



“The righteous . . . shall grow
like a cedar in Lebanon”

Psalm 92:12

Reading Companion
to the Book of
Ecclesiastes

*“So they read in the book in the law of God . . .
and caused them to understand the reading”*

Nehemiah 8:8

By
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“Vanity of vanities,
saith the Preacher,
vanity of vanities;
all is vanity”

(Ecc. 1:2)

Introduction

The title of this little book comes from the opening phrase in the Greek (Septuagint) translation of the Hebrew Old Testament (O.T.) – *“rhēmata ekklesiastou”* or *“words of the Preacher”*. Thus the word *“Ecclesiastes”* is Greek for “preacher”, or one who speaks to an assembly (*ekklesia*) of people.

The book of Ecclesiastes is the Preacher’s (King Solomon, *“the son of David, king in Jerusalem”*, 1:1) observations of the earthbound, time-bound experience of natural man, without the Saviour. With penetrating insight the Preacher repeatedly concludes life under the sun to be vanity or futility. His heart guided by divine revelation, he displays a revealing contrast of this earthly, horizontal perspective with life before the God who is *above* the sun and *made* the sun. This is a viewpoint to which the natural man without the Spirit of God cannot ascend, for he *“receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”* (I Cor. 2:14).

The Preacher was confronted with the plight of natural man, mucking about in the dust of the earth, oppressed by the troubles of life with which

God has allowed man to be afflicted in this earthly existence (3:10), and finding so much of it but a vanishing mist and internal torment. Perhaps it is because of this earthly viewpoint of the Preacher that we discover the book of Ecclesiastes devoid of the names of the Lord (Jehovah, Jah, or Adonai), with small trace of the concept of a Saviour or Redeemer within its pages. This earth-bound outlook is the lot of the natural man, while the redeemed man of the Spirit soars to the heights as if upon wings as eagles, looking down upon all from God's perspective, with an eye to eternity.

Now why the Lord's seemingly cruel approach in this book, leaving man in the hopelessness of his earthly plight? For the same reason as the seemingly heartless approach of the law of God, exposing man's hopeless shortfall before the holy standard of God, offering no solutions for man's need. The Lord in His grace seeks to drive man to look up and find his answer in Him. For the same reason parents are wise to bring the pain of the rod upon their child, in order to lead them to the peaceable fruits of righteousness. If they can effectively be led to a lifetime of *joy* through the correct use of the rod during the brief window period of their childhood, well then bring on the rod if it brings on their eventual joy. If a man is led to *eternal life*, blessed in the presence of the

true God, through painful confrontation with the hopelessness of life without God during the brief window period of this life, well then bring on that painful confrontation. This is the purpose of the Preacher's writing. God is confronting man with life's hopelessness, providing this book as a catalyst to despair, and ultimately to God for answers and life and hope and joy and satisfaction in Him.

Consider how the lesson for our witness comes clear. We are not wise to seek to *soften* the shock or attempt to *comfort* the unsaved in our effort to introduce them to Christ. Far better to follow the divine example before us, laying out the realities and consequences of a man's choices before him as God does, with all of the threat and hopeless despair in clear view. For *therein* is the avenue the Spirit of God recommends in leading a soul to the eternal answers in the Saviour. And let them see your *satisfaction* in Christ, for they can find no such lasting joy here below (Eccl. 1:8; Prov. 4:19; Isa. 59:8; 57:20-21), while the redeemed are ever revived (Isa. 57:15; 32:17-18; I Jn. 1:4; Ps. 29:11).

The author or "*Preacher*" is clearly King Solomon. The internal evidence is obvious (1:1, 12; 2:9 compare with II Chron. 1:12). There are those who dispute Solomon's authorship, and thus the

inspiration of Ecclesiastes, but this little book was in the O.T. of Christ's day, and Christ never "set the record straight". Thus the trustworthiness of Christ Himself presumes the trustworthiness of this book.

This book of Solomon's is an examination of life through the eyes of one who had it all, understood it all, and lived it all. It's a discussion of what sort of life is worth living. The book's theme is expressed in the first three verses. The first chapter summarizes the dilemma the observant Preacher faced. We'll have a look at chapter 1 in a moment.

In a sense this is a philosophy book, looking at life from a human perspective. But *real* philosophy, not *pagan* philosophy. We find in the book of Ecclesiastes an honest, open admission of man's inability to find meaning "*under the sun*", without knowing the One who made the sun. Every human pursuit, when really considered with unclouded insight, and chased to its fullest extent, is found to be vanity or emptiness. Whether it be the pursuit of some knowledge (1:17, "*I set my mind to know*"; 8:16, "*I applied my heart to know*"), or some experience (2:4-8, "*I made*", "*I got*", "*I built*", "*I planted*", "*I gathered*"; 2:9-10, "*I was great . . . more than all that were before me*", "*whatsoever*

mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy", etc.). In every case the perceptive Preacher came to the conclusion that it was vanity and emptiness under the sun (2:11). There was no real lasting profit in it.

He looks upon the endless monotony of life, the mysteries and seeming contradictions. He dabbles with vital questions; "is this life of toil really worth living?", "what is the sense of the sameness of endless labour?" People work their life through, raking together a leaf pile, only to die and leave their careful gatherings to somebody else. And who knows whether the heir of their collection will be worthy or a waster (2:17-19; compare Psalm 49:10).

