



## ECCLESIASTES 11:7-12:8

7 Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun. 8 So if a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them all; but let him remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity. 9 Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment. 10 Remove vexation from your heart, and put away pain from your body, for youth and the dawn of life are vanity. 1 Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, "I have no pleasure in them"; 2 before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain, 3 in the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those who look through the windows are dimmed, 4 and the doors on the street are shut—when the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low— 5 they are afraid also of what is high, and terrors are in the way; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along, and desire fails, because man is going to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets— 6 before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern, 7 and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. 8 Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity.

## STRUCTURE

- I. **Receive the light:** Enjoy life under the sun—dark days are coming (11:7-8)
  - a. *Life is genuinely good:* light is sweet; the sun is pleasant (11:7)
  - b. *Joy is commanded:* rejoice in all your days (11:8a)
  - c. *Sobriety is required:* the days of darkness will be many (11:8b)
- II. **Exhortation to the young:**
  - a. *Run after joy:* Pursue pleasure in youth—freely, but not fearlessly (11:9-10)
    - i. *Permission:* rejoice in your youth; let your heart cheer you (11:9a)
    - ii. *Pursuit:* walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes (11:9b)
    - iii. *Accountability:* know that God will bring you into judgment (11:9c)
    - iv. *Purging:* remove vexation; put away bodily pain (11:10a)
    - v. *Reason:* youth and the dawn are vapor—brief, slipping away (11:10b)
  - b. *Remember your Creator*—before age breaks you and death unmakes you (12:1-7)
    - i. *Failure of the aging body:*
      1. Your last days will be dark (12:2)
      2. Your hands will tremble (12:3a)
      3. Your legs will bend (12:3b)
      4. Your teeth will fall out (12:3c)
      5. Your eyes will dim (12:3d)
      6. Your mouth will recede (12:4a)
      7. Your sleep will be light (12:4b)
      8. Your voice will weaken (12:4c)
      9. Your fears will multiply (12:5a)
      10. Your hair will turn white (12:5b)
      11. Your strength will fail (12:5c)
      12. Your libido will plummet (12:5d)
    - ii. *Death of the aging body:*
      1. *The destination:* man goes to his eternal home (12:5e)
      2. *The aftermath:* mourners walk the streets (12:5f)
      3. *The collapse:* the silver cord snaps; the golden bowl breaks (12:6a)
      4. *The shattering:* the pitcher drops; the wheel breaks (12:6b)
      5. *The reversal:* the dust returns to the earth (12:7a)
      6. *The accounting:* the spirit returns to God who gave it (12:7b)

III. **Vanity Framed by Wisdom:** The investigation ends where it began—vapor remains, so heed wisdom (12:8)

- The refrain returns:* "Vanity of vanities... all is vanity" (see also 1:2)
- The effect:* the book closes the argument and hands us over to wisdom's demand

## GENERAL COMMENTARY:

Beginning in 11:1, Solomon moved from observation in the prior chapters to more direct exhortation. 11:1-6 counseled us to work vigorously; 11:7-12:8 spur us to rejoice everyday and remember our Creator. These exhortations conclude Solomon's investigation into the problem of vanity: the frustration of life under the sun—under sin's curse. 12:8 repeats almost verbatim 1:2 by its thrice mention of "vanity" and return to the third-person, referring to Solomon as "the Preacher." This intentional "bookend" frames the book as not just a travel diary but as Wisdom Literature. It also marks the completion of Solomon's exploration of "vanity" and his proposed solution: Wisdom knows how to absorb the joys of life, which more than counterbalances its burdens.

Verses 7-8 give us the seventh of Solomon's "Enjoy Life" sayings. They remind us that joy is not just permitted, but commanded. For all its hardships, life is genuinely good. In seasons of darkness, there is still enough light to choose joy. In seasons of light, we must choose joy all the more because "the days of darkness will be many" (11:8). If you can't find joy in good times, you certainly won't find it in hard times.

Verse 9 pivots toward an exhortation to the young. Youth is "dawn" (11:10)—beautiful and promising yet also fleeting. As we say, "Youth is wasted on the young." They don't yet have the wisdom of age. The results are sad: many young people fail to maximize this bright season. Those who ostensibly do often give themselves to excess, forgetting that they will answer to their Creator, multiplying future sorrow (11:9c). A better course is for young people to run after joy (11:9a); to unbury their dreams and chase them (11:9b); to put off crushing anxiety (11:10a); to drink up joy before dawn turns to dusk (11:10b).

