1:4 *The earth remains forever*- It is God’s promised plan to establish His eternal Kingdom on this earth; He will not destroy it. The Biblical descriptions of “heaven and earth” being destroyed are to be read as figurative of the destruction of the present world order, rather than literally.

1:12 This book appears to be the meditations of Solomon at the end of his life. He had been given Divine wisdom and retained it (2:9), but he rejected its claim upon him personally. He therefore says much which is true, and yet he speaks with the cynicism of the person who has rejected the true faith for himself whilst still offering it to others, especially the young. This explains the apparently contradictory strands of teaching within the book.

2:9 Solomon insists that throughout his life, his wisdom had remained with him. The theoretical wisdom which he had did not affect his life practically, and thus it was as if he lacked wisdom completely. Mere possession of truth leads to great temptations- for like Solomon, we can reason that this alone justifies us in any behaviour.

2:18,21 Solomon saw “wisdom” as something he had worked for [forgetting it was God’s gracious gift to him], and he treated it as a material possession. Because he saw that he couldn’t take it with him, he felt therefore it was useless- he didn’t, it seems, want to leave it to his son because he felt it was only for him. This was the spirit of the man who buried his talent of Divine Truth in the ground and thought that would be enough- he wouldn’t risk it with others or share it with them. And so Solomon ended up hating all his labour for wisdom because at the end of his life that mere knowledge and teaching of it to others hadn’t transformed his personal life. The rejected at the day of judgment may well, tragically, feel the same. But now is the time to personally apply God’s Truth to ourselves and to be humbled by the very possession of it.

3:19 *One and the same spirit*- The Hebrew word translated “spirit” has a wide range of meaning, but includes the idea of “breath”. By nature, man and the animals are the same. The same thing happens when we die; and Solomon so wished that men would perceive this whilst they were alive (:18) so that they would give themselves to God the more fully. There’s no difference in where the spirit goes after death, whether we are man, animal or plant (:21). We are made of dust and will return to dust; the spirit, or life force which animates us, returns to God, whether we are good or bad. Those who are responsible to God will be resurrected and judged; the wicked will die for ever, the second death, again returning to dust; and those counted righteous by God’s grace will live for ever with immortal bodies in His eternal Kingdom on earth. There is no conscious survival of death taught in the Bible; we’re not born with any ‘immortal soul’. This is a non-Christian idea. Immortality is only revealed to those who are in Christ (2 Tim. 1:10).

4:8 The billionaire always wants another billion… “Hell and destruction are never satisfied, and the eyes of man are never satisfied” (Prov. 27:20 RV), Solomon wrote in his youth; and then in old age, he came to basically the same conclusion, having spent his life working back to the truth that he had been taught in his youth (see too 1:8). And there are many men and women who have done the same. We all tend to be empirical learners; and yet this is the great power of God’s word, that through it we don’t have to learn everything through our failures; but we can receive His Truth, trust it, and simply live by it. Otherwise we shall be like Solomon…

5:2 *God is in heaven, and you on earth*- God is revealed as existing as a personal being in a specific location, Heaven. Although He is present everywhere by His Spirit, this doesn’t mean that He has no personal existence.

5:6 *Don’t protest before the messenger*- The Hebrew word ‘malak’ translated “messenger” is the usual word translated “angel”. It can be used of men, e.g. priests, or anyone who is a ‘messenger’. The Angels of God don’t sin (Lk. 20:35,36 cp. Rom. 6:23), but the word ‘malak’ can be applied to ordinary men, who of course can sin. The Greek word ‘aggelos’, usually translated ‘angel’, is applied to the human messengers of John the Baptist (Lk. 7:24). This confusion has led to some misunderstanding the few Bible verses which speak (in some translations) of ‘angels’ sinning; but those ‘angels’ referred to are human beings, representatives, servants or messengers of others, and don’t refer to ‘angels’ in the sense of spirit beings.

6:2 Prov. 6:26 warns the young man that the Gentile woman will take his money and leave him destitute at the end. These words seem to be alluded to by Solomon years later here, where he laments that despite his wealth and success, a Gentile would have it all after his death. He saw in later life that his warnings to the young men of Israel had been in the form of painting a picture of a typical young man who epitomized youthful folly; but now he saw that he had been making a detailed prophecy of himself. Likewise in 2:18,19 he laments that his labours will achieve nothing; doubtless alluding back to his words in Prov. 5:10, where he says that the Gentile wife will make the young Israelite's labours meaningless. Sin never satisfies. We can know truth on a theoretical level as Solomon did, and yet not live it out in practice.

7:2-4 The continual emphasis of society upon ‘fun’ and ‘entertainment’ doesn’t lead to wisdom before God, but the very opposite.

7:23 Solomon recognized that although he had loved the idea of wisdom, the image of a spiritual  life, the wisdom of God had never really impacted him personally: "I said, I will be wise (referring back to his request for wisdom in 1 Kings 3); but it was far from me". His request for wisdom had only been so that he could do the job of leading Israel, living out the parental expectation of his father, whom he admits in Proverbs 4 had taught him to ask for wisdom.

7:28 Solomon had all the instruction he could wish for; but he didn't allow it to really sink home one. He started out on the search for an ultimately satisfying woman, but out of the 1000 he had (1 Kings 11:3) he never found one, even when he sat down and analyzed each of them. And even politically, his marriages with all those Gentile women didn't seem to achieve him the support he desired from their home countries; Egypt gave refuge to Jeroboam, Solomon's main rival (1 Kings 11:40), even though he always acquiesced to his wives and even in his very old age he still didn’t destroy the idol temples he built for them (2 Kings 23:13).

