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The Conclusion of the Matter

Ecclesiastes 12: 9-14

The conclusion of the matter DIG: How is the Teacher described? Who is the Shepherd in 12:11? Who is speaking in 12:9-14? How does the speaker summarize his interpretation of the book in 12:13-14? How does that compare to the rest of the book living under the sun?

REFLECT: In retrospect, how do you respond to the reflections in this book? How do you feel about Solomon? Which scriptures had the most impact on your thinking? How do you think the Teacher would want you to apply his teachings to your life? How would God?

Here is the conclusion of the matter, now that you have heard everything: fear God, and keep his mitzvot; this is what being human is all about.

Modern Gentile scholars are divided on the authenticity of this section as an original part of the book. Some consider it an editorial addition by a scribe who sought to defend the worth of the Teacher's writing at the time when the question was the subject of debate. On the other side the famous German Lutheran theologian Franz Delitzsch (1813-1890) has written, "The spirit and tone of the book and epilogue are one. The epilogue only seals the distinction between the pessimism of the book and the modern pessimism which is without God and without a future." He is supported by S. R. Driver, the Hebrew scholar from England (1846-1914), who asserts, "There does not appear to be any sufficient reason for doubting that 12:9-12 is written by the author of the book . . . and the author himself may have appended the two closing verses with the same purpose in view as the supposed editor.

Authority of the book (12:9-10): Solomon first referred to **his** personal qualifications as a wisdom **Teacher** - one of the three kinds of leaders (prophets, priests, and teachers) through whom **ADONAI** revealed **His** will to **Isra'el** (see the commentary on **Jeremiah**, to see link click [Cw](#) - [At the Potter's House](#)). Solomon said **he was . . . wise and imparted knowledge to the people. He** took thoughtful care in producing **his book; he**

said **he pondered** (carefully weighed in his mind) **and searched out and set in order** (carefully arranged) **many proverbs, searching to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true.**

Wisdom with a point (12:11-12): Solomon related this **book** to the purpose and goal of other **wisdom books**. The sayings of the wise are as sharp as goads, and those given by leaders of assemblies are like firmly planted nails. Like ox goads and firmly planted nails, Solomon's teaching, like the words of the sages, provides a guide and stimulus to godly living (see **Acts 26:14** for an illustration of **goads**) and a secure basis for living (see **Jeremiah 10:4** for an illustration of **nails**). Moreover, like some other **words of the wise**, these **words** have **divine** authority; **in this case, they are given by a single Shepherd**. This refers to **ADONAI** and **His** care and concern (**Genesis 49:24; Psalm 80:1**; and in **Psalm 95:6-7** the concepts of **Shepherd** and **Creator** are combined as they are in **Ecclesiastes 12:1** and **11**). Because of the unique value and authority of **the words of the wise** - of which this **book** is an example - **Solomon warned his son** (**Proverbs 1:8, 10 and 15, 2:1, 3:1, 11 and 21, 4:10 and 20, 5:1 and 20, 6:1, 3, and 20, 7:1, 19:27, 23:15 and 19, 23:26, 24:13 and 21, 27:11**) and all **his** readers not to seek answers beyond those **God** had given through **the wise**. If they would keep looking for life's answers in **many other books - there's no end to it; they would wear** themselves out.



King Solomon's final advice (12:13-14): The book ends, **here is the conclusion of the matter, now that you have heard everything: fear God, and keep his mitzvot**. These words were not added by someone other than **Solomon**, as some have claimed, but are the culmination of many other implicit references in **Ecclesiastes** to **fear God** and serve **Him** (**2:24-26, 7:15-18, 11:9-10, 12:1**). Here, **Solomon** said such reverence and service are **everyone's duty, this is what being human is all about (12:13).**

The fact that revering **ADONAI** is **every person's** responsibility is underlined by the truth that **God will bring to judgment (3:17 and 11:9) everything we do** (every **human** act),

including every secret, whether good or bad (Matthew 10:26). Everyone is responsible for everything we do, whether obvious or concealed. Though this is often taken as referring to a future **judgment** after **death**, a comparison of **Psalm 90:7-8** and a proper understanding of **Ecclesiastes 2:24-26, 7:15-18** and **11:9-10** will show that this is doubtful.

Though a future **judgment** after **death** is indeed a solution to the mystery **Solomon** had observed in the unequal distribution of justice in human history (**7:15** and **8:14**), no evidence suggests that **the Teacher** believed in such a **judgment**. Life after **death** was as mysterious to **him (11:8)** as the unequal distribution of justice. **His emphasis was on this life under the sun**, and its opportunities for service (**9:10** and **12:17**) and enjoyment (**2:24-26, 3:12** and **22, 5:18-20, 8:15, 9:7-9** and **11:7-10**). **He** thought life after **death** offered no such opportunities. Therefore, **he** didn't comment on any differences *after death* between **the righteous** of the TaNaKh and **the wicked, the wise** and **the foolish**, man or beast.

Many other Scriptural passages, of course, do not point out the eternal blessings of **the righteous** and the eternal punishment of **the wicked**. But **Solomon** lived on the other side of the cross and in comparative darkness of the progressive revelation; nevertheless, **he** affirmed belief in **God** and in **His justice (3:17** and **8:12b-13)**. **He** was content to leave **judgment**, along with everything else, to **God's timing** for **He has made everything appropriate in its time (3:11)**. So **Solomon** counseled **his** readers to **enjoy life in the fear of God** as **He** enables. O, would the people who live on this side of the cross be as content as **the Teacher** was to leave the mysteries of life in **God's hands**, to serve **Him** appropriately, and to **enjoy life** as **He** enables!³²⁰

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** that knowing and loving you brings peace and joy into life. Even when things do not go as we planned, we can rest in your love and your wisdom to guide the paths of **Your** children. We surrender our lives to **You**. What a joy it is to trust **You** and to live our lives focused on pleasing **You**. Only one life will soon be past. Only what's done for **Messiah** will last! In the holy and loving name of **Yeshua** and by the power of **His** resurrection. Amen*