we go back to the Garden of Eden and the Fall, we find that the curse that God placed upon mankind subjected them to vanity. Why did God place these particular curses upon mankind? We know that the woman's primary job was to be fruitful and multiply while the man's job was to till the ground. Thus, the woman is more focused upon her family and her children while the man is often focused upon his work. Women often talk about their family while men most often talk about their jobs. But after the Fall, God placed a burden upon each of their jobs. Therefore, God placed a burden upon each of these activities so that mankind would look to God for help. Jesus Christ said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matt 11:28-30)

The endless toils and travails of this life now reveal the vanity of our labours. Such vanities turn our hearts towards more eternal issues, such our enduring hope of eternal life and rest in the presence of God our Creator. When man labours and is heavy laden, he looks to God through Jesus Christ and finds rest. When woman looks to God in fear and reverence, she finds salvation through child bearing, as Paul says in 1 Timothy 2:14-15, "And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety."

Mankind now eagerly awaits the redemption from our mortal bodies in hopes of taking on immortality, as Paul says in Romans 8:23, "And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body." Thus, the curse that God placed upon mankind works for our good so that through our travail we will look to eternal issues.

This is the focus of the book of Ecclesiastes. The Preacher realizes that God has subjected us to vanity and he searches for answers as to man's role in the midst of such travail.

In Ecclesiastes 1:4-8 the Preacher refers to the elements of God's creation that were recognized by men during the ancient times. Man believed that all matter and energy could be found in four states: in the heat from the sun, in the solid elements such as the earth, in the liquid elements represented by water, and in the vapor state of elements represented by clouds. He describes these four states of God's inanimate creation as being in constant motion, or labor. These elements represent the cycles of nature. He concludes that all of creation has been subjected to vanity, which Paul also concludes in Romans 8:19-22.

The repetition of these cycles of nature teaches us that there are also repetitions in the cycles of human history. Therefore, man has been subjected to vanity just like creation.

Outline – Here is a proposed outline:

1. Title	1:1
2. Opening Statement	1:2-4
3. The 3-fold Testimony of the Generations of the Earth to Vanity	1:5-7
4. The Testimony of the Generations of Man to His Subjection to Vanity	1:8-11

1:1 **Title** - The opening verse serves as the customary Hebrew title to the book of Ecclesiastes.

1:1 **The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.**

1:1 **“The words of the Preacher” - Comments** – The Hebrew word (קֹהֵלֶת) “qoheleth” means, “a speaker/leader of an assembly,” being derived from the verb (קָהַל) “to assemble, summon” (HALOT). This participle is used seven times in the Old Testament, with all but one occasion being found in the opening and closing passages of the book of Ecclesiastes. The Hebrew, Greek, and English titles of the book of Ecclesiastes have been taken from this word.

We must remember that oral tradition held strong roots in the Oriental culture. Thus, the Preacher, as well as his predecessors, could have recited these words in Ecclesiastes many times before they were put into written form. In other words, the words of the Preacher may have been orally transmitted years before they were recorded.

“the son of David, king in Jerusalem” - Comments – King Solomon was not the first-born son of King David. The Scriptures suggest that he was the tenth born of David's seventeen sons (2 Sam 3:2-6; 5:14-16) or nineteen sons (1 Chron 3:1-8). Nevertheless, Solomon recognized the divine orchestration of his appointment as king over Israel. He had been told the story of the prophet Nathan's visit at his birth and naming him “Jedidiah,” being beloved of YHWH (2 Sam 12:24-25). He was told of the prophesy given to his father David, saying, “Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about: for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days. He shall build an house for my name; and he shall be my son, and I will be his father; and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel for ever.” (1 Chron 22:9-10) Therefore, he grew up knowing that his destiny was the throne of Israel.

He went on to become king, yet his fleshly passions took him far from God, until he lost his direction and purpose in life. Somehow, in this darkness of heart and mind, he returned to his awareness of destiny and wrote the book of Ecclesiastes. He saw human depravity and its endless number of mankind without purpose and destiny. He writes this book as the son of David with a destiny, Yet, how to draw out a destiny for each of mankind, he knew not. He concludes that each man must fear God and keep his commandments (Eccl 12:13-14), this being his only hope of finding destiny.

1:2-4 **Opening Statement** – Ecclesiastes 1:2-4 serves as an opening statement upon which the rest of the book of Ecclesiastes is built. In other words, the Preacher offers his opening

statement and builds his arguments from it, reaching his conclusion in 12:13. The Preacher realizes that God has set this earth upon a course of mortal decay because of human depravity; and man, whose spirit is immortal, should fear God as a means of overcoming the vanity imposed upon him in this earth-life.

1:2 Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.

1:2 *Comments* – Gesenius says the Hebrew word (לָבַד) means, “breath, breathing,” and “exhalation, vapour, midst, darkness.” He says that it is “commonly used of anything transitory, evanescent, frail.” It means, “emptiness, vanity” (*Strong, HALOT*) and is derived from the primitive Hebrew root “habal” (לָבַד), which means, “to be vain, lead astray” (*Strong*).

The phrase “vanity of vanities” literally, “breath of breaths.” We know that breath, or wind, is fleeting. This phrase means, “utterless, meaningless or useless,” or “a most useless thing.” Breath is transitory and impermanent as the wind. This same statement opens and closes the book of Ecclesiastes (1:2; 12:8). After taking the entire book to support this statement, he ends his case by making the same statement.

Bob Nichols says the word “vanity,” when used within the context of Ecclesiastes, refers to the things pertaining to this earthly life, which will someday pass away.³⁹ It does not mean that things in this life are not necessary or unimportant, but the Preacher is weighing them in light of the importance of eternal matters. The older we get, the better insight we have into the vanities of this life and our eternal destiny. We see children busying themselves with play and clinging to toys and things that are of little worth. Of course, play is an important aspect of a child’s social development. But the things they pursue are not true treasures. Even as adults, a wise man sees this same vain activity in the lives of people around him. The Preacher will conclude that the only true importance in this life is to fear God and to keep His commandments.

1:3 What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?

1:3 **“What profit hath a man of all his labour”** – *Comments* – *Strong* says the Hebrew word (יָתְרוֹן) means, “profit, advantage” (*HALOT*).

The Hebrew word (מְלָצָה) means, “toil, wearing effort,” thus, “worry, whether of body or mind” (*Strong*) or “care, anxiety” (*HALOT*). *Strong* says it comes from the primitive root (מָלַצָה), which means, “to toil, to work severely and with irksomeness.”

The Hebrew word “labour” (מְלָצָה) is used twenty-two in the book of Ecclesiastes of fifty-five uses in the Old Testament, thus becoming a key word that reveals the theme of the book. As we look at the book of beginnings, the book of Genesis, we find that labour and travail were placed upon mankind under the curse as a way of judging him. God said to Adam, “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread . . .” In the book of Ecclesiastes, the Preacher re-evaluates the results of the curse of our labour and travail, saying, “I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it.” (3:10) God uses labour and travail to discipline us so that we will look to Him each day in the midst of our daily travail.

1:3 **“which he taketh under the sun”** - *Comments* - The phrase “under the sun” in the book of Ecclesiastes basically means, “in this life.” We know that the word “vanity” is used also in the previous verse (1:2) to refer to the temporal affairs of this life when compared to the importance of eternal matters. It is the sun that causes man to age so quickly and thus, to be mortal. We see later in 12:1-8 a discussion on the brevity of this life that is lived under the sun. The rising and setting of the sun is used to measure our mortal life.

³⁹Bob Nichols, “Sermon,” Calvary Cathedral International, Fort Worth, Texas.

In addition, no other aspect of nature brings more stress and travail upon the laboring man than the sun beating down upon his sweaty brow. The sun brings more stress upon the physical body than any other aspect of nature.

1:4 One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever.

1:4 “**One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh**” - *Comments* - Man’s mortality is the greatest witness to his subjection to travail and vanity upon earth, since it refers back to the Fall in the Garden of Eden. At this time man and all of creation was predestined to mortality and vanity.

“**but the earth abideth for ever**” – *Comments* - Although this present heavens and earth will pass away in order to make way for the new in eternity, it seems to abide forever in that it outlasts each generation of mankind. Thus, relatively speaking, this earth “abides forever.”

1:5-7

The Three-fold Testimony of the Generations of the Earth to Man’s Subjection to Vanity – Not only does man’s mortality testify to his subjection to travail and vanity until his future redemption (Eccl 1:4), but all of creation has been subjected to the same (Rom 8:18-23). The second greatest testimony to man’s subjection to travail and labour is characteristics of the earth, which was also cursed at the time of the Fall. Ecclesiastes 1:5-7 describes three primary characteristics of this temporal earth, the sun, wind and rain, which is also described in Genesis 8:22, “While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.” These three characteristics of nature have the most obvious, continuous movement on any aspect of creation, and may be representative of all the other characteristics of the earth. Because of the rotation of the earth, the sun, the wind and water are always in motion and determine weather patterns. Nothing else in nature moves as consistently and swiftly as do these three; yet they seem to go nowhere. Man has been given authority by God to dominate parts of this creation, in a limited capacity; however, he has not been given the power to rule over the sun, the wind, nor the rivers. These elements of earth's creation behave as they desire, despite man's knowledge and intervention of them. These movements describe the destiny of this temporal earth in which we must live our lives under the sun. More specifically, they testify to the vanities of this mortal life. As all aspects of creation testify of the glory of God, the endless and seemingly purposeless movements of the sun, wind and rivers testify to us that God has subjected this temporal earth to vanity.

1:5 The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose.

1:5 *Comments* - The first characteristic of the earth that testifies to man’s travail and vanity is the sun, which appears to rise and go down due to the rotation of the earth. The energy released by the sun becomes the driving force of the wind currents over the earth.

1:6 The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits.

1:6 *Comments* - The second characteristic of the earth that testifies to man’s travail and vanity is the wind, which is driven by the energy of the sun and the rotation of the earth. Ecclesiastes 1:6 provides a clear description of the Jet Stream, which flows in the high altitudes of the earth’s atmosphere. Man did not discover that the Jet Stream existed until the twentieth century.

1:7 All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.

1:7 *Comments* - The third characteristic of the earth that testifies to man’s travail and vanity is the rain and the rivers that flow as a result of the rain, which weather is driven by the wind currents across the earth.

1:8-11

The Testimony of the Generations of Man to His Subjection to Vanity – In addition to creation (Eccl 1:5-7), time also serves as a testimony to man's subjection to vanity. The events of man's present life (1:8b), past events (1:9-10), and future events (1:11), all testify to the fact that God has predestined mankind to travail and vanity.

Divine Intervention in the Affairs of Mankind - In Ecclesiastes 3:1-15 the Preacher acknowledges how God intervenes in the affairs of mankind and establishes seasons of purpose in our lives. The Preacher initially notices the repetition of cycles, or seasons of life when he says, "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun." (1:9). He will later acknowledge God's hand in orchestrating these cycles and seasons in 3:1-8.

The repetition of particular events in history can be seen in Bible prophecy. For example, Isaiah's prophecy (Is 7:14) that a virgin would conceive and bear a son and his name will be called Immanuel was two-fold. It was fulfilled during the time of King Ahaz as well as during the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

History will repeat itself when Jesus will reign as King of Kings from Jerusalem. King Solomon serves as a type and figure of the Lord Jesus as King over the earth. Thus, Solomon's reign will repeat itself in prophetic fulfillment at the Second Coming of Christ Jesus.

1:8 All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.

1:8 "All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it" – *Comments* - The NIV reads, "All things are wearisome, more than one can say . . ." In other words, every aspect of our mortal life testifies to life's travail and vanities.

"the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing" – *Comments* - Man's present lusts and pursuits testify to life's vanities.

1:9 The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.

1:10 Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us.

1:9-10 *Comments* – While Ecclesiastes 1:8b reflects upon how the present activities of mankind testify to our travail and vanity, Ecclesiastes 1:9 reflects upon how the past activities of mankind testify to the same, in the fact that the events of man's life seem to repeat themselves in later generations.

1:11 There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after.

1:11 *Comments* - While Ecclesiastes 1:8b reflects upon how the present activities of mankind testify to our travail and vanity, and Ecclesiastes 1:9-10 reflects upon how the past activities of mankind testify to the same, Ecclesiastes 1:11 reflects upon how the future activities of mankind testify to our travail. The future testifies to our subjection to vanity by having nothing to offer mankind except the certainty of a loss of one's remembrance (outside of man's future redemption). Who will even remember that a particular person existed after his life of labours and death?

1:12-2:26

The Preacher Explains How He Came to a Conclusion of Vanity in This Life – Having acknowledged the predestined vanity of this world, the Preacher begins to explain how he

pursued a purpose for his life in the midst of life's vanities. He will describe the vanity of his own personal experiences (1:12-2:11) and those of the society of people around him (2:12-26).

Outline – Here is a proposed outline:

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| 1. The Preacher Finds Vanity in the His Own Pursuits | 1:12-2:11 |
| 2. The Preacher Finds Vanity Around Him | 2:12-26 |

1:12-2:11

The Preacher Finds Vanity in the Pursuits of Mental, Spiritual, Physical, and Financial Gratification - Throughout the book of Ecclesiastes the Preacher will attempt to answer the question, "What profit does a man have of all of his labours in this life?" (Eccl 1:3) In Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:11 the Preacher describes his pursuits to find pleasure in this life. After introducing himself as the king over Israel (1:12), he explains how he pursued gratification for his mind by pursuing wisdom (1:13-18). He then changed his pursuits to find gratification for his heart through wine and laughter (2:1-3). He then describes how he set out to work with his hands to construct great edifices for himself (2:4-6) and to gather much wealth (2:7-11). The Preacher concludes that this too is vanity and grasping for the wind. Thus, we see him referring to the three-fold make-up of man: mind, spirit and body as well as finances. We can assume that these three pursuits took place in the Preacher's life in the order that he gives them. He pursued wisdom and understanding first, followed by mirth and then the construction of great projects and the gathering of wealth. This represents the order of pursuits in the lives of many people. For example, in our society, we start out in our youth focusing upon school and education. When we go into our college years, we find that the influences for party and mirth are everywhere. We later find our place in society by focusing upon a career and learning to work hard towards success. For those who achieve financial success, they are left still searching for a meaning and purpose to their lives, having learned that all of these pursuits did not bring inner peace.

Throughout this passage the author searches for the true meaning of life. He asks the question in 1:3, "What profit hath a man of all his labor which he taketh under the sun?" He experiences different interests throughout life for periods of time, just like people today have fads, or hobbies, which are always changing. Illustration: My father would go through phases in his life of being interested in playing the guitar, working on cars, hunting, and various projects. I watched as these interests changed during the course of his life. The preacher will soon recognize the divine seasons that God orchestrates in the lives of those who obey His Word and keep His commandments (12:13). The king has seasons of pursuits in his life. Because he orchestrated them himself, he found no satisfaction in them. Although none of these pursuits are evil in themselves, they are vanity when a person does not follow God's plan for his life.

Just as Solomon, we too can have seasons of interests in various things of this world. These interests seem to fade in one area, and refocus on a new area through the years. When we follow God's plan for our lives, we can still enjoy those seasons of change, but in a greater and more dynamic way. His plan for our lives will take us to new levels of interest and adventures. Our own pursuits will produce vain interests, as Solomon has stated here. However, when we follow God's will for our lives, these seasons of interests will be satisfying. Seasons of changing interests are normal for us, but they do not satisfy until God is directing these seasons. Life is made up of seasons of change. When we learn to go with God's seasons in our lives, we will find that they are not vain, but very rewarding.

Outline – Here is a proposed outline:

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| 1. In Pursuits of the Mind | 1:12-18 |
| 2. In Pursuits of the Heart | 2:1-3 |
| 3. In Pursuits of Wealth | 2:4-11 |

1:12-18 **The Preacher Pursues Wisdom to Gratify His Mind** – In Ecclesiastes 1:12-18 the Preacher describes his pursuits of wisdom in order to give gratification to his mind. However, in all of his pursuing he found only vanity and grief.

1:12 **I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem.**

1:12 *Comments* - Ecclesiastes 1:12 testifies to Solomonic authorship.

