

Ecclesiastes 12

Meaning amidst Meaninglessness

My PURPOSE in Choosing to Study this Book of God's Word is that we would SAY a PRAYER for PRETENDERS > People who STRUGGLE in THIS LIFE SEARCH for HOPE > SERIOUS > so FEW People REALLY HAVE IT THINGS they have PUT HOPE IN are so EASILY SHAKEN, DESTROYED

STUDYING Ecclesiastes > SURVEY of World's THINKING > LISTEN Well! ANCIENT Book Speaks with CRISP RELEVANCE to the 21st Century

GOAL: BOTH INFORM our HEADS and EXPAND our HEARTS > People LOST

(Read CHAPTER 12) 1. Search for Life 2. Search for Truth 3. Search for the Way

1. Search for Life

Unit of Thought begins 11.7 > Reflections on LIFE and DEATH

REMEMBER your CREATOR in DAYS of YOUTH....BEFORE Days of Decline

a. Decline

vs. 2-5 before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain; when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men stoop, when the grinders cease because they are few, and those looking through the windows grow dim; when the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades; when men rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint; when men are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets; when the almond tree blossoms and the grasshopper drags himself along and desire no longer is stirred. Then man goes to his eternal home and mourners go about the streets.

GOAL of Study is EXEGESIS – Bring out TRUE MEANING of TEXT

OLDEST Commentators > ALLEGORICAL Approach > Need CAUTION

WORDS as SYMBOLS > POINT to ANOTHER Truth > THIS means THAT

DANGER of Allegory > Forcing OWN OPINIONS into TEXT > EISEGESIS

Reason why think RIGHT to use RARELY Used Interp of Allegory > Text Says to

My endeavor is to bring out of Scripture what is there, and not to thrust in what I think might be there. I have a great jealousy on this point, never to speak more or less than I believe the mind of the Spirit, in the passage I am expounding.

Charles Simeon

KEY: The Bible itself explains the proper meaning of the allegory

v. 3 when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men stoop, when the grinders cease because they are few, and those looking through the windows grow dim;

FUNERAL SCENE in LARGE HOUSE > The WHOLE COMMUNITY

	Lower Class	Upper Class
Male	Keepers of the house (guards)	Strong men (landowners)
Female	Grinders	Those looking through the window

NOT LITERAL Interp > IF Grinders DECREASE then Work Should INCREASE

Grinding WOMEN = Grinding TEETH / FALL OUT / Eat LESS

Vs. are ALLEGORICAL PICTURE of HUMAN BODY > in DECLINE

v. 2 the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain

HEAVENLY LIGHTS become OBSCURED > DIMINISHING Capacity for JOY

DARK Clouds TOLERABLE if give Thirsty Ground a GOOD SOAK
DARK EMPTY CLOUDS TERRIBLE > Depressing, Dark, Fruitless Days

Before the glorious brightness which is like the sun be changed, and before the light of your eyes be darkened, and before the beauty of your cheeks becomes black, and before the centers of your eyes, which are like stars, be dim, your eyelids drip with tears like clouds after rain.

Jewish Targum

Wealthy Women in Window LOOK Approaching STORM, Ever DARKER Vision
Deteriorating House faces DEVASTATING STORM // OLD AGE > FALL Apart

There are many lights withdrawn, besides those of senses and faculties, as, one by one, old friends are taken, familiar customs change, and long held hopes now have to be abandoned.
Derek Kidner

About the Time your FACE CLEARS UP > Your MIND begins to GO!

DUNLOP Crisis > My BELLY Done LOPPED over my BELT

FURNITURE Disease > My CHEST has FALLEN Down into MY DRAWERS

NOW my KNEES BUCKLE but my BELT will NOT

v. 4 when the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades; when men rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint;

HOUSE Threatened by STORM > CLOSE the DOORS > Stop Normal Activities

Blocking / Disability of BODILY ORIFICES // Doors = LIPS

Ears > CANNOT Hear what WANT / CANNOT NOT Hear what Don't Want

Youth is such a wonderful thing. It's a shame to waste it on young people.

George Bernard Shaw

v. 5 when men are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets; when the almond tree blossoms and the grasshopper drags himself along and desire no longer is stirred.

