

# When It's All Said and Done!

## Ecclesiastes 12:9-14

When all else fails, read the instructions.

Anonymous

### We've finally arrived at the end of Ecclesiastes.

The book concludes with a paragraph that reinforces several of the main points of the book—seek wisdom, fear God, be prepared for judgment. Although it is usual to treat the last words of the book as the comment of a disciple, they could be by the Teacher himself, who, in spite of personal failings, must have retained the gift of wisdom, which he had asked for and obtained for the benefit of his people (2:9; cf. 1 Kings 3:9-12; 4:29-34). The summary here is especially important, since commentators have tried to interpret the book as the thoughts of a skeptic. Obviously, the Teacher is sometimes skeptical; but God is real to him, and he believes that God has revealed his will to mankind.<sup>1</sup>

**Verse 9** says that Solomon “pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs” (NIV). How many proverbs did Solomon write? (see 1 Kings 4:32) *Solomon composed “three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five.”*

### Goads and Nails (12:11)

What is a “goad”?

*A goad is something that pushes or prods, like a whip for a horse or a switch to move a donkey along. In the OT, a goad was usually a wooden rod with a sharp iron point used to direct oxen. The verb “to goad” means to motivate or influence.*

### How are the words of Solomon like goads?

*Their wise teachings are to goad their readers to action. The wise sayings provide motivation to learn. They keep one on the right path, heading the right direction.*

The author also states that the words of the wise are like nails. What's the comparison here? *Nails fasten one thing to another and provide stability. Shepherds used long nails to fasten their tents to the ground. Wise words “fasten” wisdom to us. They give us stability, strength and anchorage. They should stick in our memory like a nail stuck in a board. Other texts talk about the Word being “engrafted” and “planted” in us. Same idea.*

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<sup>1</sup> Expositor's

**What the author means by the “masters” (lit. “lords” or “heads”) of “assemblies” (or “collections”), and their relationship to the nails, is not clear?**

Translations handle the passage in different ways and various interpretations are possible. Depending on how one renders the passage, the words (the collected sayings) are like nails, or those who masters these collection of wise sayings are like nails.

*KJV: The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies which are given from one shepherd.*

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

*NASB: The words of wise men are like goads, and masters of these collections are like well-driven nails; they are given by one Shepherd.*

**Verse 11** is important as well because the author claims that the words are “given by one Shepherd.” God is often described as the Shepherd of Israel (Gen 49:24; Ps 23:1; 80:1). Hence, the author is claiming inspiration for the book, and that it is worthy to be a part of Scripture.

### **Books (12:12)**

What advice does the author give us in verse 12? *of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.*

### **What’s strange about this statement?**

*This statement is found in a book. The author just wrote a book, and now he says that there are too many of them. Plus he’s advocated study and instruction previously.*

### **What’s the author’s point?**

*This seems to be a warning against going beyond what God has written, or a warning against seeking wisdom in other books. It’s a warning against the vast amount of literature that is a waste of time for the reader who is concerned to find the truth.*

### **A Final Word of Advice (12:13-14)**

The last two verses aptly conclude the whole book. What two things are we commanded to do? *Fear God and keep His commandments. These should be our highest priorities.*

The author gives us two reasons to obey—what are they? *This is the whole (duty) of man; God will bring every work/deed into judgment.*

**The last part of verse 13** is normally translated “for this is the whole duty of man” (KJV, NIV). You’ll note that the word “duty” is in italics, meaning it was added by the translators. The literal Hebrew, “This is all mankind,” is the equivalent of “This is what man is made for” or “This is the whole duty of man.” Thus, mankind’s whole purpose for existence can be wrapped up in these words: fear God and keep His commands. *Similar to the West. Confession—glorify God and enjoy Him forever.*

**Note the Quote:** The “fear of the Lord” is that attitude of reverence and awe that His people show to Him because they love Him and respect His power and His greatness. The person who fears the Lord will pay attention to His Word and obey it. He or she will not tempt the Lord by deliberately disobeying or by “playing with sin.” An unholy fear makes people run away from God, but a holy fear brings them to their knees in loving

**The last verse in the book asserts that God will bring man into judgment for his deeds.** Man knows enough to be held responsible for what he does or fails to do. His life day by day is to be lived as in the sight of God, who has given him the opportunity to fulfill God's purpose for that day. His actions, as well as the secret intentions of his heart, are open to God and one day will be opened up for reward or punishment (cf. 3:17; 11:9b).<sup>2</sup>

***Exquisite Concepts from the Conclusion of Ecclesiastes***

1. God’s Word is like a goad—it provides motivation and keeps one on the right path, heading the right direction. Those who master it find stability and strength.
2. God’s Word is filled with wisdom. Any “wisdom” contrary to biblical wisdom is a waste of time.
3. The whole duty of man, the purpose for his existence, is to fear God and to obey His commands.
4. God will bring every person into judgment. All people will give an account for their behavior, and they will be rewarded or punished accordingly. This fact should motivate us to live godly lives.

**Conclusion:** Solomon struggled with many serious issues—success and failure, wealth and poverty, work and leisure, oppression and pleasure, life and death. At times, he seems downright depressed, puzzled, and cynical about life “under the sun.” He questions whether it’s worth going on. Yet at the end of the book, theology provides the answers to his most difficult problems. What profit is there in living? What does a man get for all his labor? The ultimate in success and profitability in life is found in recognizing the authority and sovereignty of God over all things. Fearing God and obeying Him are the primary duties in life.

We should learn this important lesson from one of the wisest men who ever lived. Whatever situation crosses your path, strive to employ Solomon’s final bit of advice —fear God and keep His commands.

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<sup>2</sup> Expositor’s

## **For Further Discussion:**

### **1. Why are the concluding statements of Ecclesiastes so important?**

- 1. Because they show us that Solomon was not a skeptic at the end of his life. He came to the right conclusions after discussing all the puzzling matters that disturbed him*
- 2. Because the theology of the conclusion sheds light on some of the puzzling statements earlier in the book.*

### **2. If someone should ask you, “What is the Book of Ecclesiastes about?” what would you say? (I.e., how would you summarize the content of the book?)**

*Ecclesiastes is a sermon/message by Solomon that explores various puzzling and difficult issues in life. The overall message of the book is to fear and obey God, trust that God knows what he’s doing, acknowledge your own limitations, set the right priorities, enjoy your life, and prepare for judgment.*