1:13 **And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith.**

1:13 **“this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith”** – *Comments* – We find in 1:13 the Hebrew word (אֱלֹהִים) “God” used for the first time in the book of Ecclesiastes. This word will be used forty times throughout the book. Although Solomon uses the covenant name “YHWH” (יְהוָה) frequently throughout the book of Proverbs, he does not use it a single time in the books of Ecclesiastes and Canticles.

The sore travail given unto mankind is the curse of working by the sweat of the brow, which the Lord pronounced upon Adam when he sinned in the Garden (Gen 3:17-19). The phrase “to be exercised therewith” can be paraphrased, “to be afflicted by his labor.” In other words, God subjected mankind to affliction through laboring under the sun. In this verse, we see the effects of the curse that God placed upon man when he fell in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:17-19). Man was to now eat by the sweat of his face. For it was in man’s affliction that he would be more likely to look to God.

Before the fall, man was anointed to seek out the wisdom in God's creation. It was a joy to see what was under the heaven. But now, under the curse, the exercise of learning, inventing, and developing a civilization comes through much travail and at a high cost. In this verse, we see the labor that it cost man to build dams, bridges, railways, or highways. We picture the long hours involved in developing ideas and inventions. No longer does God give His wisdom without measure to a perfect, sinless man in the Garden. Instead, a fallen, corrupt man has to seek it out through much travail. The purpose of this travail is so that a sinful man will look to God and not to himself as the source of his well-being.

1:14 **I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.**

1:15 **That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.**

1:14-15 *Comments* – Since Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, man has been trying to find a remedy for the ills of this planet Earth. What man lost in the Garden cannot be restored until the fullness of times. Man cannot prevent war, nor feed all of the poor, nor make life pleasant again. All of creation is out of order and it is beyond man’s ability to set it back in order. Thus, our labours are in vain.

1:16 **I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.**

1:17 **And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit.**

1:17 **“And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly”** – *Comments* - In Ecclesiastes 1:17 we see the two men of the book of Proverbs, the wise man and the fool, who are contrasted throughout the book of Proverbs. These two characters are compared and evaluated based upon their wisdom and folly. This verse supports the view that the same author wrote both Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

The author makes a similar statement in Ecclesiastes 2:12, “And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly: for what can the man do that cometh after the king? even that which hath been already done.”

1:18 For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.

1:18 *Comments* - Today I saw a housemaid busy working at a local restaurant. She came into the restaurant to pick up dirty linen while laughing at someone's joke. I noted that she had little education, a little job, and little concerns. Education and wealth can bring the burdens of responsibility. These burdens add grief and sorrow to life if a person does not know how to rest in the Lord, as we read in Ecclesiastes 5:12, “The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep.”

2:1-3 **The Preacher Pursues Mirth to Gratify His Heart** – In Ecclesiastes 2:1-3 the Preacher pursues mirth in order to find gratification and pleasure for his heart. But in the end he again finds only vanity.

2:1 I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also is vanity.

2:2 I said of laughter, It is mad: and of mirth, What doeth it?

2:2 *Comments* - Why does the Preacher make such a conclusion in Ecclesiastes 2:2? Perhaps when an educated man walks among the poor and uneducated, he sees the vanity of these conversations. He notes how their words are useless in providing answers to life. This type of laughter and mirth is the product of foolish jesting and vain imaginations.

2:3 I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life.

2:4-11 **The Preacher Pursues Great Works and Wealth to Gratify His Body** – In Ecclesiastes 2:4-6 the Preacher endeavors to work hard in order to find satisfaction with great accomplishments of building projects. He gathers much wealth in his attempt to find his purpose in life, but finally concludes that this too is vanity and grasping for the wind.

2:4 I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards:

2:4 **“I made me great works”** - *Comments* - King Solomon build more buildings and expanded the kingdom of Israel more than any other king in Israel's history. So much so, that he put a tremendous burden upon the people, as we read in 1 Kings 12:4, “Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee.”

2:5 I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits:

2:6 I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees:

2:7 I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me:

2:8 I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts.

2:8 “I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces” - *Comments* – The Preacher describes his material wealth in Ecclesiastes 2:8. His power and broad reaching influence allowed him to bring precious metals from abroad. We find a more detailed description of this material wealth in 1 Kings 10:14-29. He gathered six hundred and sixty six talents of gold per year. He brought in best spices through the ancient trade routes. He made shields of gold, a throne of ivory with twelve statues of lions, and drinking vessels of gold. He brought in wild animals from afar to entertain his people. He brought in the finest horses, and built chariots and trained horsemen to strengthen his military, and he built a royal navy to control the seas.

“I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts” - *Comments* – The phrase (וְהַשְׂמֵרָה וְהַשְׂמֵרָה) “as musical instruments, and that of all sorts” uses the Hebrew word (הַשְׂמֵרָה) twice. This Hebrew word only occurs two times in the Old Testament, with both uses found in this one verse. Therefore, scholars propose a wide variety of translations. For example, Roland Murphy says the *LXX* and Syriac translate the phrase as “a cupbearer and female cupbearers.” [*Brenton* reads, “a butler and female cupbearers.”] Murphy says the *Vulgate* reads, “cups and waterpots.”⁴⁰ However, modern scholarship favors the idea of Solomon’s wives in translating the Hebrew word (הַשְׂמֵרָה). For example, *Gesenius* says (הַשְׂמֵרָה) means, “mistress, lady, hence, wife,” and is the feminine of the Hebrew word (שֵׂרָה), meaning “lord, master.” *Gesenius* translates this phrase in Ecclesiastes 2:8 as “a wife and wives.” *Strong* says it means, “a wife (as mistress of the house),” and is derived from (שֵׂרָה), which means, “to be burly, powerful, to ravage.” The *TWOT* suggests the translation, “harem,” and associates this Hebrew word with (שֵׂרָה), which means, “breast, bosom.” A. R. Fausset suggests the phrase (וְהַשְׂמֵרָה וְהַשְׂמֵרָה) means “a wife,” referring to a queen, and “wives,” referring to the rest of the king’s harem.⁴¹ This modern view is reflected in recent English translations: *JPS*, “women very many”; *LITV*, “a concubine, and concubines”; *NIV*, “a harem”; *RSV*, “and many concubines”; *YLT* “a wife and wives.” However, some modern English translations broaden the meaning to describe human luxuries in general by blending the phrase (וְהַשְׂמֵרָה וְהַשְׂמֵרָה) with preceding phrase “and the delights of the sons of men”: *CEB* “with every human luxury, treasure chests galore”; *NAB*, “and all human luxuries”; *NEB* “and all that man delights in”; *NJB* “and every human luxury, chest upon chest of it”; *REB* “and everything that affords delight.”

2:9 So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me.

2:10 And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour.

2:10 *Comments* - In Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:9 the Preacher told us that he had tried wisdom and education (1:12-18), mirth (2:1-2), wine (2:3), buildings and gardens (2:4-6), servants (2:7), and wealth (2:7-9). Ecclesiastes 2:10 states that anything else that man could enjoy, the Preacher sought and experienced in his life.

2:11 Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.

2:11 *Comments* - After a lifetime of work, the Preacher sees that he has not made this world any better than when he had begun his great works.

⁴⁰Roland E. Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, in *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 23A, eds. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, and Glenn W. Barker (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, Publisher, 1992), 17, Logos.

⁴¹Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *A Commentary, Critical, Experimental, and Practical, on the Old and New Testaments*, vol. 3 (Glasgow: William Collins, Sons, and Company, n.d.), 517.

2:12-26 **The Preacher Finds Vanity in the Mortality of Mankind: The Wise Man and the Fool Partake of the Same Fate, Which is Death** - After the Preacher reflects upon his own frustration, he looks beyond his own personal experiences to find a purpose and meaning in life. Now he begins to observe the people who surround him in society. But alas, he comes to the same conclusion. Although a wise man walks in light and the fool in darkness (verse 14), wisdom does not appear to deliver one from the same fate as the fool (verse 15). Both must die and be forgotten (verse 16). Both will leave their substance to fate when they die (verses 18-19). He concludes that man should learn to enjoy each day by recognizing God's blessings and not worry about the things of tomorrow (2:24-26).

2:12 And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly: for what can the man do that cometh after the king? even that which hath been already done.

2:12 *Comments* - King Solomon realized that if any man on earth could find peace and happiness and meaning in life, it would be him, the richest man on earth; yet, he himself failed to achieve this in his own pursuits.

2:13 Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness.

2:14 The wise man's eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness: and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all.

2:13-14 *Comments* – The Preacher says that wisdom is better than folly. This insight is repeated later in the book: Ecclesiastes 4:13-14, “Better is a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished. For out of prison he cometh to reign; whereas also he that is born in his kingdom becometh poor.” Ecclesiastes 10:12, “The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious; but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself.”

2:15 Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity.

2:16 For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man? as the fool.

2:17 Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit.

2:18 Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me.

2:19 And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have shewed myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity.

2:20 Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labour which I took under the sun.

2:21 For there is a man whose labour is in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity; yet to a man that hath not laboured therein shall he leave it for his portion. This also is vanity and a great evil.

2:22 For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun?

2:23 For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity.

2:24 There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God.

2:24 “and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour” – *Comments* - Within the context of this passage the Preacher concludes that each person should learn to enjoy each day. The phrase “in his labour” refers to a person’s daily labours. If we recall the Story of Creation in Genesis 1:1-2:3 we see that God concluded each day by enjoying the good of his labour. He should learn to enjoy the simple aspects of life, recognizing those things that are more important. If he spends his life chasing the wind of vanity, he will miss the joy that God orchestrates for him each day. Our family and close friends make up the essence of life on earth. Here we should find our most valued possessions in which to focus our joy.

2:24 *Comments* - Ecclesiastes 2:24 appears to state a third theme that is repeated throughout the book of Ecclesiastes, telling us to enjoy the blessings that God gives us daily and not to strive after vanity. When we devise projects and set goals and work towards them, and after we accomplish some great feat, we are still left empty inside and without purpose when we are not walking in fellowship God. It is better that we take one day at a time and enjoy that day’s labours with thankfulness in our hearts. For a child, this seems to come naturally for he has no thoughts of tomorrow, but rather finds things to enjoy and laugh about today. He does not understand the cares of this world. God created the family unit so that we can see our children and their natural desire to rejoice. If we are not careful, we as adults can allow the cares of this life to choke out the blessings that God gives to us today. The weight of our cares and energies diminishes our joy.

When the Preacher tells us to enjoy the good of our labour, he is talking about contentment rather than material pleasures. This theme of learning to be content in life and not covet after material things is woven throughout the book of Ecclesiastes (Eccl 3:13; 5:18, 19). The Preacher in Ecclesiastes contrasts contentment with discontentment, or covetousness in Ecclesiastes 1:8, “All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.” Ecclesiastes 6:7, “All the labour of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled.” Solomon teaches contentment in Proverbs 30:8, “Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me.” Paul also preaches it in 1 Timothy 6:6, “But godliness with contentment is great gain.”

2:25 For who can eat, or who else can hasten hereunto, more than I?

2:25 *Comments* - In Ecclesiastes 2:25 the Preacher repeats a statement made in earlier in 2:12, “And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly: for what can the man do that cometh after the king? even that which hath been already done.” No man has ever possessed so much wealth and sources of pleasure as was King Solomon. Who of all sons born to man had a greater opportunity to pursue the wealth and luxuries and wisdom of this world? Yet, in the midst of all of his material possessions and pursuits, he had to reevaluate the meaning of life. He had to acknowledge that there is no joy in such earthly pursuits, no matter how great they may seem.

2:26 For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit.

2:26 *Comments* - The fool will continue to travail in his vain labour, for he is addicted to it, even though it will fall into the hands of another (2:18). By God’s design, Ecclesiastes 2:26 tells us that these possessions will eventually make their way into the hands of a good man. God has subjected the sinner to labour and travail, as he did Adam in the Garden of Eden at the time of the Fall. In contrast, God’s children are to live by the principles of sowing and reaping. They are to live in obedience to His Word, being led by the Holy Spirit; and He promises to provide for His servants and prosper them in every aspect of their lives. One way the Lord prospers His servants is by giving them the heaped up wealth of the sinner.

The Scriptures provide a number of examples of the transfer of wealth from the wicked to the righteous: Exodus 12:35-36, "And the children of Israel did according to the word of Moses; and they borrowed of the Egyptians jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: And the LORD gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent unto them such things as they required. And they spoiled the Egyptians." Job 27:16-17, "Though he heap up silver as the dust, and prepare raiment as the clay; He may prepare it, but the just shall put it on, and the innocent shall divide the silver." 2 Samuel 8:6, "Then David put garrisons in Syria of Damascus: and the Syrians became servants to David, and brought gifts. And the LORD preserved David whithersoever he went." 2 Chronicles 9:1, "And when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon, she came to prove Solomon with hard questions at Jerusalem, with a very great company, and camels that bare spices, and gold in abundance, and precious stones: and when she was come to Solomon, she communed with him of all that was in her heart." 2 Chronicles 18:1-2, "Now Jehoshaphat had riches and honour in abundance, and joined affinity with Ahab. And after certain years he went down to Ahab to Samaria. And Ahab killed sheep and oxen for him in abundance, and for the people that he had with him, and persuaded him to go up with him to Ramothgilead." 2 Chronicles 26:8, "And the Ammonites gave gifts to Uzziah: and his name spread abroad even to the entering in of Egypt; for he strengthened himself exceedingly." Psalm 105:44, "And gave them the lands of the heathen: and they inherited the labour of the people;" Proverbs 13:22, "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just." Proverbs 28:8, "He that by usury and unjust gain increaseth his substance, he shall gather it for him that will pity the poor."

3:1-15

Calling: God's Calling Through His Divine Intervention in the Affairs of Mankind (The Seasons of Our Life) – After the Preacher concludes that God has predestined mankind and creation to vanity by reflecting upon his own frustrations of life (1:12-2:11) and upon those of others (2:12-26), he turns himself to a wider search by looking above. He realizes that God has a purpose for mankind based upon the realization that He continually intervenes in the affairs of mankind, and because His divine laws govern the outcome of men's lives. We describe this event as "divine calling," in which we come to realize that God has a redemptive purpose and plan in His creation. His divine calling is reflected through His divine intervention in the lives of men to bring them into their times and seasons of service to Him.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-15 represents the Preacher's next phase of learning when he teaches us that God calls mankind to particular times and seasons of life; therefore, every man's lifespan consists of a series of seasons that He orchestrates for those who obey Him. We learn that these seasons have been divinely placed within our lives by God (3:1). Once the Preacher recognizes these divine seasons of life (3:1-8), he concludes that man should simply rest in God and enjoy each day's journey, knowing that God is at work in his life each day (3:9-15).

For this reason, God has placed a time-clock within every human being. We are born with a sense of destiny because of this divine time-clock that ticks away each day within our hearts. We have an awareness that our lives should reach milestones of accomplishments. For example, the term "mid-life crisis" is used to describe those who face an identity crisis during mid-life. They face this crisis because of an awareness of failing to follow God's time-table of life for themselves. Because God has called each person to progress through predestined phases of life in order to walk above the vanities of life, those who fail to do so find themselves in a crisis at some point in their lifetime. They know in their hearts that they have failed to fulfill their divine destinies.

There are twenty-eight seasons listed in the following verses. It is in these seasons of life orchestrated by God that we find meaning and purpose in our lives. The closing verses to Ecclesiastes will warn us that everything we do in these seasons of life must be undergirded with the fear of God and the keeping of His commandments. The fact that there are twenty-eight is significance. Anytime in historical events the number seven or a factor of seven is

used, it serves as a witness of divine intervention. One clear example is found in Matthew's description of Jesus' divine lineage, where God brought Israel through seasons of change every fourteen generations, as we read in Matthew 1:17, "So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations."

We see these divine seasons (and purposes) listed in 3:2-8. We clearly identify with such descriptions of our lives as we recall how we move from birth to childhood to adolescence to adulthood to old age and finally to death. God's involvement in human affairs leads to the understanding that there will be an eternal judgment, as the preacher says in Ecclesiastes 3:17, "I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work." Therefore, enjoy the goodness that God gives to us in this life, but remember to fear God because His judgment will come upon every man.