The Preacher presents himself first as a *seeker*, and then as a *counsellor*. He was one earnestly searching for reality and meaning in life, finding it only ultimately in God, and then turning to share his discoveries with his world. He comes at last to the conclusion that the very best thing a man can do is to walk in the fear of the Lord, enjoying God's blessings today. Of course the New Testament (N.T.) considerably brightens the prospect, confirming that "*our labour is not in vain in the Lord*" (I Cor. 15:58), and that all that is done for Christ will last, and will be rewarded at the last

(James 1:12).

Key words and phrases in the book help to reveal the thrust of its message; “*wise*” or “*wisdom*” (52 times), “*man*” (47 times), “*vanity*” (37 times), “*labour*” (36 times), “*under the sun*” (30 times), “*evil*” (22 times).

That common phrase “*under the sun*” reveals the author’s angle as the outlook of natural man. It refers to a worldview that is purely horizontal, without a heavenly perspective. It describes the experience and outlook of man without God, summarized as “*vanity*”. And if one stops with only that perspective he’s left in the darkness without the brilliant light of day brought by the rest of God’s revelation to man. You just can’t take Ecclesiastes on its own. As with the book of Acts, this book must be understood in the context of the rest of the Bible. Cults have a field day with this book. I remember years ago, someone of a Jehovah’s Witness persuasion pointing to Ecclesiastes (probably 3:20 & 9:5) for proof of their view of soul sleep, that the lights just go out when you die.

The very opposite of the Preacher’s perspective in this book is that hopeful outlook of one who, with eyes of faith, sees above the sun, seeing “*Him who is invisible*” (compare Moses in Heb. 11:27).

The Preacher seems to think in a circular pattern throughout, repeatedly dipping into the futility of the world's empty offerings, and then coming back around to hope in God. Looking at life under the sun as the natural man would, without the light of God's revelation, the Preacher considers endless cycles (1:4-11), life's seemingly unfair contradictions (4:1; 7:15; 8:8), the meaninglessness of materialism (2:4-11; 5:10-11), fame (4:16), merry-making (2:1-2; 7:2-6), etc., and he comes to the repeated conclusion – *emptiness*. Yet the Preacher continually comes back around to speak as one to whom God has revealed Himself, affirming that true hope is found only in God, that life can only really be enjoyed as the gift of God (2:24; 3:13; 5:18; 8:15). In such statements there is a note of assurance in the Preacher's words (3:14; 8:12-13), ultimately concluding that the *wise* will live their lives for God, knowing that “*God shall bring every work into judgment*” (12:13-14).

Thus the purpose of the book is to demonstrate the emptiness of materialistic, earthly goals as an end in themselves, and to point the way to God as the source of all true meaning – both in our life and labour, and in life eternal.

“And I gave my heart
to seek and search out by wisdom
concerning all things
that are done under heaven...”

(Ecc. 1:13)

Chapter 1

- 1:1 The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.
- 1:2 Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.
- 1:3 What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?
- 1:4 One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever.
- 1:5 The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose.
- 1:6 The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits.
- 1:7 All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.
- 1:8 All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.
-

A Candid Assessment.

1:4-7 – Endless cycles.

- Vs. 4 – Generations of men.
- Vs. 5 – Days.
- Vs. 6 – Winds.
- Vs. 7 – Water.

1:8-10 – No completions.

- 1:9 The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.
- 1:10 Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us.
- 1:11 There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after.
- 1:12 I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem.
- 1:13 And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith.
- 1:14 I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.
-

- Nothing ever comes to a final point of satisfaction. Life never comes to some sort of completion level, moving on then to something new. Man's endless labour seems to have no end or goal or accomplishment. "For what?" is a fair question under the sun.

1:11 – No lasting remembrance.

- Nothing of the present is really fixed on into the coming generations.

1:12-13 – The Preacher's commitment to search out and understand.

1:13-18 – His conclusions.

- 1:15 That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.
- 1:16 I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.
- 1:17 And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit.
- 1:18 For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.
-

- Vs. 13-14 – “*sore travail*”, “*vanity and vexation of spirit*”.
- Vs. 15 – Things needing to be bettered cannot be lastingly bettered.
- Vs. 16-18 – Even great wisdom, with a grasp of all knowledge and applications, provides only greater sorrow rather than relief (vs. 18). You see, one who is truly wise is a *seer* (aware, carefully observant), and therefore he sees and understands more of the inequities and bitter realities and hopeless heartaches brought to man’s experience through man’s fall into sin. Mankind is truly depraved, with a heart “*deceitful above all things and desperately wicked*” (Jer. 17:9). Those wisely observant can’t miss this reality. In contrast, the fool is unseeing, running headlong and heedless through life

in pursuit of his own gratification, with no real conscious awareness of ultimates and purposes in life. But the Preacher is *seeing*, more clearly than any man in fact, considering everything to be had or done under the sun, and without fail he comes up *empty*. There's a sense in which it is true that ignorance carries a momentary bliss, for ignorance is oblivious of the larger picture of reality. But its bliss is only good for this life. True seers among the unsaved, in their observant awareness, are often led to the same hopeless outlook, and even despair and suicide, through the very thoughts the Preacher expresses. For if they do not find the answer in the Son above the sun they can trace out no satisfying ultimates under the sun. It does no good to deny these dark realities, or to belittle such thoughts as negative or unduly critical. All who are truly aware must come to the same despair when observing *only* what's under the sun. And *beyond* this life, from natural man's point of observation, "*who shall bring him to see what shall be after him*" (3:22). Only the Lord of life and death can reveal reality beyond death's curtain.