The ultimate way of maximizing youth is by Solomon's next exhortation: "Remember your Creator" (12:1). The time to fear God is not later—if there even is a later. Fearing God increases pleasure rather than diminishing it, for God is the Source: "In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Ps. 16:11). Young people have a unique ability to enjoy life—if they listen to wisdom—for their faculties remain intact. Those fortunate enough to live long suffer the failure of their bodies. Age breaks us; death unmakes us. Solomon employs images of creation in reverse: "the sun and the light and the moon and the stars" (12:2)—which God created in Genesis 1—grow dim in old age. Our last days grow darker until darkness overtakes us.

In verses 2-5, Solomon composes a poem about aging. It parallels the opening poem in chapter 1, where we observed the permanence of the earth that outlasts us. In chapter 12, Solomon zooms in on mortality. We die before we die. Like a stately home falling apart, our bodies break down (12:3-5). The man of dust returns to dust—creation unmade (12:7). Our spirit returns to God (12:7), our "eternal home" (12:5). Young people imagine this will never happen to them and rarely maximize the dawn of youth. But dusk is coming. Enjoy the light while you have it.

And remember your Creator.

## VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY:

*7 Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun. 8 So if a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them all;*

—Solomon has focused his entire purview on life "under the sun." We have felt its heat, and its ceaseless cycles have wearied us. He closes with a different perspective. The same sun that burns us also delights us: "Light is sweet". Its life-giving rays are "pleasant for the eyes to see". This balances what he has said before.

—We must be careful not to let the vanity of life under the sun outweigh joy. I see this danger in my own perspective. Life is hard. The longer you live, the more you suffer. Solomon's observation warns us never to forget how "sweet" and "pleasant" it is to see the sun. It cautions us against becoming jaded. O Lord, help us! —"many years... rejoice in them all": Solomon will soon remind us that those who live "many years" will suffer declining faculties. When your brain, limbs, and five senses don't function properly, it's harder to absorb life's pleasures. Nevertheless, God blesses us sufficiently to "rejoice in... all" our days—dark days included.

—Kidner: Verse 7 is about "the bliss of being alive."

*but let him remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity.*

—The "darkness" of verse 8 enriches our interpretation of "light" in verse 7. In verse 7, "light" correlated to "the sun"—it was literal—a calling to enjoy each day. Here, "darkness" is figurative; it means suffering. Therefore,

the parallel “light” of verse 7 is not just literal, but figurative also. Not only does it speak of literal days but also of prosperous days. When God visits us with prosperity—in our possessions or relationships or honors received—we should absorb that light like beach lovers on Spring Break. Take it in! It won’t last forever. —“remember... days of darkness will be many”:

- This applies universally. Solomon doesn’t say “the days of darkness will be many for the poor and marginalized”—but for everyone. Rich people suffer. Poor people suffer. Everyone who lives long suffers much.
- We must “remember” this truth. We too often forget it. When the good times roll, we expect them to keep rolling, but life visits us in seasons. The good news about this is that bad times don’t roll forever either.
- Why would Solomon want us to “remember” such a sobering reality? Because it heightens the urgency. When life is “sweet” and “pleasant,” you drink it up all the more, knowing that the good times never keep rolling. Dark times are ahead.
- One might think that dwelling on dark realities would darken everything. But Solomon has already revealed this folly in Ecclesiastes 7:5–6: The laughter of escapists is like thorns crackling under a pot; their tavern-songs drown out the voice of wisdom. Ignorance is bliss until it isn’t. When reality hits, the drunkard wishes he listened to rebuke, and the escapist wishes he began with the end in mind. Reality cures our escapism. It liberates us to live for today—before the days get darker.
- It strikes me that he says “the days of darkness will be many.” No matter how stridently I reject the prosperity gospel and the evangelical culture of hyper-triumphalism, a stubborn illusion persists: if I just live for Jesus, the days of darkness will be something less than “many.” Nothing in Scripture teaches this, and it often teaches the contrary. I’m reminded of Jacob’s words to Pharaoh. The blessed patriarch summarized his autobiography like this: “The days of the years of my sojourning are 130 years. Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life” (Gen. 47:9).

—“All that comes is vanity”: The days of future darkness culminate in total darkness—death. A shadow looms over life’s brightest days. It is “vanity”: painful, mysterious, and vexing.

*9 Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.*

—This parallels vv. 7–8a where Solomon told us to rejoice in all our days while we can.