Each verse in Ecclesiastes 3:2-8 contains two couplets. Each of these sets of couplets is similar to one another. For example, in verse two birth is contrasted with death. In verse 3 killing and healing are similar to breaking down and building up. In verse 4 weeping and laughter are similar to mourning and dancing.

These couplets appear to represent individual seasons of our earthly lives. Within each season in this life there are both good things and evil things to deal with. This is because mankind has been subjected to vanity because of the Fall. Evil is now a part of this life that must be dealt with during every season of life. Thus, we see the struggle between good and evil, between God's ways and the ways of the devil as we walk through our journey in life.

For example, the joy of the birth of a child will always be overshadowed by the knowledge that he will one day have to die (3:2a). We see this in the birth of our Saviour Jesus Christ. His birth was accompanied with exciting prophecies and visits from wise men from the East. In the Temple Simeon spoke not only of His office as a Saviour but balanced his prophecy with words of sorrow and grief for Mary. Regarding Proverbs 3:2b, the travail of planting in the field and waiting patiently for the fruit will one day be forgotten by the joy of taking in a great harvest (3:2b). In our times of sorrow we must not forget how God brings us a ray of sunshine during our darkest hours (3:4a). We know that one day sadness will be overcome by joy; for this is how Jesus, because of the joy set before Him, endured the Cross and suffered the shame (3:4b). There is a season in our lives when we hold our children tightly and protect them in our embrace, while knowing that one day we must release them and send them out to pursue their own destinies (5b). We understand that as horrible wars can be, they always produce peace for a nation if fought in righteousness (3:8). Thus, every season and event in our lives is mixed with sadness as well as joy if we will look for God's handiwork in it.

The preacher then asks himself the value of labouring and travelling during the seasons of life (3:9). For God subjected mankind to travail at the time of the Fall in the Garden in order to keep us humble (3:10). For it is in humility that we will turn back to God.

Now the answer comes when God reveals to him that there is a beauty to be found within each of these seasons in our lives; because each one will teach us a new lesson that we cannot learn from an earlier season of life (Eccl. 3:11a).

God created our life as a series of seasons so that we would better understand that eternity is made up of ages and periods in which God takes mankind from one dispensation into another. This is why Ecclesiastes 3:11b says that God has placed eternity in our hearts. He did this by subjecting us to the pattern of seasons the He has subjected eternity to.

Ecclesiastes 3:11c then tells us that no man can find contentment in these seasons by pursuing earthly works and ambitions. If we try to fully understand the fullness of the world around us during each season of life, just as Solomon, we will realize that we cannot complete such pursuits; for God's creation is far too vast and our lives too short. This causes us to become unfulfilled with earthly pursuits and dreams, because by them we will only find discontentment in watching them go incomplete as we move into another season of life. As Solomon amidst his vast gardens and building projects, we must conclude that contentment and joy will only be found in pursuing our divine assignment on a daily basis. All other pursuits and ambitions will fall incomplete and unfulfilled at the end of one's life. We must find our joy today as we serve the Lord.

We must resign ourselves to serving the Lord with gladness of heart (Eccl. 3:12) and enjoy the benefits that God has given us during our daily service to Him, and this without coveting more than we have been given (3:13). This is the secret of happiness in the midst of our being subjected to travail all the days of our lives.

Outline – Here is a proposed outline:

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|---|--------|
| 1. The Preacher Concludes God Has a Purpose | 3:1-8 |
| 2. The Preacher Explains His Conclusion | 3:9-15 |

3:1-8

The Preacher Concludes that God Has a Purpose for Mankind – The Preacher comes to the understanding that God has a purpose (or calling) for mankind based upon His divine intervention in the affairs of their lives and the life of his nation. He now attempts to understand the meaning or purpose of life in light of God's divine intervention, which the Preacher calls "seasons" and "purpose under heaven." Ecclesiastes 3:1-15 represents the Preacher's next phase of learning when he tells us that our life is made up of times and seasons, or periods of change; and we learn that these seasons have been divinely placed within our lives by God (3:1). The Preacher lists these divine seasons in 3:2-8. We clearly identify with such a description of our lives as we recall how we move from birth to childhood to adolescence to adulthood to old age and finally to death.

The apostle Paul alludes to God's work in orchestrating individual lives for His divine purpose by saying, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." (Eph 2:10) The psalmist describes God's divine guidance for man's spiritual journey in Psalms 32:8, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye."

Outline – Here is a proposed outline:

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|--|-------|
| 1. General Summary | 3:1 |
| 2. The Vanity of Wisdom | 3:2-3 |
| 3. The Vanity of Mirth and Pleasure | 3:4 |
| 4. The Vanity of Strength and Conquest | 3:5 |
| 5. The Vanity of Riches | 3:6 |
| 6. The Vanity of the King's Rule over Israel and the Nations | 3:7-8 |

3:1

General Summary - In a summary of this passage of Scripture, we see that Solomon begins by making a general summary of about the divinely orchestrated seasons in the affairs of mankind (3:1).

3:1 To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

3:1

Comments - Having pursued every vanity of life that was within his reach, and having found all of life's pleasures unfulfilling, King Solomon now turns his attention to the divine element of life. In Ecclesiastes 3:1 he reflects upon God's divine timetable for every aspect of creation. He acknowledges that every person, every nation, every aspect of creation, has a

purpose and plan that God Himself embedded within its design. God has a plan that is made up of times and seasons, which were beyond Solomon or man's ability to determine and orchestrate. The Hebrew word (מָוֶלַד) "appointed time" (BDAG) refers to a season or period of time in which God's creatures are called to perform a task. The Hebrew word (תָּוֶלַד) "a point in time" (BDAG) refers to single event of divine intervention in which God invades the human life and orchestrates a change of season. God's perfect will for His children is to have them walking in His timetable of events. Only then is a person able to fulfill his own divine destiny.

King Solomon had spent much of his life trying to orchestrate the affairs of his kingdom, pursuing wisdom, mirth, building projects and the acquisition of great wealth. Yet in all of these pursuits the king realized he was subject to the design and predetermined plan of his Creator, the God of Israel.

Illustration - Our life is a series of seasons. When we yield our lives into the hands of divine providence and provision, God is allowed to orchestrate these seasons in a magnificent way. I have seen these seasons very clearly in my life as God has orchestrated them towards a greater level of sacrifice and service. I began making a sacrifice as a Seminary student, and watched God's hand provide my needs. As I continued to serve the Lord, I have had the experiences of sensing seasons of change soon before they arrive. For example, in 1988, the Lord dealt with me about returning to Fort Worth to finish my Seminary degree. In 1993 I received a promotion with DMJ Management, where I served for 4 years. It was a season of learning how to deal with Christian business ethics in a corporate world. In 1997, I sensed a season of change coming just before being called into the mission field. In 2010-2011, I took a sabbatical of rest and saw God's divine hand of provision. After one year, I was called back into the mission field in an amazing series of divinely orchestrated events. In contrast, I have observed men and women as they orchestrate their own careers apart from divine intervention. They do reach their peaks of success, but in an exhausted state of ill marriage or ill health or broken marriages. Such individuals have not relinquished their lives unto divine providence and provision. Thus, life is busy and difficult and eventually failures await them in some form or manner. This is the vanity that the preachers describes in the first chapters of Ecclesiastes.

3:2-3

The Vanity of Wisdom - Ecclesiastes 3:2-3 reflects upon King Solomon's conclusion regarding the vanity of his pursuit of wisdom (Eccl 1:12-18), where he realizes that he cannot control life and death, the seasons of this earth, and good and evil. These are events that God alone has determined and can judge. In Ecclesiastes 3:2 the king deals with the issues of life and death, and with the seasons of planting and harvesting, which often determined life and death in these ancient world. In Ecclesiastes 3:3 King Solomon acknowledges that, despite his vast knowledge and wisdom he obtained, he alone cannot control the forces of good and evil, to stop killing and other destructive forces of mankind; neither can he heal and restore things to good. Although he is a king, he does not have the power to control evil or good. Despite his vast wisdom, the king acknowledges that only God determines life and death, and He also judges good and evil upon this earth. These aspects of one's life are beyond King Solomon's grasp. These outcomes were in the hands of God.

3:2 A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;

3:2 "a time to be born" – Comments - Jesus' birth was accomplished in the fullness of time according to Galatians 4:4, "But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,"

3:2 "and a time to die" – Comments - Jesus had an appointed time to die according to Luke 9:51, "And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem." Hebrews 9:27, "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment."

3:2 “to plant . . . to pluck up” – *Comments* – There is time to sow and a time to reap, as Paul says in Galatians 6:9, “And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”

3:2 *Comments* - In Ecclesiastes 3:2 the king deals with the issues of life and death, and with planting and harvesting, which often determined life and death in these ancient world. The phrase “a time to live and die” refers to human life and the animal kingdom. The phrase “a time to plant and pluck up that which is planted” refers to the plant kingdom.

The time (תָּו) of one’s birth and death are important events. However, between these two events are important seasons (תָּו) of life for man and animal as well as plants. Naturalists study these seasons in the life of the animal and plant kingdoms in order to understand their purpose upon this planet. For example, there are breeding seasons, birthing seasons, migratory seasons, etc. in the animal kingdom. Likewise, the plant kingdom has seasons of germinating, flowering, bearing fruit, etc. Mankind also has seasons in his life between the day of his birth and the day of his death, seasons that God desires to orchestrate so that every human fulfills his own purpose in life.

In all of his pursuits of wisdom (Eccl 1:12-18), King Solomon realizes that he cannot affect the timing of one’s birth, nor of one’s death. It is a time that God alone has determined. Neither can he change the seasons of the earth. There is a planting season and a harvest season determined by God, which no man can change, just as God said to Noah in Genesis 8:22, “While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.” Even with modern science and technology, man still cannot understand how life begins, nor can he conquer death; neither can he control the seasons and weather under creation. He cannot determine the days of the year to plant, nor the days to harvest. This timing is left up to the seasons that only God controls (Gen 8:22).

3:3 A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;

3:3 “A time to kill” – *Comments* - God ordained laws for those who murder in Genesis 9:6, “Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.” However, God ordained the time of the offering of burnt sacrifices under the Law, and even before the institution of the Mosaic Law.

3:3 “and a time to heal” – *Comments* - Jesus taught, preached and healed according to Matthew 4:23, “And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.”

3:3 “a time to break down” – *Comments* - Jesus cleanses the temple by destroying the man-made financial structure in John 2:15, “And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables.”

3:3 “and a time to build up” – *Comments* - Jesus builds the church in Matthew 16:18, “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

3:3 *Comments* - The phrase “A time to kill, and a time to heal” addresses those creatures that have the breath of life, which is the plant and animal kingdoms. The phrase “a time to break down, and a time to build up” refers to the part of creation that does not contain life, such as the geological and mineral elements of creation, yet they have purpose as well. In Ecclesiastes 3:3 King Solomon acknowledges that, despite his vast knowledge and wisdom he obtained (Eccl 1:12-18), he alone cannot stop killing and other destructive forces of mankind. Neither can he heal and restore things to good. Even as a king, he does not have

the power to control evil or good. In 3:2 the king acknowledges that only God determines life and death, and He also judges good and evil upon this earth. Both are beyond King Solomon's grasp.

3:4 **The Vanity of Mirth and Pleasure** – Ecclesiastes 3:4 reflects upon King Solomon's conclusion regarding the vanity of his pursuit of mirth and pleasure (Eccl 2:1-3). King Solomon had pursued mirth and pleasure with the greatest of resources that man could obtain; yet, in all of these pursuits he now realizes that he cannot determine the time of a person's weeping and laughter, mourning and dancing. The reason is because even Solomon could not determine the outcome of every person's situation, whether it saddened or rejoiced the heart. These outcomes were in the hands of God.

3:4 A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

3:4 **"A time to weep"** – *Comments* – We read in John 11:35 that "Jesus wept." David was a man of tears, as we see in 1 Samuel 30:4, "Then David and the people that were with him lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep."

3:4 **"and a time to laugh"** – *Comments* – The Lord laughs over the affairs of men in Psalm 2:4, "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision."

3:4 **"a time to mourn"** – *Comments* – The children of Israel mourned for King Saul (1 Sam 31:13, 2 Sam 1:17).

3:4 **"and a time to dance"** – *Comments* – David danced before the Lord in 2 Samuel 6:16, "And as the ark of the LORD came into the city of David, Michal Saul's daughter looked through a window, and saw king David leaping and dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart."

3:4 *Comments* - King Solomon had pursued mirth and pleasure with the greatest of resources that man could obtain (Eccl 2:1-3); yet, in all of these pursuits he now realizes in Ecclesiastes 3:4 that he cannot determine the time of a person's weeping and laughter, mourning and dancing. The reason is because even Solomon could not determine the outcome of every person's situation, whether it saddened or rejoiced the heart. These outcomes were in the hand of God.

3:5 **The Vanity of Strength and Conquest** - Ecclesiastes 3:5 reflects upon King Solomon's conclusion regarding the vanity of his pursuit of strength and conquest (Eccl 2:4-6). The king had embarked upon some of the greatest building projects of the ancient world, carving and moving great stones; yet he could not determine the timing of when these projects could be completed, or even accomplished. His people had gathered stones and cast them away; his hired servants had grasped hold of these projects, and postponed or even cancelled them. The timing of these great building projects was in the hands of God.

3:5 A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

3:5 *Comments* - King Solomon had embarked upon some of the greatest building projects of the ancient world (Eccl 2:4-6), carving and moving great stones, yet he could not determine the timing of when these projects could be completed. His people had gathered stones and cast them away; his hired servants had grasped hold of these projects, and postponed or even cancelled them. The timing of these great building projects was in God's hands.

3:6 **The Vanity of Riches** - Ecclesiastes 3:6 reflects upon King Solomon's conclusion regarding the vanity of his pursuit of riches (Eccl 2:7-11). The king had gathered the greatest accumulation of wealth that had ever been collected upon earth, yet this wealth could not be kept entirely safe and secure. There were times he must give it away, and there

were times thieves broke in and stole this wealth. He determined that riches were in the hands of an Almighty God as to whom He would give it to and whom He would take it away.

3:6 A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;

3:6 “**A time to get**” – *Comments* – Jesus commanded us to pursue the kingdom of God above material wealth in Matthew 6:33, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”

3:6 “**and a time to lose**” – *Comments* – Jesus us exhorts us to lose our lives for His sake in Matthew 16:25, “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.”

3:6 “**a time to keep**” – *Comments* - God keeps and watches over Israel as His people (Ex 32:11, 14).

3:6 “**and a time to cast away**” – *Comments* – The Lord cast away His people for a season of divine judgment in Jeremiah 33:26, “Then will I cast away the seed of Jacob, and David my servant, so that I will not take any of his seed to be rulers over the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: for I will cause their captivity to return, and have mercy on them.”

3:6 *Comments* - King Solomon had gathered the greatest accumulation of wealth that had ever been collected upon earth (Eccl 2:7-11), yet this wealth could not be kept entirely safe and secure. There were times he must give it away, and there were times thieves broke in and stole this wealth. He determined that riches were in the hands of an Almighty God as to whom He would give it to and whom He would take it away.

As we reflect upon Israel’s redemptive history, we now can see that there is a predetermined time for them to prosper; and there will be a time when God will utter waste them in divine judgment. There is a time in their history for gathering stones and building the glorious Temple, and there will be a time of tearing it down in judgment. All of this was beyond Solomon’s judgment as a mortal king over Israel.

3:7-8 **The Vanity of the King’s Rule over Israel and the Nations** – Ecclesiastes 3:7-8 reflects upon King Solomon’s conclusion regarding the vanity and limitations of his rule over Israel and the nations. The king had decreed some of the wisest judgment among men, yet these judgments could not fix everyone’s problems in the kingdom (Eccl 3:7). In this respect he found himself in the hands of an Almighty God in knowing when to keep silent and let God work things out, and when to intervene and speak his royal judgment. Although King Solomon was the greatest king upon earth during his period of reign, with the divine wisdom to maintain peace over his kingdom, yet he was not able to control love and hate, war and peace upon the earth (Eccl 3:8). These were things too great for him, things he had to look to God for their outcome. In all of his judgments, he could not resolve all conflicts. It was beyond his mortal ability to do so; thus, judgment ultimately rested in God’s hands.