But that's not where the Lord leaves us, not

even in this little book of Solomon's. The way to a truly valuable existence will always be the same. Turn your focus around and live for the One who made the sun, and for others as the servant of all, for there is the way to joy.

“There is nothing better for a man,
than that he should eat and drink,
and that he should make his soul
enjoy good in his labour.

This also I saw,
that it was from the hand of God”

(Ecc. 2:24)

Chapter 2

- 2:1 I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth,
therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also is vanity.
2:2 I said of laughter, It is mad: and of mirth, What doeth it?
2:3 I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet
acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on
folly, till I might see what was that good for the sons of
men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of
their life.
2:4 I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me
vineyards:
2:5 I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in
them of all kind of fruits:
2:6 I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that
bringeth forth trees:
2:7 I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my
house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle
above all that were in Jerusalem before me:
2:8 I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure
of kings and of the provinces: I gat me men singers and
women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as
musical instruments, and that of all sorts.
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In chapter 2 Solomon turned his heart to great works of every kind (vs. 4-10), yet found all to be quite unprofitable (vs. 11). Then he followed with something of the reason why he came to that conclusion in vs. 12-23. Though wisdom exceeds foolishness in the same way that light excels over darkness (vs. 13), yet still the same eventuality happens to both the wise man and the fool (vs. 14-17) – *they die!* So what is the advantage of earthly

- 2:9 So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me.
- 2:10 And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour.
- 2:11 Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.
- 2:12 And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly: for what can the man do that cometh after the king? even that which hath been already done.
- 2:13 Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness.
- 2:14 The wise man's eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness: and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all.
- 2:15 Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity.
- 2:16 For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man? as the fool.
-

wisdom after death? (vs. 15) Nobody really remembers in the revolving generations to come (vs. 16). And after a life of labour, the fruits are simply left to somebody else (vs. 18-23), somebody who might be a fool, or made *more* a fool through his sudden windfall (vs. 19). Somebody who didn't work or apply wisdom for what he got (vs. 21). Talk about taking the wind out of your sails! What is the lasting profit of that? (vs. 22) Why stress yourself out through life and lose sleep (vs. 23) for somebody you might not really wish to so bless

- 2:17 Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit.
- 2:18 Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me.
- 2:19 And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have shewed myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity.
- 2:20 Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labour which I took under the sun.
- 2:21 For there is a man whose labour is in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity; yet to a man that hath not laboured therein shall he leave it for his portion. This also is vanity and a great evil.
-

through your own labours?!

Thus the Preacher, in his earthly wisdom, came to a reasonable conclusion. In view of the *temporary* nature of life on this earth, and in view of the *passing* nature of the results of man's work under the sun – ***enjoy life!!*** (vs. 24-26) Enjoy the fruits of your own labour to the fullest. Recognize them as the gift of God, not as things to be hastily heaped together, only ultimately to be left to others. See them as something to be *enjoyed* in the acquiring. It's God who gives peace to the penitent, and trouble to the transgressor (vs. 26). And all of the passionate possession-piling of the wicked is only ultimately for the benefit of those who are good (vs. 26), for the meek shall inherit

- 2:22 For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun?
2:23 For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity.
2:24 There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God.
2:25 For who can eat, or who else can hasten hereunto, more than I?
2:26 For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit.
-

the whole earth. God is the administrator of that (compare Prov. 13:22; 28:8). True enjoyment of the fruits of our labour (*and enjoyment of our labour* for that matter) is based on whether we are pleasing to God more than self-willed sinner (Ps. 84:11; Rom. 8:28). This must not be distorted into the Epicurean sensualist sort of reaction to life's despair and disparities, "Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die". Rather it is simply coming to the reasonable conclusion that there is ultimately no true enjoyment in life *without God*. As Augustine once prayed;

"Thou hast made me for Thyself, and my heart will not rest until it rests in Thee."

Salvation and eternal life in Jesus Christ is rescue from the human predicament of hopelessness under the sun.

Chapter 3

- 3:1 To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven;
- 3:2 A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;
- 3:3 A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;
- 3:4 A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
- 3:5 A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
-

In chapter 3 is found a well-known discussion of God's *design, order, and appointments* in life's events (vs. 1-11). The word "*time*" is found 28 times in these 14 pairs of opposites, covering all aspects of human experience – things "*traced upon our dial by the Son of Love*". God is the great life-balancer. And why does the Lord work with us in this way? To provide a multiple witness of Himself to man's heart;

- The witness of God's order (vs. 1-8, 11). Man can see the witness of God's order in life, just as he can see God's order in creation, forcing him to acknowledge God (compare Ps. 19; Rom. 1:19-21). The truth is that though man cannot fully understand

- 3:6 A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
 3:7 A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
 3:8 A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.
 3:9 What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth?
 3:10 I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it.
 3:11 He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.
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what God is doing (vs. 11b), there is nothing *wrong* with God's handling of things, even though man might be tempted to come to that conclusion. All is being handled quite perfectly from the Lord's perspective (vs. 11a).