8:1 Solomon didn’t see the relevance of his wisdom to his own personal family life. Yet he proudly insisted: “Who is like the wise man?”, as if the possession of theoretical truth and wisdom was the ultimate possession; and he then goes on to say that this made him beyond criticism (:2-4). This is a danger for any community or individual who says they have “the truth” and who considers the possession of it to be of the utmost importance.

8:4 It is only God who cannot be questioned in this way. But Solomon felt that because he possessed God’s wisdom, he could therefore act as God. :2 could suggest that he thought his commandments were in fact God’s. So the possession of Truth, which we too have, can lead to an incredible arrogance, a lack of openness to others’ comments upon us, and a certainty that we are right in all that we do and are beyond criticism in every area. The hardness of a man is changed by true wisdom (:1) but despite knowing this, Solomon became hard hearted and abused his people. He had the wisdom- but as he said, it was far from him personally.

9:5 *The dead don’t know anything*- The Bible clearly teaches that death is unconsciousness. See on 3:19.

9:6 *Neither have they any more a portion forever in anything that is done under the sun*- Human theories of ghosts and reincarnation aren’t compatible with the Bible. The Biblical hope for life after death is in the form of a bodily resurrection to stand before God’s judgment and then by grace receive eternal life in His Kingdom on earth; and this is not for all, but for those who have consciously made a covenant with God in this life.

9:10 *Sheol, where you are going*- ‘Sheol’, translated “hell” in some Bibles and “the grave” in others, is simply death; all people, good and bad, go there. It’s not a place of conscious punishment for the wicked, it refers simply to the grave.

10:1 Solomon had “honour” to an unprecedented extent (1 Kings 3:13). But in this same book he admits that he, the man famed world-wide for wisdom, gave himself to folly (2:3). He knew so well the error and folly of his ways, but he could only preach the lesson but not heed it. A true fool is one whose wisdom fails him in practice (when he “walks by the way”, :3); and especially is this acute when this “error… proceeds from the ruler” (:5). It’s all about Solomon himself. His self-analysis, like that of many an alcoholic and drug addict, was excellent. The very possession of truth and wisdom seems to be of itself a temptation to live the very opposite way, which is why believers who go wrong often end up behaving far worse than unbelievers.

10:16,17 Solomon was so confident that he was or would be the Messiah that he seems to have felt that he was beyond the possibility of sinning; real self-examination and the sense of the possibility of failure just didn’t exist for him. He says that the land of Israel is happy or blessed because her king is the son of a noble, and she will be cursed if her ruler is a servant. Solomon proudly presented himself as the son of King David- and he makes a clear swipe at Jeroboam, the pretender to the throne who was a servant (1 Kings 11:26). By reasoning like this, Solomon sets himself in direct opposition to the spirit of Jesus, who declared that the servant is to be the King of all. Thus Solomon’s self-justification, his self-defensiveness, his lack of focus on the future Messiah, led him to miss totally the spirit of Christ.

11:9 *For all these things there is a God who will bring you into judgment*- Solomon knows judgment will come, at least for the young people, but he reasons as if it won’t- at least not for him. He knows, but he doesn’t know on the personal, experiential level. This is why there are apparently contradictory statements in Ecclesiastes. For example, the wise dies as the fool, with no more eternal remembrance than the fool (2:15,16). This, Solomon, says, is what he himself believes in his own heart. But in 7:12 he says that wisdom gives life to those who have it. But then again in 9:16-18 he observes that although wisdom can help, its benefits are easily undone, so easily as to make it useless. He knew and preached God’s Truth, but for him personally, it meant nothing at all. And therefore in practice he advocated the life of self-enjoyment, acting as if all the other truth of wisdom was not operative in practice. His final recommendation in chapter 12 is for young people to go the way of wisdom, as this is their duty. He had evidently minimized the coming of judgment, as his obsession with himself being the Messiah had lead him to minimize the reality of the coming of Christ. How deeply do we struggle with our own humanity, and deeply long for the second coming? Has our materialism made the Hope of the Kingdom mean practically nothing? Solomon's complaint at the pointlessness of wisdom in 2:15-20 is liberally sprinkled with personal pronouns; his self-centredness was part of his materialism and lack of faith in the Kingdom. And for us too, familiarity with the glorious principles of Divine Truth with which we have been entrusted can lead us to the blasphemy of saying, in effect, that those principles are unimportant; they come to mean little to us personally, and thereby we effectively deny their value and worth.

11:10 The tragic brevity of life means that youth is vanity; we should quit the time wasting follies of youth or overgrown childhood (and the modern world is full of these), and therefore we too should remove anger from our hearts. Ecclesiastes uses the mortality of man not only as an appeal to work for our creator and quit anger, but to simply have faith in His existence (as 2 Cor. 1:9).

12:2 *And the clouds return after the rain*- Solomon’s father, David, had in his old age rejoiced in the prospect of God’s Kingdom coming on earth at Christ’s return, which he imagined would be like the clear shining after the rain (2 Sam. 23:4). Solomon in his old age saw only negativity, the return of the clouds, whereas David in old age looked ahead with hope to the Kingdom. Whilst Solomon spoke so often of his father David, he failed to personally grasp the wonder of the hope of Christ and His Kingdom which his father had; for this cannot be passed on through the generations, that wonder has to be learnt from experience and years of spiritual devotion.

12:3-5 This is a picture of a man in old age, perhaps based upon Solomon himself, having lost his strength and his teeth (“the grinders”), with darkened eyesight, poor of hearing and jumpy, scared of heights having lost his balance, with white hair like the almond tree and having lost sexual desire. Solomon presents this picture of man at his last end to those yet young, with the appeal to therefore not waste life ingratiating the senses, but rather in serving God.