3:7 A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

3:7 “**A time to rend**” – *Comments* – The Lord tore the kingdom from Saul and gave it to David (1 Sam 15:28). The veil of the Temple was torn at the time of Jesus’ death (Mk 15:38). In antiquity people tore their clothes during times of intense mourning. Even Barnabas and Paul tore their clothes as a sign to the people that they were not gods (Acts 14:14).

3:7 “**and a time to sew**” – *Comments* – Jacob made a beautiful coat for Joseph because he favoured him above his other sons (Gen 37:3)

3:7 **“a time to keep silence”** – *Comments* – There are many Scriptures that each man to refrain from much talking (Prov 10:19; 15:28; 17:27, 28; 18:13; 20:3; 21:23; 29:20, Jam 1:19). During His trials, Jesus kept silent before His accusers (Isa 53:7, Matt 26:62-63; 27:12, Acts 8:32, 1 Pet 2:23).

3:7 **“and a time to speak”** – *Comments* - We see this same thought in Proverbs 25:11, “Apples of gold in imagery of silver, *Is the word spoken at its fit times.*” (YLT) We see this divine principle in Proverbs 31:8-9, “Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction. Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy.” Jesus taught daily in the Temple as His divine calling demanded that He speak (Matt 26:55).

3:7 **“a time to keep silence, and a time to speak”** - *Comments* - King Solomon had decreed some of the wisest judgment among men, yet these judgments could not fix everyone’s problems in the kingdom. In this respect, he found himself in the hands of an Almighty God in knowing when to keep silent and let God work things out, and when to intervene and speak his royal judgment.

There is tremendous value in managing one’s tongue. There are times when we profit by keeping silent so that our tongue does not rage in foolish chatter that we hear around us. However, there are times to speak and prophesy and declare the Word of God, as did the prophets. There is great wisdom in managing the tongue. Silence at the appropriate time or season reveals wisdom, but silence without the ability to speak forth boldly reveals foolishness and weakness.

3:8 A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.

3:8 **“A time to love”** – *Comments* – God’s time to demonstrate His love towards mankind is seen on the cross, as Jesus gave his life, as we read in John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

3:8 **“and a time to hate”** – *Comments* – The psalmist mentions this divine principle in Psalm 97:10, “Ye that love the LORD, hate evil: he preserveth the souls of his saints; he delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked.” Psalm 139:21-22, “Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies.”

3:8 **“a time of war, and a time of peace”** – *Comments* - Before there is peace, there must be a war. For example, the nation of Israel enjoyed peace during the reign of King Solomon because David was a man of war. He had subdued all nations surrounding him in order to have peace. Also, in order for a believer to walk in victory and peace in his life, he must first learn to kick the devil out of his life by spiritual warfare. The Lord once spoke to me and said, “There is peace in a home when there is dominion in that home.” He then quickened to me Luke 11:21, “When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace:” There can only be peace in a home when a man is armed for war. Unless the United States had gone to war during the First and Second World War, this world would not have enjoyed peace.

There are a number of biblical examples where the Lord called for war and failure to execute a war would have been sin. God told Joshua to go destroy the inhabitants of Canaan so that the children of Israel could possess the land and have rest (Heb 4:1-9). The Lord also told Saul to destroy the Amalekites so that His people would have rest from their wars in 1 Samuel 15:18, “And the LORD sent thee on a journey, and said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed.”

3:8 *Comments* - Although King Solomon was the greatest king upon earth during his period of reign, with the divine wisdom to maintain peace over his kingdom, yet he was not able to control love and hate, war and peace upon the earth. These were things too great for him, things he had to look to God for their outcome. In all of his judgments he could not resolve all conflicts. It was beyond his mortal ability to do so; thus, judgment ultimately rested in God's hands.

As we reflect upon Israel's redemptive history, we now can see that there is a predetermined time for them to be at peace, and there is a time God brought the nations into their land to judge them by waging war upon His people.

3:9-15 **The Preacher Explains His Conclusion of Man's Purpose** - The Preacher will then acknowledge each man's purpose, or calling, in this life, in 3:9-15 as a calling to rejoice and to do good in this life by enjoying the good of each day's labours (3:13). In other words, mankind has been called to serve the Lord by doing good works and to rest in God's divine provision for his life.

3:9 What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth?

3:9 *Comments* - Having pursued wisdom (1:12-18), mirth (2:1-3), building projects (2:4-6) and material riches (2:7-11), all to a greater extent than any man before him had been able to achieve, and having realized both the vanity of his own pursuits and of mankind in general) as he now reflects upon his utter helplessness to obtain true happiness and fulfill his own destiny in this life (2:12-26), and acknowledging the reality of divine providence over all of mankind and creation (3:1-8), the preacher asks the most basic question regarding his life on earth, "What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth?" In other words, what is my purpose and destiny? How can I find true happiness and satisfaction and contentment and utter fulfillment?

3:10 I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it.

3:10 *Comments* - Ecclesiastes 3:10 tells us that mankind was subjected to sorrow and travail in order to humble him. This subjection took place at the time of the Fall in the Garden of Eden. In contrast to God's curse upon the serpent, God sought to lead Adam and Eve into repentance and redemption. Thus, God did not curse them, but instead, subjected them unto vanity. The reason God subjected them to vanity was for their own well-being. For in their daily pain and travail, they would look to their Creator for hope and future redemption.

Man's original role in taking dominion over the earth was to tend the Garden. The woman's role in taking dominion over the earth was not in tilling the soil, but in bearing children. We then see how man was working the land while woman was tending to children. This was God's original divine order and plan for mankind to prosper and fulfill their destinies. This is reflected in the way in which God judged Adam and Eve in the Fall. The woman had her pain and sorrow increased in the area of childbearing while the man had his sorrow and pain increased in tilling the earth. God added travail and sorrow to each of their earthly journeys so that they would learn to turn to Him for their daily peace and rest. Such daily travail brings humility, and humility leads us back to God. In fact, Ecclesiastes 3:10 tells us, "I have seen the travail that God hath given to the sons of man to be humbled by it."

3:11 He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.

3:11 **"He hath made every thing beautiful in his time"** – *Comments* - Ecclesiastes 3:11 teaches us that there is a beauty to be found within each of the seasons in our lives listed in 3:1-8; because each one will teach us a new lesson that we cannot learn from an earlier season of life. Even what may seem bad, such as war and destruction, has its beautiful purpose in this world. For example, in the Story of Creation God says that everything was good. But as we

look around us we see so many things that are bad and evil. But if we step back and look at creation from God's perspective, that is, from eternity past to eternity future, we will realize that the season that we are living in was placed upon mankind in order to produce something good.

3:11 **“also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end”** – *Comments* - We can see Ecclesiastes 3:11 reflected in the work of NASA, the U.S. space agency whose job is to explore space, God's creation. The more they learn, the more vast and enormous space and learning becomes.

3:11 *Comments* - Ecclesiastes 3:11 says that God has placed eternity in our hearts. He did this by subjecting us to the pattern of seasons to which He has subjected eternity. These seasons in our life are listed in Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.

God has put a desire within our hearts to discover and find out all knowledge, yet in our short, mortal lifespan, no man can live long enough to discover everything. We have been made to labour and travail in this life as a way of humbling us (Eccl 3:10). If a man were a king and all others served him, so that he had not travail to humble him, then his heart would be lifted up. Therefore, God has designed this life with the travail of labour, and in this labour we strive to find out all things of this world, which we cannot do in this short life.

Within every human being is an eternal time clock, sounding the alarm of our mortality. This earth life is divinely structured for us to follow God's plan of salvation. In other words, we are designed and create by God to serve Him with each of our differing gifts of grace. When a person serves himself, this inner time clock sounds an alarm to our conscience that we are losing time to accomplish life's divine callings. Many people reach the middle of their lives and face a “mid-life” crisis, realizing that their lives are half-way complete and they have missed their destinies. No man can escape their God-given design and destiny, for He has put eternity within each of His creatures, so that they will know that there is a Creator whom they should serve with their mortal lives.

3:12 I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life.

3:12 *Comments* - In Ecclesiastes 3:12 the Preacher answers his own question from 3:9, “What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth?” He decides that the only way to fulfill his purpose and destiny, and find true happiness and satisfaction and contentment and utter fulfillment in this life is to use each day as an opportunity to do good, which means to serve one another. He will find true joy and happiness in simply helping others.

Since we cannot discover everything and fulfill every aspect of this mortal life (Eccl 3:12), we should realize that God has given us something each day to accomplish, something good to do to help others as a way of obeying His commandments. We are to rejoice in each day's divine blessings.

3:13 And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God.

3:12 *Comments* - Besides doing good in this life (3:11), the Preacher also realizes that in order to find true happiness and contentment, he must be thankful for each day. He should be content and rejoice in the things he possesses, for these are the things that God has given to him (3:12).

3:14 I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him.

3:14 *Comments* - In our decision to rejoice in each day's labours and to do good, we begin to realize that God is orchestrating each day, so that we cannot change what He has designed for us. It would be vain and futile for us to labour to design the outcome of each day. God has designed it this way so that we may acknowledge Him and look to Him and fear Him as we seek direction in each day's journey. We must realize that we cannot begin the day and determine its outcome at the end of the day.

3:15 **That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past.**

3:15 *Comments* - Ecclesiastes 3:15 seems to serve as a summary of the entire passage of 3:1-15. Thus, the Preacher is reflecting upon God's divine intervention in the affairs of mankind by noting how the past, present, and future of His plan of redemption involve the repetition of events; or, in simple terms, is overseeing all matters of life.

3:16-6:12 **Justification: The Depravity of Mankind** – The Preacher has concluded that this world has been subjected to vanity (1:1-2:26); yet, God has a purpose for mankind (3:1-15). God's overall plan for mankind involved his redemption. The Preacher now seeks to know God's plan of redemption/justification for mankind in the midst of a depraved humanity, but first he must build a case for man's need of redemption. Thus, in Ecclesiastes 3:16-22 he makes the conclusion that mankind is depraved. In Ecclesiastes 4:1-6:12 the Preacher uses illustrations from life and from creation to support his theme that all is vanity. In this section, he discusses the overall condition of mankind in his fallen state of depravity and his need for redemption. Within the context of these passages of Scripture, the Preacher describes man's justification is a need to walk in God's timetable of times and seasons by being obedient to His Word.

Outline – Here is a proposed outline:

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|---|----------|
| 1. The Preacher Concludes Man's Depravity | 3:16-22 |
| 2. The Preacher Explains His Conclusion | 4:1-6:12 |

3:16-22 **The Preacher Concludes that Mankind is Unjust** – In Ecclesiastes 3:16-22 the Preacher makes the conclusion that mankind is depraved. He understands that God will judge every man according to his works, both the righteous and the wicked. He observes that wickedness was found in the place of judgment (3:16). He first concludes that God will ultimately give a final and true judgment (3:17). He makes a second conclusion that man is mortal just like beasts (3:18-21). He comes to the conclusion that because of this vanity of unrighteous upon earth a person should respond by learning to enjoy the labours of each day without coveting for more, or worrying about tomorrow; for man is not able to determine his own future, which belongs to God alone (3:22).

Outline – Here is a proposed outline:

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|--------------------|---------|
| 1. Man's Depravity | 3:16-17 |
| 2. Man's Mortality | 3:18-21 |
| 3. Conclusion | 3:22 |

3:16-17 **Man's Depravity** – The Preacher makes his first observation by stating the wickedness and depravity of mankind. He concludes that God will bring justice upon this sad condition of man since man is not judging himself righteously.

3:16 **And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there.**

3:17 **I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work.**

3:17 *Comments* - The Preacher now makes an evaluation of the vanities of life from a divine perspective for the first time in the book. He repeats his statement in 3:1 by saying that there is a time for every purpose. This means that God orchestrates the lives of men by guiding them into times and seasons. In other words, our lives are not to be lived aimlessly, but with a purpose and a goal.

3:18-21 **Man's Mortality** - In Ecclesiastes 3:18 the Preacher compares mankind to beasts from the aspect that they are both mortal. He will elaborate on this in 3:19 by saying that death befalls them both. Thus, from an earthly perspective, no one is better than the other, since both die and are no more (3:20). In addition, neither man nor beast is able to determine his individual fate, whether he goes up to heaven, or down to hell (3:21).

3:18 I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts.

3:18 *Comments* - Ecclesiastes 3:18 compares mankind to animals in the respect that both are mortal (3:19-21).

3:19 For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity.

3:20 All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again.

3:19-20 *Comments* - The book of Ecclesiastes emphasizes man's physical body rather than his spirit or his soul. Therefore, the description of man and beast being made up of dust and returning to dust reflects their physical mortality. Everyone faces death of the physical body. However, man's spirit lives forever, going to heaven or hell at the time of death.

3:21 Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?

3:21 *Comments* - Ecclesiastes 3:21 makes the statement that the spirit of man can go upward and the spirit of beasts can go downward. However, within the context of Hebrew poetry we can interpret this verse to say, "Man nor beast is able to decide whether his spirit goes upwards or downwards after death." In other words, the eternal destiny of the spirit of man and beast is in God's hands alone. He will decide their destiny.

We know that upwards represents heaven, and downwards represents hell. Thus, we are given a clue from Scripture that animals as well as mankind have a destiny after death. Those believers who have been given the opportunity to visit heaven and hell, such as Rebecca Springer, Mary K. Baxter, Roberts Lairdon, and Bill Wiese testify to seeing animals both in heaven and in hell.⁴² Baxter says that hell is full of unclean animals and that heaven has beautiful, clean animals, in a similar way that the Scriptures classify between clean and unclean animals (Lev 1:1-47). These people mention seeing beautiful horses and birds in heaven, as well as awful giant snakes, rats, spiders and worms in hell. Lairdon says that there is every kind of animal imaginable in Heaven. Ecclesiastes 3:21 suggests that animals also can go to heaven or hell.

⁴²Rebecca Springer, *Within Heaven's Gates* (Springdale, Pennsylvania: Whitaker House, 1984), 53-4, 107; Mary K. Baxter, *A Divine Revelation of Heaven* (New Kensington, Pennsylvania: Whitaker House, 1998), 38, 82-3, 127-9; Mary K. Baxter, *A Divine Revelation of Hell* (Springdale, Pennsylvania: Whitaker House, 1993), 64; Roberts Lairdon, *I Saw Heaven* (Tulsa Oklahoma: Aubury Publishing, c1983, 1991), 31; Bill Wiese, *23 Minutes in Hell* (Lake Mary, Florida: Charis House, c2006), 30.

3:22 **Conclusion** – In Ecclesiastes 3:22 the Preacher makes his concluding remarks about man’s depravity and mortality. He decides that man should learn to enjoy those things which God has blessed him with as a result of the works of his own hands.

3:22 **Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?**

4:1-6:12 **The Preacher Explains His Conclusion** – In Ecclesiastes 4:1-6:12 the Preacher uses illustrations from life and from creation to support his theme that mankind is depraved. In this section, he discusses the overall condition of mankind in his fallen state of depravity. However, this time he makes his evaluation from the perspective of divine judgment.

We see a progressive order of events in this passage of Scripture. Man’s fall in the Garden of Eden resulted in his mortality. Mortal man became depraved by his sin. This depravity led man into a state of unrighteousness. He now oppresses the weak, labours without rest, toils selfishly all the days of his life, and struggles to gain ascendancy over others. Thus, those who reach positions of power, wealth and leadership over others are no better than those they rule over. This is the Preacher’s way of reasoning with us to see his point of view that our mortal lives are full of vanity.

Outline – Here is a proposed outline:

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|---|----------|
| 1. The Vanity of Oppression on Earth | 4:1-3 |
| 2. The Vanity of Toil on Earth | 4:4-6 |
| 3. The Vanity of Selfish on Earth | 4:7-12 |
| 4. The Vanity of Nobility on Earth | 4:13-16 |
| 5. The Vanity of External Religion (Fear God) | 5:1-7 |
| 6. The Vanity of Riches | 5:8-6:12 |

4:1-3 **The Vanity of Oppression on Earth** – In Ecclesiastes 4:1-3 the Preacher makes an observation about the vanity of oppression in this life. It is man’s depravity, discussed in 3:16-22, that causes him to oppress one another. The Preacher notes his *observation* in 4:1 that there is much oppression over those who cannot defend themselves and find a comforter. In 4:2-3 he makes his *conclusion* that the dead are better than the living, and those who are not yet born are better than the both.