- The witness of life's vanity (vs. 9-10). Man can see the hollowness of his experience in this life, again forcing him to turn to God.
- The witness of eternity (vs. 11). There's a question mark over the word translated "*world*" in vs. 11 (KJV). Behind the English is the great O.T. Hebrew word *olam*, found over 400 times in the Bible, and almost everywhere translated "*everlasting*" or "*forever*" or something similar. The Hebrew word *olam* is similar to the N.T. Greek word

aion, from which we get the English word *eon*, meaning “world” in the sense of “age”. Of the hundreds of times *olam* is found in the O.T. the only other time it’s translated “*world*” is in Ps. 73:12, and there it is “*world*” in the sense of this age. In fact every other occurrence of the word *olam* in this book of Ecclesiastes (including the immediate context of 3:14) expresses the idea of everlasting (1:4, 10; 2:16; 3:14; 9:6; 12:5).

Thus, here in Eccl. 3:11 the reference is to the *sense of eternity* which God has placed in the hearts of men. God has given, even to natural man, the ability to grasp the *lasting significance* of things, that things past relate to things present, and that present things must be answered for in the future (vs. 15). And with that awareness of the eternal, man is left with the problem of his inability to fathom, among other things, the vast reach of past and future. Man is unable to trace all of the effect into the future of present decisions and actions. He is often incapable of connecting present circumstances or outcomes to past decisions and actions. He is unequal to the task of putting that all together. And therefore man is forced to

trust God with the aspects of reality and outcomes he is not able to fully search out for himself. Man can sense, by God's own placement in him, an eternal perspective in the unfathomable nature of God and His creation, and in the unsolvable mysteries of our existence. God has simply not given man all the solutions to every seeming inconsistency in life. But rather He has left man unable to fully explain God's works, "*so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end*" (3:11; compare 8:17). And so again man is confronted with his *smallness* in contrast to God's *vast greatness*. Because the Lord has put the stamp of eternity on man's heart, he is unable to find complete satisfaction in this world. By his very nature man concludes that there must be something beyond this age, and he longs for settled assurance there.

Jesus spoke in a similar way to the disciples in Luke 10:20, "*rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.*" The truest basis for rejoicing is to know that our eternity is settled, that our relationship with our Creator is established forever in Christ. The icing on that

- 3:12 I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life.
3:13 And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God.
3:14 I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him.
3:15 That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past.
3:16 And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there.
-

glorious cake is the enjoyment of the simple things of life and the fruits of our labours as God's gift as well – all of those things that *came alive* with meaning and took on such deeper colours the moment I was saved. I have all of forever with Him! And to walk with Him in this life as well! *Praise God for His goodness!*

But for the natural man without God, again the Preacher's best conclusion under the sun ("*nothing better*", 2:24; 3:22) is for such a man (vs. 12-14), to do good (vs. 12), to enjoy the good results of his labour as God's gift (vs. 13), and even to allow the eternal, unmoveable nature of the Almighty to bring him to fear the Lord (vs. 14; compare Ps. 119:89-91).

In 3:16-4:3 the Preacher raises a question or

- 3:17 I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work.
- 3:18 I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts.
- 3:19 For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity.
-

dilemma. If God is ordering all events of life, and so assures us that “*everything is beautiful in his time*”, why are injustices and oppressions among men allowed? For as the Preacher looks around under the sun (vs. 16), he finds that where judgments are made among men, wickedness is also involved (imperfect justice). And even where men speak of their righteousness there is a good dose of iniquity mingled in. Yet he could foresee (vs. 17) that this shall *not* be so with God when the time arises for His work of judgment.

In vs. 18 the Preacher seems to answer that God allows injustice to exist for the time being among men that man’s evil might be “*manifest*” or become evident to him – that man might understand his low (“*beastly*”) nature. You see, if immediate judgment followed every wrong deed there would be no room for man to exercise his free will, faith,

- 3:20 All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again.
3:21 Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?
3:22 Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?
-

steadfast endurance in hardships, etc. And so God allows man to display to himself his own sinful, fallen nature, and to be confronted with his own mortality and frailty (comparable only in that way to animals). The Lord allows man the opportunity, either as oppressor or oppressed, to respond properly in turning to God. It's why the Lord allows oppressively evil men to continue in their injustice for a time.

Again the Preacher comes, in vs. 22, to the best conclusion for man under the sun – the thankful enjoyment of his work as God's portion for him in this life. Natural man's ignorance of the future should lead him to use his present existence to the fullest advantage.

“Better is an handful
with quietness,
than both the hands full
with travail and vexation of spirit”

(Ecc. 4:6)

Chapter 4

- 4:1 So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter.
- 4:2 Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive.
- 4:3 Yea, better is he than both they, which hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.
- 4:4 Again, I considered all travail, and every right work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbour. This is also vanity and vexation of spirit.
- 4:5 The fool foldeth his hands together, and eateth his own flesh.
-

The Preacher now begins to consider various motivations of men in their work.

4:4 – Envy.

- Some are moved by the dead end of envy.

4:5 – Sloth.

- Others are at the opposite extreme, choosing rather not to work at all, with starvation as the inevitable result (“*eateth his own flesh*”).

4:6 – The balance.

