

# Day Eight

Ecclesiastes 11-12

As the Book of Ecclesiastes comes to a close, Qohelet brings into focus the inevitability of the aging process, and the reality and finality of death for all people. *Let's face it, most do not like to dwell on the subject of death.* However, it is a fitting conclusion for the reader to consider, as it will be encountered by everyone at some point in time. By reflecting on death during this season, you can make some adjustments in your life, and integrate attitudes which will better prepare you for your eventual departure from Earth.

In the opening seven verses, King Solomon uses some poetic terms to describe the aging process, and how the body and mind have a tendency to physically deteriorate as one ages. Yet as this section begins, in spite of these realities, Solomon reminds his audience to remember their Creator as they experienced Him in the days of their youth. He ends his thoughts with the same admonition to remember Him (the Creator) before one's physical life is over:

"Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, 'I have no delight in them'; before the sun and the light, the moon and the stars are darkened, and clouds return after the rain; in the day that the watchmen of the house tremble, and mighty men stoop, the grinding ones stand idle because they are few, and those who look through windows grow dim; and the doors on the street are shut as the sound of the grinding mill is low, and one will arise at the sound of the bird, and all the daughters of song will sing softly. Furthermore, men are afraid of a high place and of terrors on the road; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags himself along, and the caperberry is ineffective. For man goes to his eternal home while mourners go about in the street. *Remember Him*

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before the silver cord is broken and the golden bowl is crushed, the pitcher by the well is shattered and the wheel at the cistern is crushed; then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it" (Ecclesiastes 12:1-7, NASU).

The lyrical descriptions of various body parts remind the reader of the fleeing of youth and the physical aging process. Backs weaken and mighty men stoop. Teeth fall out and eyes grow dim. The slightest sound awakens the elderly from sleep at the earliest hours. The anxiety of over-crowded conditions and the inability to handle intense times are a sign of aging. The silver cord is often attributed to the spinal column, and the golden bowl to the head. Both are broken and crushed as the body loses its strength. Eventually, the composition elements of the human body will return to the ground and the indwelling spirit will return to God.

While we reflect on these realities, it is important to remember that this is the cycle of life which God has determined for human beings. While the age and specific types of physical deterioration will vary among individuals, the fact remains that eventually everyone will deal with the finality of death. Just how we deal with the inevitability of death during our lifetimes varies from individual to individual.

In a reference back to some of the opening statements of Ecclesiastes, Solomon reiterates his often-used thematic statement about the vanity of life:

"'Vanity of vanities,' says the Preacher, 'all is vanity!' In addition to being a wise man, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge; and he pondered, searched out and arranged many proverbs. The Preacher sought to find delightful words and to write words of truth correctly. The words of wise men are like goads, and masters of *these* collections are like well-driven nails; they are given by one Shepherd" (Ecclesiastes 12:8-11, NASU).

But the wisest man is not finished with his conclusions, because he has searched out many of the other writings of the wisdom available to him in his era. Qohelet concludes that these words, probably coming from many different cultures, have a similar purpose to them. He states that they are given by the one Great Shepherd, or the Creator, in order to act like goads to steer people along proper paths toward

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righteousness. He further states that when taken to heart, these words of wisdom can be like “well-driven nails” which solidify or hold together the walk of wisdom.

At the end, the Book of Ecclesiastes comes to a profound, uplifting completion—with the Preacher summarizing his thoughts with this simple conclusion:

“The conclusion, when all has been heard, *is*: fear God and keep His commandments, because this *applies to* every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14, NASU).

In spite of all the negative statements which are made throughout Ecclesiastes, its author comes to a summary statement which should be memorized by all who call upon the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. After all, much has been written and much has been said about God and our approach to Him down through the ages. Here, the wisest man to ever live, summarizes life to these admonitions:

**Fear God**  
**Keep His Commandments**  
**This applies to all**  
**For God will judge everything**

According to Qohelet, this is the key for living a successful life. First, fear the Creator. Recognize who He is and your relationship to Him as a creature. Multiple times in the Book of Ecclesiastes the concept of fearing God has been stated:

“I know that everything God does will remain forever; there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it, for God has so worked that men should fear Him” (Ecclesiastes 3:14, NASU).

“Do not let your speech cause you to sin and do not say in the presence of the messenger *of God* that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry on account of your voice and destroy the work of your hands? For in many dreams and in many words there is emptiness. Rather, fear God” (Ecclesiastes 5:6-7, NASU).

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“Do not be excessively righteous and do not be overly wise. Why should you ruin yourself? Do not be excessively wicked and do not be a fool. Why should you die before your time? It is good that you grasp one thing and also not let go of the other; for the one who fears God comes forth with both of them” (Ecclesiastes 7:16-18, NASU).

“Although a sinner does evil a hundred *times* and may lengthen his *life*, still I know that it will be well for those who fear God, who fear Him openly. But it will not be well for the evil man and he will not lengthen his days like a shadow, because he does not fear God” (Ecclesiastes 8:12-13, NASU).

Next, we are to keep or obey God’s commandments. He is the Creator. We are the creatures. He has given us a manual for living we call the Holy Bible. Take its words seriously and let its instructions guide how you conduct your life.

Finally, recognize that all of God’s Word is relevant instruction to each and every individual created. No one escapes the ultimate judgment, because eventually, everything done “under the sun” will be judged. Several times earlier in Ecclesiastes, Solomon made these statements which deal with judgment:

“I said to myself, ‘God will judge both the righteous man and the wicked man,’ for a time for every matter and for every deed is there” (Ecclesiastes 3:17, NASU).

“Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood. And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes. Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things” (Ecclesiastes 11:9, NASU).

As *Sukkot* comes to a timely close, the conclusion of Qohelet is one which we can carry into the upcoming year as our Torah cycle begins in earnest on the coming *Shabbat*. If we are going to fear God, we are going to need to know Him. In a like manner, if we are going to obey His commandments, we are going to have to study them in order to know them.

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Recognizing that we are going to all be accountable to what is written, it is a good thing to contemplate as we rejoice in the Torah on this last day of *Sukkot*. With great joy we turn once again to the Torah's instruction, so that we might live properly and bring glory to the Holy One. Let this be the right conclusion for all who seek His face! May the good works which come as a result of our study be judged favorably by His standard in this coming year!