—Here, however, he turns toward the “young man” in his “youth” (2x). Both the young and old are called to joy—to rejoice in “all” their days, regardless of the decade they fall in. But considering future darkness, decline, death, and especially “judgment”, the youth must take note. Old people know darkness already. Young people live like they’ll never grow old. The message is, “Enjoy life while you can! It won’t be so easy in the decades ahead.”

—One might think future “judgment” suggests we never let loose, remain uptight, and tip-toe our way through the minefield of potential sins. Of course, we flee sin, but judgment should not drive us to hyper-fixation. As Augustine once said, “Love God, and do what you please.” When you love God (or as Solomon would have said, “fear God”), He transforms your “wants” and empowers your obedience. All the lesser commands flow out of the Greatest Commandment: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength.

—There are two common interpretations of this section about joy and judgment:

- One side argues that Solomon’s mention of judgment is meant to temper their enthusiasm for the wrong kind of pleasures. It’s as if he’s saying, “Drink deep of life’s pleasures, but remember you’ll have to answer for your excess.”
- The other side argues that Solomon mentions judgment to tell us that God will literally judge us for disobeying His command to enjoy life.
- I’m attracted to the second interpretation because enjoying life is more than a privilege God permits; it is a rule that God commands. It makes sense when you think about it. When a child receives a hard-earned gift from his parents and chooses to sulk rather than play with it, it is the height of ingratitude. Throughout Ecclesiastes, the Preacher has exhorted us again and again to enjoy life as “gift” not “gain.” It is the posture of those who fear God to receive from His hand—times, seasons, and every blessing under the sun.
- Nevertheless, the adversative—“But”—decides the matter for me. While it’s true that joy is a command, and obedience requires daily rejoicing, I don’t think Solomon mentions judgment primarily

to warn us against insufficient joy. I believe the first interpretation is better. "But" implies a contrast with the open race for pleasure in 8a. If the second interpretation was correct, we would have expected "And," not "But." This paraphrase of the two interpretations might clarify what I mean:

- Solomon is saying, "Race after joy with all your energy, BUT know that God will judge you if you pursue these pleasures at the expense of holiness."
- Solomon is not saying, "Race after joy with all your energy, BUT God will judge you if you don't." The BUT makes no sense in this second paraphrase. To make sense, it would have to say, "Race after joy with all your energy, AND God will judge you if you don't." The BUT requires a contrast.

—Looming judgment should not drive us to legalistic perfectionism, and it must not restrict true joy—only the illusion of joy, of making created things ultimate. Remembering our future judgment helps us enjoy creation without it supplanting our Creator.

—"let your heart cheer you": Don't let it sour you. Joy is a choice.

—"Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes":

- I have always critiqued the modern saying, "Follow your heart," because "the heart is deceitfully wicked above all things" (Jer. 17:9). If I followed my heart, I would have chased it off the cliff-edge of sin. Yet this verse seems to say, "Follow your heart."
- This is why our prior conclusion about "judgment" is so important. Solomon does essentially say, "Follow your heart"—but "judgment" places boundaries on our pursuit of pleasure. When the culture tells us to follow our heart, judgment is not in view. The fear of God is not in view. Ecclesiastes contains "worldly" messages—follow your heart, eat, drink, and be merry—but always in context of fearing God.
- Despite the caution of judgment, we must not dull the force of Solomon's appeal. "Walk in the ways of your heart" means to unbury those desires you suppressed because there wasn't enough time, or because you might fail, or because people wouldn't approve. "Go for it!" Solomon says.
- "Walk... in the sight of your eyes" presses the same point again. In verse 7, it was "pleasant for the eyes to see the sun." Now he returns to "eyes" with the same idea. There will come a day when our eyes finally close, but as long as God keeps opening them, let us keep enjoying the light of day; let us pursue the things we see; let us build the future we dream of; let us chase the next horizon. Yes, God will judge us if we veer into sin. But stop tip-toeing through life, stop burying your deepest wants, stop promising you'll do it later. Run after joy! Embrace the days He's given because He won't always give them.
- In the Screwtape Letters, one demon advises another by stating this truth about God: "He's a hedonist at heart. All those fasts and vigils and stakes and crosses are only a façade... Out at sea, out in his Sea, there is pleasure, and more pleasure... He has a bourgeois mind. He has filled his world full of pleasures. There are things for humans to do all day long without him minding the least."