4:6 Better is an handful with quietness, than both the hands full
with travail and vexation of spirit.
4:7 Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun.
4:8 There is one alone, and there is not a second; yea, he hath
neither child nor brother: yet is there no end of all his
labour; neither is his eye satisfied with riches; neither saith
he, For whom do I labour, and bereave my soul of good?
This is also vanity, yea, it is a sore travail.

- The balanced, reasonable approach is to simply seek to have enough “*with quietness*”. Better one handful with heart rest, than a white-knuckled grip on two fists full with torment, rivalry, envy, etc. (compare Prov. 15:16-17; 16:8). Don’t ever make the mistake of buying treasures for the price of tranquillity, for such trinkets come with torment.

4:7-8 – The miser.

- Here is one living alone and sharing with no one, ever driven with a desire for more wealth, yet never satisfied. It’s a sad picture of insatiable covetousness without happiness, and with no end of labour – never waking up to ask “For what?” or “For who?” “*Sore travail*”, or a *miserable business* is what the wise Preacher writes over that whole unfortunate scenario.

- 4:9 Two are better than one; because they have a good reward
for their labour.
- 4:10 For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to
him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to
help him up.
- 4:11 Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can
one be warm alone?
- 4:12 And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him;
and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.
-

4:9-12 – *People* can be much more rewarding companions than coins.

- Two working together give a good reward for their labour (vs. 9).
- Two are able to help each other through difficulties (vs. 10).
- Two can comfort each other in hard times (vs. 11).
- Two, and even three, offer greater protection in danger (vs. 12). “*A threefold cord*” refers to three thin cords twisted into one stronger one, describing the mutual strength of companions when facing some outside threat.

How much wonderfully better the relationship ties of friendships, marriage, and family than the selfish solitary wealth of the miser. That a man

- 4:13 Better is a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished.
4:14 For out of prison he cometh to reign; whereas also he that is born in his kingdom becometh poor.
4:15 I considered all the living which walk under the sun, with the second child that shall stand up in his stead.
4:16 There is no end of all the people, even of all that have been before them: they also that come after shall not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and vexation of spirit.
-

should be alone was the first thing the Lord ever proclaimed “*not good*” (Gen. 2:18). And coins don’t count for company.

Wealth (i.e. more than “*an handful*”) is a ridiculous thing to demand of life, since it comes with “*vexation of spirit*” (vs. 6), leads to an empty miserly existence (vs. 8), and robs a man of all of the rich benefits of companionship (vs. 9-12). Wisdom writes “FOOLISHNESS” over both sluggard and slave to work.

4:13-16 – Political parade.

- Here is a picture of the endlessly shifting fortunes of leadership, and the forever fickle nature of followers. A wise young man (“*child*”) rises to the throne from a place of poverty or even prison through his wisdom, taking rule away from “*an old foolish king*” (vs. 13-14). Then a “*second child*” arises to

popular preference over the first (vs. 15), until the people “*also that come after shall not rejoice in him*”. There is no end to this political parade (vs. 16).

There are things we need to keep in mind whenever we approach this valuable book of God. The viewpoint of the book tends to be from that of the natural man, our perspective from under the sun. It’s a case of natural man grappling with life, seeking for answers on his own, and not finding any consistent meaning or clarity down here (without revelation from above). And watch how the Preacher repeatedly returns us to our best option based upon what we find down here;

- The emptiness of earthly works, with the conclusion that all that we manage to accomplish in this brief window period of life will be left behind, leads to 2:24-26 – “*there is nothing better for a man*” than to “*enjoy good in his labour*”, for this is from God.
- The witness of God in life’s order, and the sense of eternity inherent in man, leads to 3:12-14 – that a man should “*enjoy the good of all his labour*” as God’s gift, “*that men should fear before Him*”.

- Man displays himself in his injustice, mortality, ignorance, and oppressions, leading to 3:22 – *“there is nothing better”* than for a man to rejoice in his own works as his portion in this life.
- As well, the silliness of gathering possessions here for the sake of having possessions, will lead to 5:18-20 – it is good and right for a man to *“enjoy the good of all his labour”*, as God’s portion to him, given for his enjoyment.
- And what seem for the time to be inconsistencies in life, leads to 8:15 – *“man hath no better thing”* than to be happy in his labour throughout the days God gives him.

This response to life, and to the Lord of life, to live the life He has given us to the fullest, is simply the best choice man has in light of the evidence; the hollowness of things accomplished this side of the sun, the evidence of God, and He as the only source of order, the evil nature of man, and the seemingly tangled inconsistencies of life. Mankind’s only appropriate response is to walk in acknowledgement and appreciation of the true God – to walk in the fear of Him.

Chapter 5

5:1 Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil.

The Preacher turns to a warning concerning our worship. Since the whole issue for man is to always see what he does as before God (Prov. 3:6), carefully preserving that most essential relationship, the Preacher expresses concern that we not jeopardize our enjoyment and blessing in these earthly things by *disregarding* or *dishonouring* the Lord in what we do – particularly in the matter of worship.

5:1-7 – A warning against hasty worship.