AFRAID of HEIGHTS > MEN who Wisely STAY OFF LADDERS

ALMOND TREE > WHITE Blossoms // WHITE HAIR

For most people, life has become a grim marathon of misery, an endurance test full of frowns, whines, groans, and sighs.
Charles Swindoll

Dragging GRASSHOPPER > No Longer BOUNCE out of Bed, DRAG my BONES

LABORIOUS and UNGAINLY Walk of the ELDERLY

Getting READY for BED // DEMOLITION of a HOUSE

TAKING OFF Wigs, Teeth, Hearing Aids, Glasses, Support Hose, Artificial Limbs

I am glad I'm growing old in England. Americans are dedicated to the new and superefficient. It must be depressing to be old in the United States.

Historian Arnold Toynbee on his 80th Birthday

Lost DESIRE (Caperberry APHRODISIAC) World BEFORE VIAGRA!

Aged King David: "I am now eighty years old. Can I tell the difference between what is good and what is not? Can your servant taste what he eats and drinks? Can I still hear the voices of men and women singers?" 2 Samuel 19:35

Woman in Market > Man standing NEXT to Her > Well Dressed, Sad, Miserable

Woman: "Excuse me sir, are you a Pastor?"

Man: "No, I am NOT, I have just been SICK Lately"

b. Death

v. 5 Then man goes to his eternal home and mourners go about the streets.

DEATH is the END of it ALL > Qohelet saw NO PRIZE waiting at END
DEATH Going to ETERNAL HOME > Hebrew Phrase for DEATH, not HEAVEN

SADDNESS of Process > MOURNERS go about the STREETS

v. 6 Remember him-before the silver cord is severed, or the golden bowl is broken;
before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, or the wheel broken at the well,

Metaphors of DEATH > Objects of SIGNIFICANT VALUE are DESTROYED

Creator's MASTERPIECE of HUMAN BODY > DELICATE ART

BREAKABLE as COMMON EARTHENWARE > Useless as BROKEN WHEEL

PITCHER Shattered at SPRING > HEART DISEASE # 1 Killer in the WEST

Ch 7 Qohelet Raised QUESTION about LIFE after DEATH > UNSURE

Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?
Ecclesiastes 3:21

NOW ANSWERS QUESTIONS > DOGMATIC 'NO!' > DUST to DUST

v. 7 and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

REVERSAL of CREATION / DISSOLUTION of Human Creature > TOTAL END

The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. Genesis 2:7

...you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return
Genesis 3:19

This is not an optimistic allusion to some kind of consciousness after death, but simply a return to the prelife situation. God temporarily united body and spirit, and now the process is undone. We have in this verse no affirmation of immortality. According to Qohelet, death is the end. Tremper Longman III

Long SOUL-SEARCHING Pursuit has come to an END

NOT a HOMEGOING > Because there is NO HALLELUJAH > FINAL MOAN!

v. 8 "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Everything is meaningless!"

DESPERATE CRY began in Chapter 1 > CONCLUDES with NO CONCLUSION

"Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless."
Ecclesiastes 1:2

Qohelet SUMMARY > Most used word 'Meaningless' – 35 X's (Whole Bible 38)

c. Decision > Certainty of the END for ALL PEOPLE

vs. 1-7 Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, *before* the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, "I find no pleasure in them"- *before* the sun and the light... grow dark...*when* the keepers of the house tremble...*when* the doors to the street are closed...*when* men are afraid...*when* the almond tree blossoms...*Then* man goes to his eternal home... the dust returns to the ground

YOUTH time of Enjoyment > Time to CONNECT with GOD

DANGER to WAIT > Patterns, Habits, Stubborn, Resistant

BEFORE the EVIL DAYS > Young People WAIT > Come to GOD Later

After ADDICTED to Cigarettes – Alcohol – Drugs – Tattoo

Acquired SELFISH MATERIALISTIC Standards of Affluence

Had or Caused ABORTION – DIVORCE – Huge \$'s of CREDIT CARD DEBT

My NEIGHBOR is Southern California Weeding MANICURED LAWN

As TEENAGE New Believer > Walked Across Street to WITNESS to HER

‘Oh that is NICE for YOU, I Believed ALL THAT when I was YOUNG’

95% People come to JESUS BEFORE the Age of 50, most before 30

The appeal of the world and the flesh is constantly with us, turning thousands of young people away from the truth of God. But bad as it is when you are young, it will get worse the older you grow. Ray Steadman

REMEMBER God in the AGEING Process > KIDS! Even YOU will GET HERE!

v. 14 For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

Your brain contains a permanent record of your past that is like a single continuous strip of moving film, complete with sound track. The film library records your whole waking life from childhood on. You can live again those scenes from your past, one at a time, when the surgeon places a gentle electrical current and applies it to a certain point on the temporal cortex of your brain.