4:1 **So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter.**

4:2 **Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive.**

4:3 **Yea, better is he than both they, which hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.**

4:3 **Comments** - Testimonies of those who have visited heaven say that heaven receives all unborn babies. These children who have never been born will never know the sufferings of this world. These children are raised in nurseries under the care of guardian angels and told the story of redemption. Their eternal destiny is sure and certain. In this respect, the unborn are better off than those who are born.

4:4-6 **The Vanity of Toil on Earth** - The man who toils for substance creates envy from his neighbor (4:4). Yet, the lazy fool destroys himself because of his laziness (4:5). Neither choice seems good. There must be a balance in work. The Preacher concludes that a man should work quietly to meet his basic needs only, and not chase after an abundance of riches, so that he can have a peaceful life (4:6).

4:4 Again, I considered all travail, and every right work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbour. This is also vanity and vexation of spirit.

4:4 *Comments* - In Ecclesiastes 4:4 the Preacher observes that the man who toils for substance creates envy from his neighbor, thus creating hardship for himself. Note a similar verse regarding man's envy that results in him trying to get the wealth of others in seen in Ecclesiastes 5:11, "When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes?"

4:5 The fool foldeth his hands together, and eateth his own flesh.

4:5 *Comments* - After noting that too much toil is not good, in Ecclesiastes 4:5 the Preacher observes that total avoidance of toil is also bad, because the lazy person destroys himself. A man's hands are used to toil for his substance. Thus, the folding of the hands represents a ceasing from toil. Note a similar verse in Proverbs 6:10-11, "Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man." (see also Prov 24:33-34)

4:6 Better is an handful with quietness, than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit.

4:6 *Comments* - In Ecclesiastes 4:6 the Preacher brings a balance to both extremes. We are to neither be over burdened with toil, nor are we to be lazy and avoid toil. We are to find a middle ground so that we can find peace and happiness in this life.

We see this divine principle in Proverbs 15:16, "Better is little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble therewith." Proverbs 15:16, "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith." Proverbs 16:8, "Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues without right."

4:7-12 **The Vanity of Selfish Toil on Earth** – In Ecclesiastes 4:7-12 the Preacher comments on the vanity of selfish toil in this world. It is futile to labour without end for oneself; for ultimately, there is no reward and joy in such labour.

4:7 Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun.

4:8 There is one alone, and there is not a second; yea, he hath neither child nor brother: yet is there no end of all his labour; neither is his eye satisfied with riches; neither saith he, For whom do I labour, and bereave my soul of good? This is also vanity, yea, it is a sore travail.

4:8 *Comments* - Endless labor for self-gain is vain. The greater benefit is to work for the mutual benefit of others, which he states in the next verses (Eccl 9-12).

4:9 Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour.

4:10 For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up.

4:11 Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone?

4:12 And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

4:12 *Comments* – In marriage, the husband and wife find strength in unity. The redemptive message embedded in this verse reveals how the third person in a relationship is Christ Jesus. With Christ the center of a marriage, its full strength is possible to obtain.

4:13-16 **The Vanity of Nobility on Earth** – In Ecclesiastes 4:13-16 the Preacher comments on nobility and kingship. Even when it appears that a person has achieved a life of rest from toil by becoming a king, yet there is vanity his life also.

4:13 Better is a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished.

4:14 For out of prison he cometh to reign; whereas also he that is born in his kingdom becometh poor.

4:15 I considered all the living which walk under the sun, with the second child that shall stand up in his stead.

4:16 There is no end of all the people, even of all that have been before them: they also that come after shall not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and vexation of spirit.

5:1-7 **The Vanity of External Religion: Exhortation to Fear God** – Ecclesiastes 5:1-7 describes the man in pursuit of a plan. In one's busy schedule and haste to accomplish a multitude of tasks there come dreams in the night and rash vows to God. In these vows we want God to bless our own plans, when we, in fact, should wait before the Lord and hear His plans for our daily pursuits.

Illustration - I was considering making a vow one day by promising the Lord I would give my study notes free to everyone if he would bless my labours of working with my father to supply my financial needs. I quickly realized that I might be changing God's plan for my life. A man can set his own destiny by making a vow and detract from God's plan for his life. He must learn to enjoy his daily labours by resting in God's divine providence and intervention.

5:1 Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil.

5:1 *Comments* - As a manager of Lighthouse Television in Kampala, Uganda, when a marketing agent enters my office, I want them to come in, sit down and wait for me to lead the conversation. This is the only way that I can organize my daily tasks so that information can be digested and decisions made. When a marketing agent comes into my office at my request and begins to talk as he walks in the door, I ask him to please sit down and let me lead the conversation. I am not trying to be rude, but rather, I am trying to avoid allowing information to enter my office without order and control. For example, I may be on the telephone while someone is knocking at the door. I must have a way to organize the information that comes to me so that proper discussions are held and correct decisions are made. This cannot take place when I allow information to flow at random and with no order. The point is that there is an order in which to approach those in authority, and the order never involves walking in and doing all of the talking. It does involve being ready to sit down and listen.

5:2 Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.

5:2 **“Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God”** – *Comments* - We do not always make our vows to God, but we do always make them *before* God. In other words, any vow we make is heard by God.

5:2 **“therefore let thy words be few”** – *Comments* – Jesus teaches on the divine principle of letting one's words be few in prayer (Matt 6:7, Lk 18:11-14).

5:3 For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words.

5:3 “For a dream cometh through the multitude of business” – *Comments* – The Hebrew word (רַבָּעַ) means, “business, employment” (*Gesenius*), or “an affair” (*HALOT*). This word is used eight times in the Old Testament.

It has been my experience that when I busy myself with an activity during the course of the day or the week, I tend to think about it after work and get inspired ideas. This is how God created us. In contrast, a lazy person never has any creative ideas, because he has no goals to reach, no ambition. But for those who are diligent, their time of rest also becomes a time of meditation and inspiration. This is often how God guides us. For example, I once was dealing with an electrical problem with the rear taillights on an old pickup truck that I used as a part of my daily work. I had just painted this truck, which required me to remove and reinstall the truck bed. In doing so, I did not realize that I had pinched some electrical wires that went to the rear taillights. I searched until I found the pinched wires and repaired them, but the problem did not go away. One night I had a dream in which I saw a hand reach under the dashboard of the truck and pull out the fuse box. This hand turned the fuse box over to expose the back side and pointed to wires on the lower end of this box. The next morning, I went out to my truck, located this fuse box, looked in the same location that this hand was pointing, and to my complete surprise, I found two wires that had melted together as a result of the wires being pinched in the rear of the vehicle. Thus, my dream was stimulated by my busy efforts to fix this problem.

A day of busy activities and concerns brings on dreams in the night, which seem to have little meaning behind them. Likewise, much talking creates the voice of a fool at the end of the day. His much talking has little effect in its ability to correct the concerns of daily life.

5:4 When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed.

5:4 *Comments* - I will never forget the vow that I made to the Lord one night in church. The Lord had spoken to me while working with Jack Emerson in Panama City to build Him a house. I promised the Lord one night at Word of Faith Church in Dallas about 1992 that if He would give me a precious young virgin wife, filled with the Holy Spirit, that I would build Him “the largest house in the world.” Little did I dream that He would hold me to such a vow. Within 12 weeks of receiving my beautiful wife from the Philippines, He sent me to Africa to work in the largest ministry in the world, which is Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) television stations. This ministry contacts more people with the message of Jesus daily than any other ministry in the history of the Church. So, I have learned that God is faithful. So when someone asks me why I would go to Africa, I do not tell them about my vow, I just tell them that I want to be faithful to serve the Lord, but inside I know what the Lord is doing and why He sent me here.

5:5 Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.

5:6 Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?

5:6 “Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin” – *Comments* – We see a similar statement in James 1:26, “If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.”

5:6 “neither say thou before the angel” – *Comments* - We can interpret the phrase “neither say thou before the angel” by the previous verses that tell us not to enter the house of God and utter a vow hastily. Thus, the phrase “before the angel” can be equated to “in the house of God.” We know from testimonies of those believers who have seen in the spirit realm that God assigns His angels to watch over each church and sanctuary. Thus, when we make a vow in the sanctuary, we are actually speaking “before the angel” that has been assigned

there. This angel is assigned to bring this vow to pass, and we are not to speak against our vows to the Lord, as these angels are present with us as our ministers.

5:6 “that it (was) an error” – *Comments* - We are not to make excuses later and try to back out of our vows, as we see in Proverbs 20:25, “It is a snare to the man who devoureth that which is holy, and after vows to make enquiry.”

5:7 For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities: but fear thou God.

5:7 “For in the multitude of dreams” - *Comments* - The word “dream” in Ecclesiastes 5:7 seems to carry the idea of thoughts of vain pursuits. It reflects someone who is always coming up with vain ideas of what they intend to do. We see this idea in several modern English versions: *Rotherham*, “For it was done amidst a multitude of dreams, and vanities, and many words, but, towards God, be thou reverent.” *BBE*, “Because much talk comes from dreams and things of no purpose. But let the fear of God be in you.”

5:8-6:12 **The Vanity of Riches** - There are two dangers to having riches. The first is that riches can easily cause the heart to become covetous, which is discussed in Ecclesiastes 5:8-20. Man’s covetousness results in wealth being accumulated through wicked means. The second vice is that men tend to find no rest and contentment after having accumulated wealth. This negative aspect of riches is discussed in Ecclesiastes 6:1-12. When men gain wealth by honorable methods, he is still in danger of falling prey to discontentment and failing to enjoy the life that God intended him to enjoy.

Outline – Here is a proposed outline:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--------|
| 1. Riches and covetousness | 5:8-20 |
| 2. Riches without contentment | 6:1-12 |

5:8-20 **Riches and Covetousness** - We can entitle the theme of Ecclesiastes 5:8-20 as “Riches and Covetousness”. The more one toils, the more one is beset by those who deplete it. Even the powerful take the riches that are due the poor because of greed. Yet, when a person dies, he cannot take his possessions with him. God’s gift is to be content to enjoy the blessings that He has given to us. Note in chapter three, that God’s divine hand is involved in every event in life. God has a plan for each person, so that we can enjoy His daily blessings while being content in the midst of our situations in life, and thus, we learn to enjoy each day as we thank God for His blessings. Otherwise, we complain about what we do not yet have and are prone to covet that which belongs to our neighbour.

5:8 If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for he that is higher than the highest regardeth; and there be higher than they.

5:9 Moreover the profit of the earth is for all: the king himself is served by the field.

5:9 “Moreover the profit of the earth is for all” - *Comments* - When the land yields its abundance of resources, it is not for the king along, but for all to enjoy. Too often the powerful rob these resources from the poor, who bring in the harvest.

5:9 “the king himself is served by the field” - *Comments* - How is the king served by the field? Through the principles of economics, taxes eventually make their way into the hands of the king. From the laborer all the way up to the king, every person in a society experiences the blessings from the field.

Note that everything that you see around you, buildings, cars, furniture, even our physical bodies, comes from the ground. These minerals are the building blocks of materials and even life.

5:10 He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity.

5:10 *Comments* - Kenneth Copeland said, “When fear comes in, money becomes the root of all evil.”⁴³ In other words, the love for money is an act of fear, of being afraid that God will not provide for His children, and this leads to covetousness and greed. But when the motive of love comes into one’s heart, then money becomes the supply of God’s provision. Creflo Dollar said, “The love of money is having the wrong relationships with the things of this world.”⁴⁴

The apostle Paul makes a similar statement in 1 Timothy 6:10, “For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”

5:11 When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes?

5:11 *Comments* – The preacher makes a similar statement in Ecclesiastes 4:4, “Again, I considered all travail, and every right work, *that for this a man is envied of his neighbour.* This is also vanity and vexation of spirit.”

5:12 The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep.

5:12 *Comments* – King Solomon was a person of much activity and labor. He built more buildings and expanded the kingdom more than any other king of Israel. He probably spent many sleepless nights toiling over activities, while he noticed his servants and those who did the labor sleeping peacefully.

I have worked hard and labouring in jobs for years. Each night that I laid down to sleep, I found it sweet and restful, without stress. As I have grown older and moved into management and little physical labour, I have experienced more stress and my sleep is not as deep and restful. Instead of sleeping through the night, I often wake up. Material riches increase stress over the cares of this world, and also affects a person’s sleep. Thus, Ecclesiastes 5:12 tells us that exercise is good to relieve stress and improve our ability to sleep at night.

5:13 There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt.

5:14 But those riches perish by evil travail: and he begetteth a son, and there is nothing in his hand.

5:15 As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand.

5:15 “As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came” – *Comments* – The divine principle of man’s mortality is seen in him being born into this world and leaving. This principle is mentioned in Job 1:21, “And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” Psalm 49:17, “For when he dieth he shall

⁴³Kenneth Copeland, *Believer's Voice of Victory* (Kenneth Copeland Ministries, Fort Worth, Texas), on Trinity Broadcasting Network (Santa Ana, California), television program.

⁴⁴Creflo Dollar, “Sermon” (Fort Worth, Texas: Kenneth Copeland’s Southwest Believer’s Conference), 7 August 2007.

carry nothing away: his glory shall not descend after him.” 1 Timothy 6:7, “For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.”

5:16 And this also is a sore evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go: and what profit hath he that hath laboured for the wind?

5:17 All his days also he eateth in darkness, and he hath much sorrow and wrath with his sickness.

5:18 Behold that which I have seen: it is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for it is his portion.

5:19 Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God.

5:19 “and to take his portion” – *Comments* - The phrase “and to take his portion” refers to the need to find balance in our lives. We should not get into excess in any one area of life. If we have a hobby collecting things, we do not have to collect them all, for this vexes our souls to strive to get them all. We are to learn to enjoy the portion we have today.

5:20 For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answereth him in the joy of his heart.

5:18-20 *Comments* – The Preacher reaches the same conclusion for both the labourer and the wealthy, for the rich and the poor in Ecclesiastes 5:18-20. They are to enjoy the fruit of their work. They are not to be lazy (4:5), but neither should they overwork (4:8).

6:1-12 **Riches Without Contentment** – There are two dangers to having riches. The first is that riches can easily cause the heart to become covetous, which is discussed in Ecclesiastes 5:8-20. Man’s covetousness results in wealth being accumulated through wicked means. The second vice is that men tend to find no rest and contentment after having accumulated wealth. This negative aspect of riches is discussed in Ecclesiastes 6:1-12. When men gain wealth by honorable methods, he is still in danger of falling prey to discontentment and failing to enjoy the life that God intended him to enjoy.

6:1 There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men:

6:2 A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honour, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it: this is vanity, and it is an evil disease.

6:3 If a man beget an hundred children, and live many years, so that the days of his years be many, and his soul be not filled with good, and also that he have no burial; I say, that an untimely birth is better than he.

6:3 *Comments* - Many societies believe that having many children gives him a purpose and elevates him in society. I read in the newspaper of one man’s pursuit of having one hundred children before his dies. In order to accomplish this goal in his religion of Islam, which limits a man to four wives, he had to divorce and re-marry many times in order to continue having children. Those who have tried to have many children through polygamy have perverted God’s original commandment to be fruitful and multiply.

6:4 For he cometh in with vanity, and departeth in darkness, and his name shall be covered with darkness.

6:5 Moreover he hath not seen the sun, nor known any thing: this hath more rest than the other.

6:6 Yea, though he live a thousand years twice told, yet hath he seen no good: do not all go to one place?

6:7 All the labour of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled.

6:8 For what hath the wise more than the fool? what hath the poor, that knoweth to walk before the living?

6:9 Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire: this is also vanity and vexation of spirit.

6:9 “Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire” – *Comments* - It is better to be happy and contented with what one actually possesses, than to be dissatisfied because of a desire for things that cannot be quickly obtained.

6:10 “this is also vanity and vexation of spirit” – *Comments* - Man’s desire for more is a vain, worthless pursuit that vexes and oppresses his spirit.