- Vs. 1 – “*Keep thy foot*”. Don’t go to God without well-considered reverence. We must be careful not to go “*to the house of God*” as a mechanical performance of religious duty. One who would worship God must “*be more ready to hear*”, drawing near to Him with genuine attention and desire for Him, than to bring “*the sacrifice of fools*”, referring to an empty abundance of words thrown

- 5:2 Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.
- 5:3 For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words.
- 5:4 When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed.
- 5:5 Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.
-

heavenward like a hand full of sand – as abundant as it is worthless. The reference is to hollow ceremonialism and empty, wordy worship. Such religious formalists “*consider not that they do evil*”. What they think to be well-doing (prating prayers and empty expressions of commitment) is proclaimed to be evil-doing. Even as Christ’s condemnation of the empty public prayer life of the Jewish religious leaders. The Preacher applies these opening thoughts specifically in the areas of prayer (vs. 2-3) and vows to God (vs. 4-7).

- Vs. 2-3 – Prayers. “*Rash*” (vs. 2) is the opposite of well-considered *reverence* – the thoughtless words and empty ceremony of prayer, where *quantity* of words replaces the *quality* of genuine relation to God.

- 5:6 Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?
- 5:7 For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities: but fear thou God.
-

- Vs. 4-7 – Vows of commitment to God cannot be hastily made, for what is spoken before the Lord must be kept. Compare Deut. 23:21-23, quoted here in vs. 5. One attempting to get out of some vow rashly made before the Lord is on display in vs. 6.

It's a picture of empty religion, with no careful attention to one's relationship with God. Malachi 1:6-14 also describes careless religion, equally condemned there by the Lord. If a man would have God's blessing on his life under the sun, then care must be taken to ensure that he is ever genuine before the Lord (*"fear thou God"*, vs. 7). Lest he actually be cursed by God, even in his hollow religious motions – yea, because of them. Lest God be *"angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands"* (vs. 6), even as those in Christ's day, of whom the Lord quoted from Isa. 29:13;

"This people draweth nigh unto Me with their

- 5:8 If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent
 perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel
 not at the matter: for he that is higher than the highest
 regardeth; and there be higher than they.
- 5:9 Moreover the profit of the earth is for all: the king himself is
 served by the field.
- 5:10 He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor
 he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity.
- 5:11 When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and
 what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the
 beholding of them with their eyes?
-

*mouth, and honoureth Me with their lips, but
 their hearts are far from Me. But in vain they
 do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the
 commandments of men” (Matt. 15:8-9).*

5:8-17 – A proper view of possessions.

- Vs. 8 – Don’t be surprised by those who seek
 their fortune through unfairness and the
 hurt of others. It is seen by the Lord and
 will be repaid in His time.
- Vs. 10-17 – A list of “because” against the
 gathering of possessions.
 - Vs. 10 – Because the finest of
 possessions won’t satisfy.
 - Vs. 11 – Because attractive
 possessions draw pests, and often
 have no constructive use.

- 5:12 The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep.
- 5:13 There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt.
- 5:14 But those riches perish by evil travail: and he begetteth a son, and there is nothing in his hand.
- 5:15 As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand.
- 5:16 And this also is a sore evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go: and what profit hath he that hath laboured for the wind?
- 5:17 All his days also he eateth in darkness, and he hath much sorrow and wrath with his sickness.
-

- Vs. 12 – Because the need to *work* is greater than the need for *wealth*. The *labourer* sleeps well, even if he doesn't eat well.
- Vs. 13 – Because wealth brings trouble.
- Vs. 14 – Because wealth flies away. Compare Prov. 23:4-5.
- Vs. 15-16 – Because all things so carefully gathered will be left behind.
- Vs. 17 – Because a life of anxious toil comes to nothing.

5:18-20 – The Preacher's conclusion.

5:18 Behold that which I have seen: it is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for it is his portion.
5:19 Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God.
5:20 For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answereth him in the joy of his heart.

- Vs. 18 – It’s good and right to enjoy the good of our labour. This rather than trying to find joy in possessions themselves.
- Vs. 19 – Possessions and the power to enjoy them are the gift of God. Even *our joy in our labour* is from God. Don’t miss the point here that God expects that we find pleasure in our work. If otherwise with you, is it not disobedience then? Make the decision to enjoy your labour. Dislike of your work is usually more a matter of attitude than of circumstance – disobedient attitude?

Chapter 6

- 6:1 There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men:
- 6:2 A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honour, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it: this is vanity, and it is an evil disease.
- 6:3 If a man beget an hundred children, and live many years, so that the days of his years be many, and his soul be not filled with good, and also that he have no burial; I say, that an untimely birth is better than he.
- 6:4 For he cometh in with vanity, and departeth in darkness, and his name shall be covered with darkness.
- 6:5 Moreover he hath not seen the sun, nor known any thing: this hath more rest than the other.
- 6:6 Yea, though he live a thousand years twice told, yet hath he seen no good: do not all go to one place?
-

This chapter continues the discussion of what are commonly considered earthly gains or blessings, yet things that do not bring satisfaction in and of themselves.

6:1-8 – Things that do not satisfy.

- Vs. 1-2 – Much wealth, yet *“God giveth him not power to eat thereof”*.
- Vs. 3-5 – Many children, yet *“his soul be not filled with good”*. The Preacher suggests a miscarriage as perhaps a better option than

- 6:7 All the labour of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled.
- 6:8 For what hath the wise more than the fool? what hath the poor, that knoweth to walk before the living?
- 6:9 Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire: this is also vanity and vexation of spirit.
- 6:10 That which hath been is named already, and it is known that it is man: neither may he contend with him that is mightier than he.
- 6:11 Seeing there be many things that increase vanity, what is man the better?
- 6:12 For who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow? for who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?
-

an unsatisfying life (vs. 3-5).