Dr. Wilbur Penfield, former Director of the Montreal Neurological Institute

IF your BRAIN has a COPY > God has ANOTHER in HIS BOOKS too

Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Hebrews 4.13

2. Search for Truth

DRAMATIC Shift > 1st Person Speech to 3rd Person NARRATIVE

The words that close Kohelet's book seem not to have come from the Preacher's hand...speak of him in the third person... words of someone else – an editor who may have been Kohelet's student. David Hubbard

SOME > Old Repentant Solomon talking about Young Rebellious Solomon

ACTUAL SHIFT in SPEAKER

The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem: "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. Ecclesiastes 1:1-2

"Look," says the Teacher, "this is what I have discovered..." Ecclesiastes 7:27

Teacher = Qohelet > PROFESSIONAL Title – Job of Gathering Assembly

<p>1.1-11 Qohelet's Viewpoint Introduced</p>	<p>1.12 – 12.8</p> <p>Words of Qohelet Searcher 'under the sun'</p>	<p>12.9-14 Summary and Critique Look to The Son</p>
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From this point, he (the righteous narrator) proceeds with his evaluation, which begins with praise, and then moves to doubt and finally to criticism... Qohelet's speech is a foil, a teaching device, used by a second wise man speeches are torn down and demolished in the end
Tremper Longman III

a. Serious

v. 9 Not only was the Teacher wise, but also he imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs.

BEGINS EVALUATION > Complimentary but Reserved

INDUSTRIOUS Person > but gives NO Honorific Titles or Terms of Respect

CREDIT for KNOWLEDGE > Great Amount of Information and Insight

WISE MAN – NOT Equal to MORAL COMMENDATION / NEUTRAL

v. 10 The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true.

LUKEWARM Comments > Casts DOUBT on ACCOMPLISHMENTS

SOUGHT for RIGHT WORDS > but NEVER FOUND THEM

b. Suffering

v. 11 The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails-given by one Shepherd.

GOAD = Large, Sharp-pointed STAKE used to PROD ANIMALS

NAILS = to SECURELY FASTEN to Separate PIECES of Wood

Metaphor > Goads and Implanted Nails > NEGATIVE and HARMFUL

GOADS and NAILS > both STING when APPLIED
PAINFUL // SKEPTICAL and PESSIMISTIC Writings of Qohelet

Pastor in HAWAII > ‘Mark, sometimes a pastor has to SHEAR the SHEEP too!’
Was ARRESTED for Pulling GUN on Neighbor Kid walking on Church Property

v. 12 Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them. Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body.

IF GOOD for Author’s SON WHY followed by WARNING of Books?

DOUBLE FAILURE > Never Found Right Words of Blessing/Delight

The wise in heart are called discerning, and *pleasant words* promote instruction...
Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.

Proverbs 16:21,24

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Matthew 11:28

Jesus does NOT say COME to me all who are Weak and I will KICK your BUTT!

c. Shortcoming WRITING is DIFFICULT and PROBLEMATIC

SOUGHT TRUTH > Implied did NOT FIND > Turns Son's Attention Away

OVERLY POSITIVE and OPTIMISTIC even ORTHODOX Interp of Qohelet

RESULTS in Strained Exegesis to make Qohelet sound BIBLICAL

All efforts to pierce the mystery of God’s ways within the book have come up short,
far short.

David Hubbard

// Speeches of JOB’S 3 Friends in Book of Job, In Themselves Incomplete, Skewed

FINAL Speaker in JOB is God > Answers their Questions with MORE Questions

God gets BIGGER their Problems become SMALLER – His Glory is their Good

3. Search for the Way

a. True God and True Way

v. 13 Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole [duty] of man.

ALMOST IMPATIENT EXASPERATION > FINALLY we get THE TRUTH!
Here's what you REALLY SHOULD KNOW! > Ultimate Conclusion

WORLD should KNOW > 1. GREATNESS of God and 2. WORD of God

FEAR GOD Phrase Used Several Times by QOHELET, How DEFINED?