6:10 That which hath been is named already, and it is known that it is man: neither may he contend with him that is mightier than he.

6:11 Seeing there be many things that increase vanity, what is man the better?

6:12 For who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow? for who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?

7:1-11:8 **Indoctrination: Practical Wisdom to Fear God** – In Ecclesiastes 7:1-11:8 the Preacher gives illustrations of practical wisdom or doctrine on how to fear God in this life. In other words, these proverbs give us wisdom on how to bring our lives into God’s divine plan that we were created to pursue.⁴⁵ Much of this passage is delivered as a collection of proverbs, or short, pithy sayings, that summarize wisdom and is very similar to the book of Proverbs in structure. However, I believe that these particular set of Proverbs are designed to guide us into finding the answers for how to serve the Lord with all of our strength.

Why is this section the longest one in the book of Ecclesiastes? Perhaps the reason lies in the fact that the underlying theme of the book is the keeping of God’s commandments in the fear of the Lord. Thus, the Preacher takes the time to list these commandments. In a similar way, the longest section in the book of Proverbs is wisdom’s call (Prov 1-9), since man’s daily walk in wisdom requires him to constantly recognize and hear wisdom’s call in order to make the right decisions each day.

Outline – Here are a number of topics discussed in this section:

Wisdom Seen in Being Sober-minded	7:1-6
Wisdom’s Ability to Protect	7:11-12
Wisdom Found in Recognizing God’s Hand in Daily Life	7:13-14
Wisdom Found in Moderation	7:15-18
Wisdom Found in Ignoring What Others Say About You	7:21-22
The Preacher’s Pursuit of Wisdom	7:23-25
The Tongue of the Wise and the Fool	10:11-14
The Principles of Sowing and Reaping	11:1-6
A Reminder of the Vanities of Life	11:7-8

⁴⁵In a similar statement, Walter Kaiser describes the central idea of Ecclesiastes 6:1-8:15 as “This plan must be explained and applied.” See Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament: A Guide for the Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2003), 93, Logos.

7:1-6 Wisdom Seen in Being Sober-minded – In light of the Preacher’s discourse on man’s depravity (5:18-6:12), Ecclesiastes 7:1-6 places emphasis upon the wisdom that is found in being sober minded in the sense that the reality of death and sorrow in this world should affect a person’s views of life around him. It is only the fool who ignores reality and makes his priority the entertainment of his soul. We find these two attitudes contrasted in Isaiah 22:12-13.

Isaiah 22:12-13, “And in that day did the Lord GOD of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth: And behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen, and killing sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine: let us eat and drink; for to morrow we shall die.”

In the midst of man’s depravity we should mourn and find repentance rather than ignoring sin and pursuing pleasure. A person who has lived many years and experienced many things tends to be more sober minded, because he has seen and experienced the realities of man’s sorrows. In contrast, the young and inexperienced tend to look at life as an opportunity to find entertainment and adventure, being more carefree and careless. Both attitudes face the mortality of a man’s soul, but prepare for it from two different ways; for the wise man prepares himself to meet his Maker, while the fool continues in his sin until death comes.

7:1 A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth.

7:1 “A good name is better than precious ointment” – *Comments* - A person’s reputation is of much greater value than earthly things, such as expensive oil. We see an example of such expensive oil when “a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious” broke it and anointed Jesus’ feet (Mk 14:3).

7:1 “and the day of death than the day of one's birth” – *Comments* - A newborn baby has laid before him a life of trials and trouble, and his journey and end no one can foresee. However, him that is dead is at rest from the troubles of this world. Thus, this phrase in Ecclesiastes 7:1 takes an earthly perspective of life.

7:2 It is 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 lay it to his heart.

7:3 Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.

7:3 *Comments* - When Menchu was in high school and college, there were many merry times laughing with her friends. Laughing and joking were a daily part of the activity of the “campus girls”. However, marriage came, and Menchu found herself in the mission fields of Africa within a few months of leaving her friends in the Philippines. Gone were the giggles and laughter with her friends. Now came times of missing her friends, finding herself in a new world where few people could be trusted. However, with this sorrow came understanding, a new insight into life. She began to see the world as God sees the world. She began to sacrifice her feelings and her life to serve others, rather than enjoying her own desires. Her heart felt the satisfaction that only comes from serving the Lord.

7:4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

7:5 It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools.

7:5 *Comments* - A rebuke is more difficult to receive than a merry song; however, the reality is that a rebuke does much more good in the long run.

7:6 For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool: this also is vanity.

7:6 *Comments* - If a person has ever made a fire using solid, dense wood, he knows how slowly and quietly it burns while producing much heat to warm the soul. When a fire is made from light woods, such as the thorny plants, we are disappointed when the fire burns quickly and produces little heat. Yes, it makes a lot of crackling noise as this light wood burns, and its sound implies a warm fire, but the reality is that its fire is weak and short lived. Thus, the Preacher compares the laughter of the fool to the fire that provides very little warmth. He sounds like a person who is walking in victory, but the reality is he cannot help himself, much less others. However, it may refer to the aspect of an irritating noise that is produced by both crackling fire and a fool's laughter.

7:7 Surely oppression maketh a wise man mad; and a gift destroyeth the heart.

7:8 **Wisdom Seen in Patience** – Ecclesiastes 7:8-9 places emphasis upon the virtue of patience.

7:8 Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.

7:9 Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools.

7:9 **“for anger resteth in the bosom of fools”** – *Comments* - The Hebrew word (נִיחָה) means, “to rest, settle down,” and carries a wide variety of applications, “dwell, stay, let fall, place, let alone, withdraw, give comfort, etc.” (*Strong*). This verb implies that a fool will allow anger to settle down and remain in his heart. He allows carnal thoughts to keep this anger kindles. He is not able to lay aside an issue and forget it. Everyone feels angry, but a righteous man will soon lay aside his anger. It is a fool who will cling to his anger.

Illustration - I was getting ready to enter a courtroom one day to deal with a business lawsuit and the Lord quickened to me Ecclesiastes 7:9 (June 15, 2001). I knew that I was in court because the opposing party lacked control over his anger.

7:10 Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not enquire wisely concerning this.

7:11-12 **Wisdom's Ability to Protect** – Ecclesiastes 7:11-12 places emphasis upon wisdom's ability to protect those who live by its rules.

7:11 Wisdom is good with an inheritance: and by it there is profit to them that see the sun.

7:12 For wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence: but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it.

7:13-14 **Wisdom Found in Recognizing God's Hand in Daily Life** – Ecclesiastes 7:13-14 places emphasis upon the wisdom that one finds in recognizing God's hand at work in our daily lives.

7:13 Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked?

7:13 *Comments* – The psalmist tells us in Psalm 146:9 that the Lord makes the way of the wicked crooked. In other words, God oversees the activities of the wicked to ensure that their plans come to nothing. While He watches over the stranger, the orphan, and the widow for good (Ps 146:9), He also watches over the wicked so that they do not prosper in their evil deeds. The Lord bends or makes their path crooked (תוּעַ) in the sense that He changes the outcome. Thus, the plans of the wicked fail. The Preacher uses this same Hebrew word in relation to God's divine intervention in the affairs of men in Ecclesiastes 7:13, “Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight, *which he hath made crooked?*” When men plan a certain outcome, God changes the outcome, and man is unable to prevent this change.

7:14 In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him.

7:15-18 **Wisdom Found in Moderation** – Ecclesiastes 7:15-18 places emphasis upon the wisdom that is found in living a life of moderation.

7:15 All things have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his wickedness.

7:16 Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself?

7:17 Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time?

7:18 It is good that thou shouldest take hold of this; yea, also from this withdraw not thine hand: for he that feareth God shall come forth of them all.

7:19 Wisdom strengtheneth the wise more than ten mighty men which are in the city.

7:20 For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.

7:21-22 **Wisdom Found in Ignoring What Others Say About You** – Ecclesiastes 7:21-22 places emphasis upon the found in being able to ignore those who are speaking negative words around us.

7:21 Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee:

7:22 For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others.

7:23-25 **The Preacher's Pursuit of Wisdom** – In Ecclesiastes 7:23-25 we are given a description of the Preacher's pursuit of wisdom. Although he found wisdom, he also discovered the difficulty of applying it to his life. This reveals man's sinful nature in this life, and reflects the Preacher's cry for redemption from his own vanity.

7:23 All this have I proved by wisdom: I said, I will be wise; but it was far from me.

7:24 That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out?

7:25 I applied mine heart to know, and to search, and to seek out wisdom, and the reason of things, and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness:

7:26 And I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her.

7:27 Behold, this have I found, saith the preacher, counting one by one, to find out the account:

7:28 Which yet my soul seeketh, but I find not: one man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found.

7:29 Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.

8:1 Who is as the wise man? and who knoweth the interpretation of a thing? a man's wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the boldness of his face shall be changed.

8:2 I counsel thee to keep the king's commandment, and that in regard of the oath of God.

8:3 Be not hasty to go out of his sight: stand not in an evil thing; for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him.

8:4 Where the word of a king is, there is power: and who may say unto him, What doest thou?

8:5 Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing: and a wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment.

8:5 *Comments* – God guides men’s lives by leading them through times and seasons, as we read in Ecclesiastes 3:1, “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” The preacher now says in Ecclesiastes 8:5 that those who keep God’s commandments are guided by them into divine times and seasons. A righteous man will know the times of change coming in his life and he will discern or judge the particular seasons in which God has brought him. This divine path leads a man out from troubles, as we see in the life of Job. The Lord put a hedge of protection about him so that he prospered in every area of his life, as we read in Job 1:10, “Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land.”

8:6 Because to every purpose there is time and judgment, therefore the misery of man is great upon him.

8:6 *Comments* – Each man’s destiny is fulfilled by following God’s divine timetables, which the preacher describes as times and seasons. Because divine blessings are given to those who walk in God’s times and seasons through obedience to Him, misery awaits those who fail to follow their own divinely planned path. Many people die with the feeling of regret because they did not follow the divine timetable for their lives. They labored and toiled for earthly possessions, but this did not bring them peace and fulfillment.

8:7 For he knoweth not that which shall be: for who can tell him when it shall be?

8:7 *Comments* – The natural man cannot find his divine timetables. They are orchestrated by God, who reveals them to those who obey Him.

8:8 There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it.

8:8 *Comments* – Having said that man cannot direct his own ways (Eccl 8:7), the preacher illustrates this divine truth with the example that man cannot overcome his own mortality. He must succumb to death. Just as a man cannot discharge himself from the military during the time of war, neither can he deliver himself from death and judgment when he practices evil.

8:9 All this have I seen, and applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun: there is a time wherein one man ruleth over another to his own hurt.

8:9 *Comments* – When a man walks outside of his divine timetable, he walks by his own sense of reason. He may rise to power, but his leadership over men is untimely causing hurt rather than blessings. It is better to be poor and walking in God’s divine plan for one’s life than rich and powerful and out of God’s will through disobedience. Such a person is blind and dull and will only use those resources under him to bring harm.

8:10 And so I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done: this is also vanity.

8:10 *Comments* – The wicked disobey God’s commands, and find themselves out of God’s divine will and purpose for their lives. They do not fulfill their God-given destinies. So, at the time of their death, there is no contribution to society that justifies remembrance of a life of selfish sin.

8:11 Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

8:11 *Comments* - Because Christians are not judged quickly in their sins, their love towards God grows cold as they set themselves to continue in sin. The apostle Paul tell us to judge ourselves, lest this happen to us, saying, “For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.” (1 Cor 11:31-32).

8:12 Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him:

8:13 But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God.

8:14 There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous: I said that this also is vanity.

8:15 Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun.

8:16 When I applied mine heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth: (for also there is that neither day nor night seeth sleep with his eyes:)

8:17 Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labour to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yea further; though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it.

9:1 For all this I considered in my heart even to declare all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them.

9:2 All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath.

9:3 This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

9:4 For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion.

9:5 For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten.

9:6 Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun.

9:7 Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works.

9:8 Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment.

9:9 Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun.

9:10 Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.

9:11 I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.

9:11 *Comments* – The Hebrew word (צִדְדָּה) means, “an incident, event, chance” (*Gesenius*) or, “impact” (*Strong*), being derived from the primitive root (צָדַד), “to impinge, by accident or violence, or by opportunity” (*Strong*). This word used only two times in the Old Testament.

The victory does not always come to those with the greatest physical ability, which is referred to as “swift and strong.” Nor does victory come to those of the greatest mental abilities, which is referred to as “wisdom, understanding and skill” in this verse. But because man lives within the realm of time and space, his life is affected by time and chance. Since the Hebrew word “chance” comes from a verb that means, “to encounter,” it refers to the realm of space.

As we look back to Ecclesiastes 3:1-15 we see how the Preacher equates time and seasons to divine providence. So, when the author says that time and chance happen to us all, he is mindful that time and chance are being influenced by God. The Preacher is speaking from an earthly perspective in order to help the reader understand the vanities of this temporal life.

9:12 For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them.

9:13 This wisdom have I seen also under the sun, and it seemed great unto me:

9:14 There was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it:

9:15 Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man.

9:16 Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength: nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard.

9:17 The words of wise men are heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools.

9:18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war: but one sinner destroyeth much good.

9:18 **“Wisdom is better than weapons of war”** – *Comments* – This divine principle is illustrated in the story of the wise woman who saved her city from destruction by negotiating with the adversary in 2 Samuel 20:16-22. We read a similar illustration in Ecclesiastes 9:15, “Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man.”

9:18 “but one sinner destroyeth much good” – *Comments* - Marietta Davis writes, “Sin added to sin enlarges its capacity and increases its advancement, until families, tribes, and nations are themselves to do battle on its behalf.”⁴⁶

10:1 **Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour.**

10:1 *Comments* - Adam and Eve did many good things, but they have always been known for their one folly, the sin in the Garden of Eden of eating the forbidden fruit.

10:2 **A wise man's heart is at his right hand; but a fool's heart at his left.**

10:2 *Comments* - A man is normally very skilled and accurate with his right hand. Thus, a wise man is skillful in using his heart to discern wisdom. In contrast, a man is normally more clumsy with his left hand. Thus, a fool is clumsy in using his heart to discern wisdom because he is in the habit of using his fleshly desires, his emotions and his reason to make decisions.

10:3 **Yea also, when he that is a fool walketh by the way, his wisdom faileth him, and he saith to every one that he is a fool.**

10:3 *Comments* - A fool demonstrates his lack of wisdom by how he makes choices in his daily life. A wise man can see a fool's clumsiness and inability to make wise decisions.

10:4 **If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place; for yielding pacifieth great offences.**

10:5 **There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, as an error which proceedeth from the ruler:**

10:6 **Folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in low place.**

10:7 **I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth.**

10:8 **He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him.**

10:9 **Whoso removeth stones shall be hurt therewith; and he that cleaveth wood shall be endangered thereby.**

10:10 **If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength: but wisdom is profitable to direct.**

10:10 *Comments* – In Ecclesiastes 10:10, the Hebrew noun (פֶּה) (face) is translated “edge.” Just as a man’s face reveals his true character, so does the edge of a sword reveals its character.

Wisdom sharpens our senses to discern between right and wrong choices, thus, making life easier to deal with.

Illustration - Many times while working at a task, we do not have ideal circumstances in which to work. We do not always have the best tools or the right weather. We may not be feeling up to par, etc., but the task can be done more efficiently if we will just use a little wisdom (Jam 1:5).

10:11-14 **The Tongue of the Wise and the Fool** – Ecclesiastes 10:11-14 deals with man’s tongue. Ecclesiastes 10:12-13 is a wonderful illustration of James 3:5-6. The tongue of the foolish kept on until it ended up causing mischief by the fool.

⁴⁶Marietta Davis, *Caught Up Into Heaven* (New Kensington, Pennsylvania: Whitaker House, 1982), 88.

James 3:5-6, "Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell."

10:11 Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment; and a babbler is no better.

10:12 The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious; but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself.

10:13 The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness: and the end of his talk is mischievous madness.

10:14 A fool also is full of words: a man cannot tell what shall be; and what shall be after him, who can tell him?

10:15 The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city.

10:16 Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning!

10:17 Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness!

10:18 By much slothfulness the building decayeth; and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through.