- Vs. 6-8 – Long life, “*yet hath seen no good*” (vs. 6), and “*the appetite is not filled*” (vs. 7).

6:9-12 – Conclusions.

- Vs. 9 – The Preacher concludes it far better to be happy with what you have (“*the sight of the eyes*”), than to be constantly looking beyond to more (“*the wandering of the desire*”).
- Vs. 10-12 – All other conclusions under the sun are futile.

Chapter 7

- 7:1 A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth.
- 7:2 It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting; for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart.
- 7:3 Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.
- 7:4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.
- 7:5 It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools.
- 7:6 For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool: this also is vanity.
-

Scattered counsel for living.

7:1 – The grace of a good name.

- A good reputation offers a finer aroma than the best of perfumed ointments.

7:2-6 – Hardship's benefits.

- It's far more beneficial to be reminded through life's hard times of our frailty and foolishness, than to be overly given to the intoxication of frivolous amusements, fun, and laughter. We see the wisest of the wise in Christ, yet where was frivolous laughter

7:7 Surely oppression maketh a wise man mad; and a gift
destroyeth the heart.
7:8 Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: and
the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.
7:9 Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the
bosom of fools.
7:10 Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were
better than these? for thou dost not enquire wisely
concerning this.
7:11 Wisdom is good with an inheritance: and by it there is
profit to them that see the sun.
7:12 For wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence: but the
excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them
that have it.

and love of amusements in His life?

7:7 – The destructive nature of oppression and
bribes.

7:8-9 – Better is patience than pride.

7:10 – Moaning over memories.

- Don't bother pining for, or eulogizing "*the former days*", for such is a waste of time. It's questionable whether they were really better anyway.

7:11-12 – Wisdom with wealth – a winning
combination.

- 7:13 Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight,
which he hath made crooked?
- 7:14 In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity
consider: God also hath set the one over against the other,
to the end that man should find nothing after him.
- 7:15 All things have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a
just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a
wicked man that longeth his life in his wickedness.
- 7:16 Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over
wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself ?
-

7:13-14 – Rejoice in both *prosperity* and *problems*.

- This admonition grounded in God's sovereignty over all. He does not reveal His purposes into the future, nor can man change God's sovereign plan (vs. 13).

7:15 – A sense of justice.

- Nothing so disturbs a man's sense of right and wrong as seeing a man die in spite of his righteousness, or seeing an evil man live long in spite of his wickedness. The answer will come in 8:12-13. Compare Ps. 73, "*Then understood I their end*".

7:16 – "*Be not righteous over much*".

- Don't exaggerate your righteousness. Don't be morbidly exacting, straining out the little externals such that we describe a life stricter

7:17 Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldst thou die before thy time?
7:18 It is good that thou shouldst take hold of this; yea, also from this withdraw not thine hand: for he that feareth God shall come forth of them all.

than God Himself requires. Compare I Tim. 4:3, “*Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats*”. The Preacher speaks of a fanatical, Pharisaic self-righteousness of outward performances so added to the law of God that the very essential heart of God’s standard of right is lost. This is the Christian brother who in his zeal for what is right becomes *obnoxious* – gasping at every curse word, unwilling to allow the least little wrong to slide by, idealism ad nauseum.

7:17 – The other extreme.

- The swing of the pendulum from *legalism* clean across to *license*, freely allowing the sin nature to express itself. This to be avoided as well, lest God’s judgment of death come upon you earlier than it might have.

7:18 – God-fearers shall escape all such extremes.

- There is always a reasonable mean or middle

7:19 Wisdom strengtheneth the wise more than ten mighty men
which are in the city.
7:20 For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good,
and sinneth not.
7:21 Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou
hear thy servant curse thee:
7:22 For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou
thyself likewise hast cursed others.
7:23 All this have I proved by wisdom: I said, I will be wise; but
it was far from me.

way to be sought in life, a moderate pathway that shuns the excesses. God is highlighting the biblical balance here. Compare I Tim. 3:3, where the word translated “*patient*” (KJV) means equitable, or “a going back from the letter of right for the better preserving of the spirit” (Trench).

7:19-21 – The strength of wise restraint.

- The wise have the strength of self-restraint, and thus can be strong in the face of humiliation. They know of their own sinfulness, that they are worthy of judgment. If the rebuke or hiding or shame we receive is unjust we all know there was many another we deserved but never got.

7:23-29 – The Preacher’s discoveries in his quest to understand all.

7:24 That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out?
 7:25 I applied mine heart to know, and to search, and to seek
 out wisdom, and the reason of things, and to know the
 wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness:
 7:26 And I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart
 is snares and nets, and her hands as bands: whoso pleaseth
 God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her.
 7:27 Behold, this have I found, saith the preacher, counting one
 by one, to find out the account:
 7:28 Which yet my soul seeketh, but I find not: one man among
 a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those
 have I not found.
 7:29 Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man
 upright; but they have sought out many inventions.

- Vs. 26 – Attachment to an evil-hearted, grasping woman is more bitter than death. God will not allow one who pleases Him to be trapped by such. One wonders if Solomon spoke from personal experience, with his own juggling of 700 wives and 300 concubines (I Ki. 11:3). Consider what this might reveal of God's attitude toward Solomon, certainly in those later years of his reign.
- Vs. 28 – How very rare is a woman of true excellence.
- Vs. 29 – The rarity of human uprightness is man's own doing (undoing), not God's. The fault for such cannot be put on God.