—This whole section reminds me of the saying, "Youth is wasted on the young." Young people rarely live like time is running out before they die, and before they face the Judge. Old people feel these realities more with each year, but they lack the faculties they once had. "If only I could have it back," we think. "I would have traveled more, spent more time on friends and family, stopped working such long hours, enjoyed my partner..." Youth is wasted on the young because they don't have the wisdom to maximize their life. By the time you gain that wisdom—life, and the ability to enjoy it, is diminished. (Diminished, but not gone.) This places an urgency on young people to gain wisdom now—to maximize the joy of youth.

#### 10 Remove vexation from your heart, and put away pain from your body, for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.

—"Remove vexation from your heart": Solomon says, "Young people, stop it with all the worry. Anxiety is crushing your joy and crowding out life. If you think it's hard now, it only goes downhill. Choose life today! Enjoy the gift—not just of life, but of YOUTH."

—"put away pain from your body":

- Don't we do this instinctively? I don't know anyone who rests their hands on hot stoves for fun!
- I think Solomon has in mind the two versions of perfectionist that we met in prior chapters: the workaholic (Eccl. 2:22–23; 4:8; 5:12) and the legalist (7:16–18). The workaholic deprives himself of sleep and pleasure—he pains his body for wealth and prestige (vanity). The legalist destroys himself with self-made rules and self-condemnation. When the perfectionist stops striving for the unattainable

"more"—and starts fearing the ineffable God—he stops destroying himself. He puts pain away from his body and receives God's gifts, including bodily pleasures, that make the pain of life bearable.—"for youth and the dawn of life are vanity": The word "vanity" carries several nuances throughout Ecclesiastes. Here, it means, "fleeting." Youth turns to age, and the dawn of life turns dark. Youth is a temporary gift. It has an expiration date. Wisdom makes the most of it.

*1 Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, "I have no pleasure in them"*

—"Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth":

- Earlier, Solomon warned us to "remember that the days of darkness will be many" (v. 8). Now, he tells us to "remember" our "Creator" (v. 1).
- This represents a progression of thought. Even unbelievers know that days get darker with age, but they don't "remember" their Creator. It is important to know both, but the highest form of remembrance is spiritual.
- Young people think that remembering their Creator is for old people. Before I got saved, I thought that way. I wanted to sow my wild oats. Then I'd settle down when I was older and life was boring. Solomon argues that the best way to maximize pleasure, however, is not by forgetting your Creator but by remembering Him. Only a foolish creature would think there's greater joy in God's creation than God Himself! He's the source of all pleasure! He's the root of all joy! Those who sow wild oats reap a harvest of regret. If we remember our Creator, our reward lasts forever.
- "Remember" is more than just cognitive recall. When God "remembered" Israel, he acted on their behalf. Likewise, to remember God is to live for Him.
- Solomon could have referred to Him as "God", but he chose the word, "Creator". What was he emphasizing by this title? It introduces the next section where the twin forces of death and decline, in some sense, "un-create" us. We will see the language of creation, but in reverse. The language thus emphasizes that the time to remember your Creator is before death and decline "un-creates" you. If you're fortunate enough to live long, your body will break down like a high-mileage car. The time to remember God is before, not after, your journey ends. And nobody knows where the end of their road is.

—"before the evil days come":

- It's about to get darker and harder. Even though it remains possible to "rejoice in them all" (11:8)—that is, in all our days—it is simultaneously true that it becomes ever more likely that we say in our final days, "I have no pleasure in them!" (12:1).
- How do these statements harmonize? How can we rejoice in all our days while at the same time not having pleasure at the end? Because joy is a choice. When your body aches from head to toe, or when disease wastes away at your vitality, or when all your contemporaries and loved ones have perished, or when your ability to do meaningful work—to even step outside—has been taken: you will naturally say to yourself, "I have no pleasure in this." At the same time, by God's grace, He gives you the capacity to choose joy, even when your faculties are so diminished. "Light is sweet"—even if we see it but dimly.
- Kidner: The following verses are about the "general desolations of old age."

*2 before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain, 3 in the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those who look through the windows are dimmed, 4 and the doors on the street are shut—when the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low— 5 they are afraid also of what is high, and terrors are in the way; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along, and desire fails, because man is going to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets— 6 before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern, 7 and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.*

—"before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened":

- Some interpret these verses eschatologically—as pertaining to the Day of the Lord, when God decisively intervenes in history to judge mankind and save His people. Prophets often paint this day

with imagery of darkened luminaries. Those who interpret verse 2 eschatologically allow that to color the whole passage, as though Solomon was warning us about the Day of the Lord.