10:18 *Comments* - Ecclesiastes 10:18 can apply to the growth of the building or church of Jesus. Much slothfulness in God's kingdom leads to decay and ruin, as we read in Proverbs 24:3, "Through wisdom is an house builded; and by understanding it is established:"

Illustration - Having served as a maintenance supervisor and construction manager, I have seen how quickly a piece of real estate can decay and fall into ruin. It takes constant care to maintain a piece of property, as we read in Proverbs 24:30-34, "I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth; and thy want as an armed man."

10:19 A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry: but money answereth all things.

10:19 *Comments* - The interpretation of Ecclesiastes 10:19 is within the context of this earthly life, rather than spiritual truths. Thus, we can interpret this verse to say, "A feast is used to bring laughter into our lives, and wine is used to make one merry, but money is used to bring us all earthly desires." In other words, money is the answer to anything in this life related to bringing joy and pleasure to men.

10:20 Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter.

10:20 *Comments* - How often we say things about people that we should not be discussing. Many times those spoken words make their way to those people's ears to which we spoke evil of.

Ecclesiastes 10:20 could be a reference to the ability of demon spirits to hear what we say, and then make plans to cause a hindrance to our plans. A demon is able to take a thought that we said and put it into someone's mind.

This verse may also refer to the fact that a man's countenance gives away his thoughts. The wings of a bird fly upon the wind; and the wind is figurative of man's spirit. A man's thoughts are carried upon the winds of his thoughts and exposed to the king. For example, we cannot hid our feelings towards other very easily; for our body language, our words, and our countenance expose out inner feelings.

However, it is more likely to refer to the fact that the king has the divine gift to discern the heart of those under him in order to rule them effectively; this gift being given by God. Thus, our thoughts are communicated to a leader over us in the spirit realm. A good example of this is found in the testimonies of those who have visited heaven and saw how easy it is to know one another's thoughts in that heavenly realm. How often has a husband and wife understood the thoughts of the other, since they are spiritually joined. We are spiritually placed under authorities on earth. The Lord can reveal to a leader the thoughts and mind of his people. In addition, under the new covenant we are priests and kings unto the Lord. The bird symbolizes the Holy Spirit, and the king represents God's servants. Those who speak evil of God's leaders can be exposed by the Spirit of God.

11:1-6

The Principles of Sowing and Reaping – The Preacher began his sermon in Ecclesiastes 1:1-2 by asking the rhetorical question, “Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?” Throughout this book, the Preacher will begin to answer this question. Ecclesiastes 11:6 teaches us one thing we can do to overcome the vanities of this life, which is to sow. This passage of Scripture motivates us to give by teaching God's divine laws of sowing and reaping.

Outline – Here is a proposed outline:

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|--|--------|
| 1. Give with Patience | 11:1 |
| 2. Give Bountifully | 11:2 |
| 3. The Certainty of Giving and Receiving: A Divine Law | 11:3 |
| 4. Giving in Faith | 11:4-5 |
| 5. Give Continually | 11:6 |

11:1

Give with Patience - The passage in Ecclesiastes 11:1-6 gives us principles of sowing and reaping. Ecclesiastes 11:1 teaches us to give and be willing to wait patiently for the harvest. We are to always be willing to spread God's Word and to help others, trusting that somehow, someday, God will return upon us His blessings. Whether we cast our bread upon calm waters or turbulent floodwaters, we must trust that God's Word will not return void (Is 55:10-11).

Isaiah 55:10-11, “For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.”

Somehow, by God's marvelous design, we will receive God's blessings and go forth rejoicing (Is 55:12-13).

Isaiah 55:12-13, “For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”

We are not called to understand all of God's ways, but we are called to follow Him, by looking to Him each day as our Provider.

11:1 Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.

11:1 **“Cast thy bread upon the waters” – Comments** – The prophet Isaiah makes a similar statement in Isaiah 32:20, “Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters, that send forth thither the feet of the ox and the ass.”

11:1 **“for thou shalt find it after many days” – Comments** - Compare this phrase to the phrase “in due season” in Galatians 6:9, “And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.” The preacher explains that there are seasons in life, saying, “*To every thing there is a season*, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:” (Eccl 3:1). Reaping does not always come immediately; rather, it comes at a certain time, which could be sooner or later. It always in time to meet our needs.

11:1 **Comments** – We can cast our bread upon the waters by giving to orphans, widows and strangers, as we read in Deuteronomy 10:18, “He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment.” We can giving to poor and God will repay us (Deut 15:10, Prov 19:17; 22:9; 28:27). We can support those in the ministry of the Gospel, as Paul says in Galatians 6:6, “Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things.” The apostle John says in 3 John 1:8, “We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellowhelpers to the truth.” Finally, we can do good to all men, especially to the saints, as we read in Galatians 6:10, “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.”

11:2 **Give Bountifully** - The passage in Ecclesiastes 11:1-6 gives us principles of sowing and reaping. Ecclesiastes 11:2 teaches us to give bountifully, for we do not know what may befall us. If we continually sow in faith we position ourselves to receive during evil times. Since we have sown bountifully we are qualified to reap bountifully.

Numerical Proverbs - Ecclesiastes 11:2 is a numerical proverb. We find this style of numerical collections also used in Job 5:19, Job 33:14, Proverbs 6:16, Proverbs 30 and Amos 2 and 3. Scholars believe that this phrase means that the list is not exhaustive.

11:2 Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.

11:2 **“Give a portion to seven, and also to eight” – Comments** - In other words, we are to sow bountifully, not sparingly, as the apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 9:6, “But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.”

11:2 **“for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth” - Comments** – The day of evil or trouble may come upon us all, as Jesus say sin Luke 16:9, “And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.”

11:2 **Comments** – Ecclesiastes 11:2 offers the principle of diversification when investing, as we read in the *NIV*, “Invest in seven ventures, yes, in eight; you do not know what disaster may come upon the land.”

11:3 **The Certainty of Giving and Receiving: A Divine Law** - The passage in Ecclesiastes 11:1-6 gives us principles of sowing and reaping. Ecclesiastes 11:3 teaches us about the certainty of giving. In order to make this point the Preacher uses two illustrations from nature. The divine principles of sowing and reaping are as certain and sure to take place as the events in nature. These illustrations tell us that certain events are sure to follow others in

the natural realm. Rain is certain to come with rain clouds. A tree is certain to lie in place once it falls, wherever it may be. Likewise, reaping is certain to follow sowing in the spiritual realm (Gal 6:7).

Galatians 6:7, “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”

11:3 If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth: and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be.

11:4-5 **Giving in Faith** - The passage in Ecclesiastes 11:1-6 gives us principles of sowing and reaping. Ecclesiastes 11:4-5 tells us to not consider our circumstances when sowing. We are to sow in all seasons at all times. We are to be instant or ready, in season, out of season, when we feel ready to work and when we do not feel ready.

2 Timothy 4:2, “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.”

Sowing is an act of faith. Ecclesiastes 11:4-5 tells us that if we wait for the right conditions to sow, we will never sow in faith because our senses will always tell us that the conditions are not right. Our senses will never approval of our sowing. But as children of God we walk by faith, not by sight, from 11:4, (see 2 Cor 5:7), trusting that God is able to make all grace abound toward you (see 2 Cor 9:8), from 11:5. Many times giving has to be done by faith, even out of poverty, so it can be difficult sometimes to make that decision to sow. This is when our faith in God as our Provider has to prevail over our senses, which is always moved by circumstances.

2 Corinthians 5:7, “(For we walk by faith, not by sight:)”

2 Corinthians 9:8, “And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:”

11:4 He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.

11:4 *Comments* - The wind and the clouds symbolic the many circumstances in this life that encompass us as we make decisions to serve the Lord and fulfill His plan in our lies.

Illustration - While working as a carpenter doing construction, many mornings were overcast, and there was always that hope of getting enough rain to call off the entire work day, but without fail, we always showed up at work and were not easily dismissed for rain, unless long, hard showers persisted. I have gone to work many mornings with a cloud of adverse weather hanging in the sky. Many times, these clouds would eventually dissipate into a beautiful day.

11:5 As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all.

11:5 “As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit” - *Comments* - This illustration of the wind helps explain John 3:8, “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”

11:5 “even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all” - *Comments* - Note a similar verse in Isaiah 55:8-9, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

11:5 *Comments* - Because we do not understand God's ways, we do not always know and understand why God leads us to do such and such things and to sow in such manners. Thus, within the context of Ecclesiastes 11:1-6 about sowing and reaping we interpret 11:5 to mean that we do not have to understand how God is going to bring us our harvest. Our job is to sow in faith believing that God will certainly bring us a reward for our sowing.

Also, Ecclesiastes 11:5 teaches us that the mystery of the forming of a child in the womb testifies to us that God's ways are beyond our understanding.

11:6 **Give Continually** - Ecclesiastes 11:1-6 gives us principles of sowing and reaping. Ecclesiastes 11:4-5 teaches us to sow continually. Note the parable of the sower (See Mk 4:1-20). Some seed had no success, some did for a short time, then failed and some produced fruit at different amounts. We cannot always tell how much impact our witnessing and good works will have in the kingdom of God. We may lead a great preacher to Jesus, or change a nation, etc.

11:6 In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.

11:6 **“In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand”** - *Comments* - In the context of this passage, we are to sow at all times when the opportunity arises.

In the field of agricultural, farmers know that it is best to water in the morning or the evening, when the sun is not so hot as to scorch plants.

11:7-8 **A Reminder of the Vanities of Life** – In between the Preacher's proclamation of things man must do to overcome the vanities of life he interjects a sober reminder of why we must heed his advice. Ecclesiastes 11:7-8 tells us again that everything in this life is vanity.

11:7 Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun:

11:8 But if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity.

11:9-12:7 **Perseverance: Warning to the Youth to Fear God** - In Ecclesiastes 11:9-12:7 the Preacher tells young people to enjoy their days of youthfulness, but to balance their lives by remembering the coming Day of Judgment. The Preacher began his sermon in Ecclesiastes 1:1-2 by asking the rhetorical question, “Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?” Throughout this book, he attempts to answer this opening question. Remember that the book of Ecclesiastes tells us the vanity of our physical labors and of our earthly possessions. It is structured in a way that teaches us how to take our physical journey through this life, from youth to old age. A young person tends to find life adventurous and exciting. He spends much effort in exploring and achieving new feats. However, the Preacher knows how vain these youthful adventures can be because he has pursued them himself. Since he was once a youth, he knows how much more difficult a youth has in seeing the vanities of life. It is only with wisdom and age that anyone can see the vanities of man's fleshly pursuits. The focus upon youth and old age in 12:1-12:7 reflects the theme of Ecclesiastes, which is to serve the Lord with all of our strength. The Preacher could have addressed a number of people in society, but he spoke directly to the youth because once they miss this truth in their early years, their life is too far spent to correct this grave error. If the youth miss their destiny when they are young due to vain pursuits, it is much harder to find fulfillment when they are old and willing to be used by God to fulfill their destinies. We must start early in life in order to fulfill God's plan for our lives. Although God blesses the righteous even in old age, God does not bring the old man into this divine journey after a lifetime of selfish pursuits.

11:9 Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.

11:9 *Comments* - Youth is a time when the senses are sharp and keen, the body is strong, and enjoyment is easy to achieve. The Preacher is telling the youth to cheer himself during these days, but cautions him to remember the ways of the Lord as he cheers himself.

Also embedded within this verse is the message that God has placed within every person certain interests and desires. We are all uniquely made with different interests. These have been planted within us as a seed towards our divine destiny. We are to follow our heart and walk by what we see, because this is how we stay on the path of our destiny. However, we must remember that God will bring us into judgment for having missed our destiny for what we were created.

11:10 Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity.

11:10 *Comments* – The Lord did not create mankind to live in sorrow and in sin, for sorrow is the byproduct of sin. These events hinder one’s ability to recognize the times and seasons of one’s life. God endeavours to work in the lives of men and women while they are young and full of passion and energy. So in this sense, a person in sin and sorrow is unable to recognize God’s hand in his life and to obey Him, resulting in a life lived in vain while still young.

12:1 Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them;

12:1 **“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth”** – *Comments* - The Scriptures refer to God as “thy Creator” in Ecclesiastes 12:1. Many names for God could have been chosen in this verse, such as “thy God,” or “the Almighty,” but none fit the need for describing God’s character better within this context than “thy Creator.” The description of God as one’s Creator implies that God directs the affairs of one’s life. He is the One who oversees His own creation, and He divinely intervenes in order to accomplish His purposes and plans. This reflects the theme of the book of Ecclesiastes, which is the fact that God gives mankind a purpose in life when he serves Him.

Statistics reveal that people are less prone to give their lives to Jesus as they grow older. The best time to give one’s life to Jesus is while we are young and easily obedient to the ways of God. An older person becomes set in his ways and more stubborn to change. If one serves sin while young, the Lord will be unable to guide that person into his divine destiny. For the aged person who does give his life to the Lord, he has missed God’s perfect will and plan and destiny. However, the Lord works in the life of the elderly to accomplish something good before he dies.

12:1 **“while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them”** – *Comments* – The Preacher uses the term “evil” (הָרָע) in the sense of difficult or painful. Within this context, it specifically refers to the difficulties of old age.

“nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them” - *Comments* – One characteristic of youth is their zeal to find some enjoyable activity each day. As a parent, I look forward to spending the day at home resting, but our children are trying to get us to take them out somewhere so that they can do something fun. Many old people lose the desire to live. They say that they want to die.

12:2 While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain:

- 12:2** “While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened” - *Comments* - This refers to the loss of sight that accompanies old age. The loss of keen eyesight is usually the first sign of the onset of old age.
- 12:2** “nor the clouds return after the rain” - *Comments* - This is figurative of depression or sadness. A long life can give a person many opportunities to remember the past and become depressed.
- 12:3** **In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened,**
- 12:3** “In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble” - *Comments* - The hands are what a person has used all of one's life to keep the house and do work. In old age, the hands began to tremble.
- 12:3** “and the strong men shall bow themselves” - *Comments* - Old age tends to cause one to bend or stoop. The “strong men” may refer to the two legs, or to the back.
- 12:3** “and the grinders cease because they are few” - *Comments* - This is a reference to the loss of teeth.
- 12:3** “and those that look out of the windows be darkened” - *Comments* - This is a reference to the two eyes.
- 12:4** **And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low;**
- 12:4** “And the doors shall be shut in the streets” - *Comments* - Old people seldom go out, but rather keep their doors shut.
- 12:4** “when the sound of the grinding is low” - *Comments* - This refers to slow or poor eating habits, and, because of tooth loss, they tend to eat soft foods. They eat less often because it is no longer a pleasure to them. This may refer to the loss of hearing.
- 12:4** “and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird” - *Comments* - Elderly people tend to get up early, sleep less, and are easily awakened.
- 12:4** “and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low” - *Comments* - This is a reference to the loss of hearing.
- 12:5** **Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets:**
- 12:5** “Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way” - *Comments* - Old people's depth of perception is poor, and therefore, they are subject to falling and injuring themselves. So they avoid climbing due to these cautions and fears.
- 12:5** “and the almond tree shall flourish” - *Comments* - The almond tree shall blossom. The almond blossom is white. This refers to white hair.
- 12:5** “and the grasshopper shall be a burden” - *Comments* - The little things in life are difficult to perform, and lifting is also a burden.
- 12:5** “and desire shall fail” - *Comments* - Elderly people lack a desire for an active life, for sex, for doing things and having interests.

12:5 “because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets” - *Comments* - This refers to a funeral.

12:6 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.

12:6 “the silver cord be loosed” - *Comments* - Billye Brim teaches that many people have visitations into heaven, or near death experiences, and even returning from death.⁴⁷ She says as long as the silver cord is not broken, they can get back to earth.

12:6 *Comments* - These are figures of speech for death. J. Vernon McGee suggests that the “silver cord” describes the spinal marrow, the “golden bowl” the basin which holds the brain, the “pitcher” the lungs, and the “wheel” the heart.⁴⁸ John Wesley says that the silver cord represents the spinal cord, which has a white color, and that the golden bowl the brain, which can have a yellowish appearance. Wesley goes on to interpret the pitcher and the wheel as the circulatory system, with the fountain figurative of the right ventricle of the heart, which is now acknowledged to be the spring of life. He says the pitcher would represent the veins, which convey the flow of blood to the body, and the cistern would be the left ventricle and the wheel the great artery.⁴⁹

12:7 Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

12:7 “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was” – *Comments* – The creation of man from the dust of the earth is mentioned in Genesis 2:7, “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 soul.”