1. RAGING TERROR: Fright before Powerful, Dangerous, Unpredictable Deity

2. REVERENT TRUST: Biblical, HOLY AWE before Great & Gracious God

KEEP COMMANDS > Qohelet never SAYS THIS

Fear > ESTABLISH a Right Relationship with God
Commands > MAINTAIN that Relationship

F aith in One True God

E xperience the Grace of God

A we before the Majesty of God

R esolve to Follow and Obey God

WHOLE DUTY > Most IMPORTANT Thing UNDER THE SUN

Word DUTY NOT in Original Hebrew > 'this is all there is to man'

b. Jesus is all we need for Living > He is Way, Truth, and Life

The book ends on a strong orthodox note, one that is in keeping with the dominant teaching of the rest of the OT...It is correct to characterize the book as positive and orthodox, while maintaining the dubious nature of Qohelet's own thinking....Jesus Christ is the ultimate answer to Qohelet's conclusion of meaninglessness under the sun.

Tremper Longman III

Great SEARCH of QOHELET > Meaning, Purpose, Reality, Truth > VALID
 WE Need ALL Qohelet TRIED to FIND > Cannot BLAME him for SEARCHING

Similar SEARCH of all WORLD'S RELIGIONS > Find God by being GOOD

Fundamentally ONLY 2 Religions on Earth >

1. Very Big, Diverse, Many Labels, Books, Leaders, Traditions, Rituals

ONE over-riding theme "I can do something to please God, make God accept me"

Then the Buddha addressed all the monks once more, and these were the very last words he spoke: "Behold, O monks, this is my last advice to you. All component things in the world are changeable. They are not lasting. Work hard to gain your own salvation."
www.buddhanet.net

2. Narrow Way – Road Hard – Few Find it > "I have no perfection to offer God"

My ONLY HOPE before God is MERCY and GRACE

Find JESUS who ALONE is GOOD > Receive MERCY and GRACE

MERCY – God does NOT give us what we DESERVE

GRACE: God DOES give us what we DO NOT DESERVE > ALL Things

All things are yours whether...the world or life or death or the present or the future
 - all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God. 1 Corinthians 3:21-23

c. Jesus is all we need for Aging

Qohelet had PROFOUND INSIGHT into AGEING PROCESS > TOO TRUE!!

The Christian gospel has better news to offer than the somber analysis of the old Preacher...What good will it do to seize *today* if we dread *tomorrow* with its creeping senility and its looming death...*Aging* is a negative process...*Maturing* is a positive experience. It points to greater wisdom and increased patience, to stronger love and enriched understanding.
 David Hubbard

Words of an AGEING and ACHING APOSTLE PAUL ---

We have this treasure (the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ) in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair... We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body... Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. 2 Corinthians 4:7-18

d. Jesus is all we need for Dying

Be HONEST about DEATH > AND CONFIDENT of LIFE in the LORD

Do not seek death. Death will find you. But seek the road which makes death a fulfillment.
Dag Hammarskjold

Will be LAST Time for Every FAMILIAR JOURNEY & ROUTINE JOB

Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, *even though he dies*; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" John 11.25,26

Jesus knew EVERYONE DIES > He was about to DO IT HIMSELF

Also KNEW because of HIS RESURRECTION > Death in Him is DOORWAY

BELIEVING in Him is CERTAINTY of LIFE after DEATH

QURAN > Muslim's told to PRAY for SOUL of MUHAMMED > Uncertain End?

BIBLE > CONFIDENCE Jesus LIVES, and ALL who TRUST IN HIM LIVE too!

Near END of Long PRODUCTIVE Life > Theolog Karl Barth on WORLD TOUR
Lectured on Several Continents – Preached in Great Cathedrals – Met Notables
Saw Majestic Mountain Ranges – Walked on Beautiful Beaches – Trip of Lifetime
Returned to HOMELAND of Switzerland > Asked what Most Profound Thought?

“Jesus loves Me, this I know; for the Bible tells me so”

Ecclesiastes 12

1 Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, "I find no pleasure in them"- 2 before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain; 3 when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men stoop, when the grinders cease because they are few, and those looking through the windows grow dim; 4 when the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades; when men rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint; 5 when men are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets; when the almond tree blossoms and the grasshopper drags himself along and desire no longer is stirred. Then man goes to his eternal home and mourners go about the streets.

6 Remember him-before the silver cord is severed, or the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, or the wheel broken at the well, 7 and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

8 "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher."Everything is meaningless!"

9 Not only was the Teacher wise, but also he imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. 10 The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true.

11 The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails-given by one Shepherd. 12 Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them.

Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body.

13 Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole [duty] of man. 14 For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.