- I feel confident that that is not Solomon's intention here for several reasons. First, Wisdom Literature does not speak apocalyptically. Its focus is not on cosmic interventions but on practical living. Second, 11:7-10 already employed language about light and darkness with reference to life and death under the sun—individual mortality not cosmic intervention. Third, 12:1 introduces this section by referring to an individual's old age. Given what has been said before, it is better to interpret this verse and what follows as a poetic description of growing old.
- When you grow old, "the sun... light... moon and... stars are darkened"—for you. The bright and fleeting "dawn" (11:10) of youth has become the dusk of old age. Solomon employs eschatological language, not to point to the end of the world but the end of *your* world. The "light" doesn't taste as "sweet" (11:1) as it did when you were young. Everything hurts. Nothing works right. You used to dunk a basketball; now you need help walking. This is why Solomon directs his exhortation to the young. "Youth" has a shot clock. If your body still works, enjoy it.

—“and the clouds return after the rain”:

- Normally, the clouds clear after the rain. Blue skies and sunlight replace gloom. But that changes when your body declines. When you're young, life moves through seasons. But—generally speaking—your last season is all clouds.
- Note: It's important that I just said, "generally speaking." It's universally true that bodies break down and grow weaker with age, but that doesn't mean that everyone ages the same way. Clint Eastwood is a vibrant 95 year old. Even for him, however, age has taken its toll. It's been a long time since he performed his own stunts.
- Kidner: "All this will come at a stage when there is no longer the resilience of youth or the prospect of recovery to offset it. In one's early years, the greater part of life, troubles, and illnesses are chiefly setbacks, not disasters. One expects the sky to clear eventually. It is hard to adjust to the closing of that long chapter: to know that now, in the final stretch, there will be no improvement: the clouds will always gather again, and time will no longer heal, but kill."

—Terry Pratchett: "Inside every old person is a young person wondering what happened."

—In verses 3-4, Solomon continues describing the decline of old age by employing the metaphor of a house. The once stately mansion has fallen into disrepair. Each image represents a body breaking down in its final years. We can't be sure of all the symbolism, but these are largely agreed upon by Bible scholars:

- "when the keepers of the house tremble": These are your hands. They once provided for you and protected others. Now they tremble. You can barely write your name.
- "the strong men are bent": These are your legs. They carried you millions of steps throughout life. They performed athletic feats. Now they stoop. You require a cane or walker. You worry about falling. You get out of bed, only by concentration.
- "and the grinders cease because they are few": These are your teeth. When you were young, you enjoyed great feasts, hardly thinking about them. Now you eat soft foods. Before the advent of toothpaste and dentures, everyone lost their teeth. "grinders" in a domestic setting referred to those who ground grain into flour.
- "and those who look through the windows are dimmed": These are your eyes. Now we have cataract surgery that staves off the loss of vision. We have glasses to refract light in just the right way. But the normal course of eyesight is to grow dim.
- "the doors on the street are shut": This is your mouth. As teeth fall out, the lips recede and sink inward. A second mention of "grinding" in the next clause ("the sound of grinding is low") confirms this interpretation.

—This next section departs from the imagery of the home but continues the theme of declining health and capacity:

- "one rises up at the sound of a bird": This refers to your sleep, and it is literal. Old people wake at the slightest disruption and then struggle to resume sleep.
- "the daughters of song are brought low": This is your voice. The voice deepens with age, and it struggles to hold a tune. I remember seeing Willie Nelson a few years ago, having only heard him on

records from his younger days. My wife and I remarked afterward that he essentially spoke rather than sang. He was over 80 years old.

- "afraid also of what is high, and terrors are in the way": The older you get, the more scary life becomes. The flu might kill you. A walk might break your hip. A ladder is unthinkable. Things you used to do without thinking now pose serious threats.
- "the almond tree blossoms": This is your hair. It turns white.
- "the grasshopper drags itself along": This is your vitality. Healthy grasshoppers jump so high, it looks like flying. They land only to instantly relaunch—do they ever rest? Young people are like that. When we age, our gait becomes a shuffle. We're like grasshoppers stuck in mud.
- "desire fails": This is your sexual appetite. What once burned in your thoughts and shaped your longings now fades into indifference.
- "because man is going to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets":
  - This statement further confirms that Solomon is not talking about eschatology but declining health and capacity for the aged. Our body is preparing us for death.
  - But death is not the end. We will enter our "eternal home" with God. Here is a brief glimpse beyond the sun. We return to the thought again in verse 7.
- "mourners" weep over your loss. Your funeral is pictured here. The body declines until the day it is discarded.