These mortal bodies return to the dust according to Psalm 104:29, “Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust.” Job 34:14-15, “If he set his heart upon man, if he gather unto himself his spirit and his breath; All flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust.”

12:7 “and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it” – *Comments* - Jesse Duplantis saw little babies around the throne of God as if they were newly created by the “breath of God.”⁵⁰ Thus, our life originated from God, and it will return to God who gave it (Eccl 3:21; 8:8, Jam 2:26).

The preacher mentions the spirit of man at one’s death in Ecclesiastes 3:21, “Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?” Ecclesiastes 8:8, “There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it.”

James describes the separation of the spirit of man at the time of death in James 2:26, “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”

12:8-14 **Closing Remarks: Glorification** – The Preacher makes his closing remarks by restating his theme that all is vanity (12:8). He accepts his divine duty to continue to teach the people on this topic (12:9-12). In the final two verses (12:13-14) he summarizes the solution to life’s

⁴⁷Billye Brim, interviewed by Gloria Copeland, *Believer’s Voice of Victory* (Kenneth Copeland Ministries, Fort Worth, Texas), on Trinity Broadcasting Network (Santa Ana, California), television program.

⁴⁸J. Vernon McGee, “Ecclesiastes,” in *Thru the Bible With J. Vernon McGee*, vol. 3 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Pub., 1997), 139, Logos.

⁴⁹John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes on the Old Testament*, vol. 3, (Bristol, England: William Pine, 1765), 1923.

⁵⁰Jesse Duplantis, *Heaven Close Encounters of the God Kind* (Tulsa, Oklahoma: Harrison House, 1996), 119.

vanities with the commandment to fear God because He will judge us in the next life. Within the context of the third responsive theme of Ecclesiastes, we fear Him and keep His commandments by resting in Him as He divinely orchestrates our lives and moves us into His divine seasons. These divine seasons are our destiny, so that we fear God and keep His commandments by fulfilling our divine destinies.

I once heard vanity described this way: a man is born, goes to school, gets a job, finds a wife, raises a family, retires, then he dies. His children do the same. A man works hard all of his life to reach each new phase of life, but for what purpose? Life is vain without a divine purpose. The answer to this dilemma of life's vanities is found in the closing verses of this book, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." (Eccl 12:13)

Outline – Here is a proposed outline:

1. Repetition of Opening Statement 12:8-12
2. Final Conclusion 12:13-14

12:8-12 **Repetition of Opening Statement** – In Ecclesiastes 12:8 the Preacher repeats his opening statement recorded in 1:2-4. This time he adds the comment that his words will teach and guide the people through this life of vanity (12:9-12).

12:8 **Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity.**

12:8 *Comments* - The Preacher opened his book with the statement, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." After taking the entire book to support this statement, he ends his case by making the same statement in Ecclesiastes 12:8, "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity."

12:9 **And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs.**

12:10 **The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth.**

12:9-10 *Comments - Evidence that Solomon Sought Wisdom Outside of Israel* - Scholars consider Proverbs 22:16-24:34 to be collections of sayings that Solomon collected from other sources, and are called "the sayings of the wise." In fact, some of the proverbs in this passage are similar to an Egyptian writing entitled "The Instruction of Amenemope," written about 1200 to 1300 B.C.⁵¹ It is possible that an additional author can be given to this passage. The fact that King Solomon sought out other sources of wisdom literature is confirmed in Ecclesiastes 12:9-10, "And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs. The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth."

The phrase, "the words of the wise," is also used herein the context of King Solomon's quest for wisdom. Note Ecclesiastes 12:11, "The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd."

12:11 **The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd.**

⁵¹Miriam Lichtheim, *The Instruction of Amenemope*, in *Ancient Egyptian literature: Volume II: The New Kingdom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973-[80]), Logos.

12:12 And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.

12:13-14 **Conclusion** - We see the primary and secondary themes reflected in the concluding verses of Ecclesiastes. Its primary theme is how to serve the Lord with all of our strength. We do this by keeping His commandments. The secondary theme is to fear the Lord; for this is the necessary ingredient of the heart that motivates us to serve Him instead of ourselves.

For the king, as well as the labourer, life does not consist in the abundance of one's possessions or accomplishments. In the end, each man's life will be measured on Judgment Day by amount of fear and obedience that he showed towards God. All of the pursuits that the Preacher described in the early chapters of this sermon are vanity compared to a man's eternal destiny. The Preacher knows that every man will give an account of his life to God, as he states in Ecclesiastes 3:15, "That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past." Ecclesiastes 3:17, "I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work."

12:13 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.

12:13 **"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter"** – *Comments* - In light of the journey found in the book of Ecclesiastes to find rest, we may paraphrase Ecclesiastes 12:13 to read, "Let us understand the secret to finding rest for our souls." This is the path to finding purpose in life amidst a world of vanity and despair, the path that leads us to the end of the journey.

"and keep His commandments" – *Comments* - Jesus explained that all of the commandments could be summed up into two commandments, saying, "Matthew 22:36-40, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. *On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*"

"for this is the whole duty of man" - *Comments* – The clause "for this is the whole duty of man" literally reads "for this is all man." Most modern English versions insert the word "duty" in order to fill the implied thought of the author. However, we can translate it to read, "this is for every man." Either translation means that every man has the responsibility to obey the Lord. Obedient to God sums up the path of life for every human being.

12:13 *Comments* - We may say that the Preacher's conclusion in Ecclesiastes 12:13 to fear God and keep His commandments sounds too simplistic and vague for such a pursuit of the meaning of life. However, the secret to resting in God's arms is found in our daily walk with the Lord, not in our grand accomplishments. God designed our journey to be one of daily dependence upon Him for direction and guidance rather than Him giving us a clearly laid out plan to follow in the beginning of our lives. He designed our lives this way to that we would learn to have fellowship with Him on a regular basis. Thus, we must seek Him daily to find a fresh word from Him for each day in order to fulfill our earthly duties.

12:14 For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

12:14 *Comments* - If we do not follow God's leadership in our lives, and rather, opt to pursue some great earthly achievement, we will find our works being judged one day before His throne. Paul explains how every man's works shall be judged in 1 Corinthians 3:11-15, "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's

work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire."

APPENDIX 1: THEMATIC SCHEME OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Foreknowledge of God The Father		God's Plan of Redemption for the Nation of Israel		Israel's Theocracy	Gen 1:1-2:3—Predestination (The Creation Story)		
					Gen 2-11—The Calling of the Seventy Nations Gen 12-50—The Calling of Israel as a Nation		
Exodus—Deliverance (Justification) & Doctrine							
Leviticus—Divine Service							
Numbers—Perseverance: Persecutions							
Deuteronomy—Perseverance: False Doctrines							
Joshua-Judges—Israel's Glorification (Rest) & Failure							
Israel's Monarchy The Acts of God (Rom 15:1, 1 Cor 6: 11)	Serve the Lord with all thine heart, mind, and strength (Deut 6:4-6)	Ruth – Predestination of the Davidic Lineage					
		1 Samuel – Calling of the Davidic Lineage					
		2 Samuel – Justification of the Davidic Lineage					
		1-2 Kings – Doctrine of the Kingdom & Redemption in Davidic Lineage					
		1-2 Chronicles – Divine Service of Israel & Redemption in Davidic Lineage					
		Ezra – Perseverance of Israel (Persecution)					
		Nehemiah – Perseverance of the Israel (False Doctrine)					
		Esther – Glorification of the Davidic Lineage					
Poetry of Israel The Heart of God	The Mind of God	Proverbs – The Mind	Job – Our Example				
		Ecclesiastes – The Body	Lamentations – Our Example				
		Songs – The Heart	Psalms – Our Example				
Prophecy of Israel The Mind of God (1 Pet 1:10-11)	Daniel The Times of the Gentiles	Isaiah – Jesus' Role in Israel's Redemption	Hosea, Amos, Jonah, Micah				
		Jeremiah – The Father's Role in Israel's Redemption	Nahum, Zephaniah, Obadiah, Habakkuk				
		Ezekiel– The Spirit's Role in Israel's Redemption	Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Joel				

APPENDIX 2: THEMATIC SCHEME OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew – Testimony of Scripture	Ephesians – His Role	Philippians - Our Role	Colossians -- His Role	Galatians -- Our Role	1 & 2 Thessalonians --- His Role	1 & 2 Corinthians --- Our Role	1 & 2 Timothy – Role of Our Spirit	Titus – Role of Our Mind	Philemon - Role of Our Body	Hebrew – The High Priesthood of Jesus Christ	James – Our Sanctification by the Holy Spirit	1 Peter – Our Divine Election by God the Father	2 Peter - Mind	1, 2, 3 John - Spirit	Jude - Body	The Book of Revelation										
																	Foreknowledge of the Father	Justification Thru Jesus Christ	Sanctification by Holy Spirit	Romans - Justification thru God the Father (Rom. 8:28-30)	Pastoral Epistles - Church Order & Discipline	Persecutions From Without (1 Pet. 1:2)	False Doctrines From Within	Glorification of the Church		
																									Church Epistles - Doctrine	General Epistles - Perseverance in the Faith
Mark - Testimony of Christ's miracles																										
Luke – Testimony of John & others																										
Acts - Testimony of Apostles																										
John - Testimony of Jesus as the Son of God	Sanctification by the Holy Spirit - New Testament Epistles																									
Justification in Jesus Christ																										
Foreknowledge of God The Father																										

APPENDIX 3: CENTRAL IDEAS FOR SERMON PREPARATION

“An exegetical outline displays a passage’s thought flow; a homiletical outline organizes a preacher’s explanation, development, application, and communication of a passage’s truths.”⁵²
(Bryan Chapell)

The introductory material of this bible commentary searches for the theological framework of the book in order to identify the author’s thought flow, allowing for more accurate exegesis of the biblical text. The following collection of central ideas of the text has come out of this research to aid the preacher in sermon preparation. The three-fold sets of central ideas in this collection attempt to identify the ideas the writer intended for his original readers (exegetical ideas), the enduring and timeless doctrinal statements that remains true throughout history (theological ideas), and the Gospel’s call towards men for a particular response to the text (homiletical ideas). As such, the following exegetical, theological, and homiletical ideas provide an outline that endeavours to shape the flow of thought of the biblical text into messages that can be clearly communicated to a modern audience. In this way, the preacher/teacher of this book of the Bible can lead his audience towards the intended destination of the author.⁵³ These central ideas are an effort to understand what the author meant to say to his original recipients and to communicate this message to a modern audience.

Study Notes on the Holy Scriptures defines ‘exegetical idea’ as the main idea of a block, a section, a subsection, or a pericope of the text within the theological framework of a book that best expresses what the writer intended for his original readers. Therefore, this idea is written using verbs in the past tense. For example, the exegetical idea of Matthew 1:1-2:12 says ‘The Old Testament Scriptures testify that Jesus Christ was predestined to be the Messiah, having fulfilled the Messianic prophecies concerning His humanity, deity, and Davidic kingship’.

Study Notes on the Holy Scriptures defines ‘theological idea’ as the primary theme of a block, a section, a subsection, or a pericope of the text within the theological framework of a book that best reflects and supports its primary theme. The theological idea is an enduring and timeless, doctrinal statement that remains true throughout history. Therefore, this idea is written using verbs in the present perfect tense. This idea uses the evidence of the exegetical idea to reflect the primary theme of the book. For example, the theological idea of Matthew 1:1-2:12 says ‘Because He has proven to be both fully man and fully God, destined to reign as Lord over all (secondary theme), Jesus Christ is the Messiah and the Son of God (primary theme)’.

Study Notes on the Holy Scriptures defines ‘homiletical idea’ as the imperative theme of a block, a section, a subsection, or a pericope of the text within the theological framework of a book that best reflects the required response of the reader. The homiletical idea reflects the Gospel’s call towards men for a particular response based upon the theological idea. This idea best expresses what the book means for today’s readers.

⁵²Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching – Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 129.

⁵³The advantage of this three-fold approach to biblical studies has been recognized by the authors of *Theologisch-homiletisches Bibelwerk: Die Heilige Schrift. Alten und Neuen Testaments mit Rücksicht auf das theologisch-homiletische Bedürfniss des pastoralen Umtes in Verbindung mit namhaften evangelischen Theologen* (Bielefeld: Belhagen und Klasing, 1857-77), edited by Johann Peter Lange. This work was later translated into English as *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Critical, Doctrinal, and Homiletical with special reference to ministers and students* in twenty-five volumes (Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1865-80) under the general editorship of Philip Schaff. The commentary notes in this series are divided into the same three categories: (1) exegetical and critical, (2) doctrinal and ethical, and (3) homiletical and practical. Later biblical commentary series can be grouped into three major categories: critical, devotional, and homiletical. These groups also reflect the exegetical-theological-homiletical approach used in *Study Notes on the Holy Scriptures*.

Therefore, this idea is written using verbs in the present tense. For example, the homiletical idea of Matthew 1:1-2:12 says, 'Because Jesus is the Son of God (primary theme), as testified through His predestined birth as the Messiah (secondary theme), the Gospel calls men to place their faith in Jesus Christ as both the Son of man and Son of God, destined to reign as Lord over all (imperative theme)'.

This collection of central ideas provides a theme-based approach for crafting exegetical studies on a book into a cohesive, text-driven, expository sermon series with a clear destination for its hearers. This approach to the biblical text follows the book's theological framework, which is the key to avoiding fragmentation. Crafting sermons around the book's framework aids the expository preacher in the delivery of a sequence of connected sermons/teachings with a clearly defined destination for the hearers.⁵⁴

A sermon series requires theological cohesion at its macro and micro-levels if the expository preacher is to take his congregation on the spiritual journey shaped from a book of the Bible. Each sermon of this spiritual journey should continually echo the book's central theme within its theological framework throughout the series. A clear, central theme supported by secondary themes allows the congregation to follow the preacher's messages as he leads them toward the spiritual transformation specific for that book. Therefore, an individual sermon text should hinge upon the central idea of its context, and this context should reflect the theological framework of the book itself.⁵⁵

In addition, the preacher should design the sermon series within the Christocentric framework of the Scriptures themselves. Specifically, the book's theological framework should support the central theme of the book itself, as well as the overarching theme of the major division of the Bible into which it is placed. Therefore, every sermon should reflect an aspect of the central theme of the book, and this central theme must fit properly within the theme of its major division in reflecting the overarching, Christocentric theme of the Holy Scriptures.⁵⁶ In order to design a sermon series into this type of cohesive unity at all levels, the preacher needs a theological, or theme-based approach that effectively identifies the central ideas at the macro-level as well as micro-level of the book's sermon pericopae.⁵⁷

This approach allows the text-driven preacher to follow the book's theological framework when preparing sermon outlines that reflect a clear and focused set of connected messages. He is able to develop a sermon series that clearly navigates through the biblical text and presents a clear destination for the congregation. This theme-based approach serves to bridge the gap between exegesis and homiletics by revealing a book's theological framework. A book's theological framework is the 'bridge' between exegesis and homiletics.

⁵⁴Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), xiv. Graeme Goldsworthy says, "In my experience the preaching of a series of sermons, say, from an epistle, easily leads the preacher to fragmentation. . . ." He says fragmentation disconnects Paul's doctrinal message in the first part of the epistle from his practical message in the last part.

⁵⁵For this reason, homileticians recommend reading the entire book numerous times in several versions in preparation for exegesis of its individual passages.

⁵⁶Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 57. Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix echo the view of modern, conservative biblical hermeneutics by saying, "From beginning to end, the Bible has one overarching theme: the redemption of God's creation."

⁵⁷Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching—Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 16. Bryan Chapell discusses the need for preachers to find a place for each passage of Scripture in "the historical sweep of God's redemptive plan." He believes a preacher will find more success in preaching sermons as he discovers the redemptive message of Scriptures at both the micro and macro-levels.

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