—Having transitioned from the days of decline to the day of our death, Solomon poetically depicts the end of our life with domestic imagery.

- "before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken": Your life is like a golden lamp—precious and bright—hanging from the ceiling by a delicate silver cord. When the cord is broken, the lamp crashes. The light of life goes dark.
- "[before] the pitcher is shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern": Your life is like a continual flow of earth's most precious resource: water. The pitcher and the wheel symbolize your body. When the pitcher falls, no one fetches water from the fountain; when the wheel breaks, no one draws from the cistern. Likewise, when your body gives out, your life is over. Life is inextricably bound to your body.
- This imagery heightens both the precious gift of life and the tragic curse of death. Life is precious—like gold, silver, light, and water. But like a severed cord, a crashing lamp, a shattered pitcher, and a broken wheel, life is tragically broken.
- The sound and suddenness of these crashing noises is meant to make us feel the gravity of death. Hear the clamor of slamming lamps and broken clay vessels. Life begins with promise. It ends with a crash.

—"and the dust returns to the earth as it was":

- This recalls the curse of sin in Gen. 3:17-19: "And to Adam he said, 'Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.'
- Ecclesiastes has been focused on life under the sun—under the curse. When man sinned, the ground yielded thorns instead of fruit. Not only was the created universe subjected to futility, but our labor became frustrating. Work became toil, and the man of dust would grind himself back into it. Since then, life has been full of surprises, many of them dark. Outwardly, we suffer tragedies. Inwardly, we are vexed. This is life under the sun and under the curse. Ecclesiastes teaches us how to find joy that outweighs the burden—a burden that never ceases until you do.
- Death is the ultimate "un-creation." God made us from dust; we return to dust.
- This is why we must "remember our Creator." Rebellion against Him unmade us. Submission to Him redeems us. Redemption is a form of creation. It is new creation. In Christ, we are new creations, and we await His remade universe—no longer stained by sins curse. Then we will live—not under the

sun—but in the light of His splendor. In the new heavens and new earth, the glory of God and Christ is our light.

—“and the spirit returns to the God who gave it”:

- The spirit does not disappear. Ecclesiastes is about life under the sun, but we find hints throughout of life beyond it. The end of our life is not the end of our existence. It is a transition—a new form of existence.
- If we trust in Christ, our spirit flies to heaven when we die. When Christ returns, He will resurrect our bodies so they neither age nor break like Solomon just wrote about. He will also resurrect our universe so we no longer live under the curse.
- The two homes we live in—our body and our world—are both remade.

#### *8 Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity.*

—Ecclesiastes 1:1-2 began like this: “The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.”

—The book finishes as it began—with vanity and a third-person reference to the Preacher.

—The epilogue will continue in the third-person voice (12:9-14).

—Framing the beginning and end of the book with similar language achieves the following purposes:

- It positions Solomon’s words as more than just a personal diary. This is Wisdom literature—the words of the “Preacher” (or assembly-convener) who has gathered the people to impart God’s wisdom for life under the sun.
- The repeated “vanity” line introduces the problem in 1:2, as if to say, “Here is the mystery I have set out to investigate.” When it appears again in 12:8, it resolves the problem, as if to say, “I have completed investigation and proposed a solution.”
- Functionally, the narrator introduces the Preacher. Then the Preacher speaks from inside the struggle. And then the narrator returns to interpret the teacher (12:8-14).

—The problem of vanity threatens us in many ways. It causes some to seek meaning in lasting gain, but there is no lasting gain under the sun. It leads others to despair, or to escape, or to perpetrating injustice to get ahead. None of it works. There is no escape—besides death. And even death results in cursing for those who don’t fear God. We will all be judged. Therefore, we must live in light of that judgment and receive from God—His blessings as a gift, and His seasons as appointed. God’s blessings make the curse bearable. God’s seasons are made beautiful in their time.

—Gibson: “Ecclesiastes opened with a poem about the cyclical patterns in nature and the world, and now it comes to a close with another poem about the universal pattern inherent in individual life coming to an end. In chapter 1, generations come and go, but the earth remains forever. Here in chapter 12 we see what that actually looks like, as the young become old and return to the dust of the earth.”