Chapter 8

- 8:1 Who is as the wise man? and who knoweth the interpretation of a thing? a man's wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the boldness of his face shall be changed.
- 8:2 I counsel thee to keep the king's commandment, and that in regard of the oath of God.
- 8:3 Be not hasty to go out of his sight: stand not in an evil thing; for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him.
- 8:4 Where the word of a king is, there is power: and who may say unto him, What doest thou?
- 8:5 Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing: and a wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment.
- 8:6 Because to every purpose there is time and judgment, therefore the misery of man is great upon him.
- 8:7 For he knoweth not that which shall be: for who can tell him when it shall be?
- 8:8 There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it.
-

8:1 – The incomparable wise man.

8:2-9 – The wisdom of staying on the right side of a king's power.

- Vs. 5 – The wise discern the right course and timing.
- Vs. 6-7 – Man faces “misery” through his inability to know or control outcomes.
- Vs. 8 – As he has no power to keep his own

8:9 All this have I seen, and applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun: there is a time wherein one man ruleth over another to his own hurt.
8:10 And so I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done: this is also vanity.

spirit or avoid death, so he has no power to avoid the consequences of his wickedness. Earthly rulers are appointed for the judgment of evil-doers and the praise of those doing good (I Pet. 2:13-14).

8:10-14 – Failure to punish wickedness.

- God's seeming failure to punish wickedness is one of the great difficulties of His economy (4:1; 7:15).
- Vs. 10 – The wicked also have access to the place of worship (*“the holy”*), which they may frequent in their life, yet they do not escape death by their religiosity. For they then die and are praised in the city where they practiced their wickedness, and are soon forgotten! Prov. 10:7, *“The memory of the just is blessed; but the name of the wicked shall rot”*.
- Vs. 11 – Perseverance in sin is often due to

- 8:11 Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.
- 8:12 Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him:
-

man's failure to punish quickly, perhaps suggesting God's apparent slackness in judgment. Compare II Pet. 3:8-9. The Lord is not bound by a time reference. His delay must not be interpreted as slackness in keeping His promises or warnings. Compare II Sam. 2-3 & 20. Though Joab escaped punishment for the murder of Abner it did not lead to his repentance (Rom. 2:4). Rather it led on to the further assassination of Amasa. But judgment and shameful death finally fell on Joab in Solomon's reign. As one writer said, it is because folks don't see the smoke of the pit, that they don't dread the fire. Compare Ps. 55:19.

- Vs. 12 – The Preacher laments that the wicked can sin with impunity (100 times and live long in it). But the reality is that in comparison with *eternal* existence the present days, however seemingly long, are really quite brief. God's "delays" exist only

- 8:13 But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God.
- 8:14 There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous: I said that this also is vanity.
- 8:15 Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun.
-

in man's short-sighted viewpoint. The Preacher definitely believed in the truth of God's payday someday. Solomon spoke clearly in Proverbs of the certainty of God's repayment of evil as well as good (Prov. 2:22; 10:27; 29:1; Isa. 3:10-11).

This was Habakkuk's dilemma as well – seeing the Lord prosper the wicked, and even use their victories to bring His judgment upon His own people (Hab. 1:13). God's answer to Habakkuk can be found in 2:4 of his book. Rather than being drawn to marvel at the accomplishments of unsaved natural man, or to envy or fret over or imitate or rage at them, by faith we see their end. We rather see them as pitiable souls to be rescued out of the fire. The challenge is always the same. Will you simply believe

8:16 When I applied mine heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth: (for also there is that neither day nor night seeth sleep with his eyes:)

8:17 Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labour to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yea farther; though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it.

what God has said? Will you act upon that faith? Will you stake your life on His promises?

8:15-17 – Conclusions.

- In view of seeming inconsistencies and our ignorance, we can only conclude that the things of God are unsearchable, denying our full understanding and begging our trust. Though we may not be able to put everything together, this is no reason to give up on life. Rather than driving you to despair, let it force you to trust the One above all.

“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do,
do it with thy might”

(Ecc. 9:10)

Chapter 9

- 9:1 For all this I considered in my heart even to declare all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them.
- 9:2 All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath.
- 9:3 This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead.
-

9:1 – The good are in God’s hand.

- Though the wisest cannot understand all (8:16-17), the Preacher declares again (8:12) his confidence that the wise and righteous are in God’s care. In 8:16 Solomon gave his heart to *know*, but alas could not get to the bottom of it. Now he gives his heart to *declare* what he did know, that man has the option to find his hiding place in God’s hand. Here is cause for despair only if you choose to remain outside of God’s blessed hand.

9:2-3 – One event happens to all – death.

- 9:4 For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion.
- 9:5 For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten.
- 9:6 Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun.
- 9:7 Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works.
-

- This no morbid preoccupation with death, but candid realism.

9:4-6 – Life’s advantages over death.

- Life still holds hope (a lowly life [*“living dog”*] is better than a majestic death [*“dead lion”*]), knowledge, reward, remembrance, emotion, a part of life, etc. We should not be led to despair in life since life is certainly better than death from the perspective of natural man under the sun. This does not teach soul sleep upon death, but again from the viewpoint of unenlightened man, it is the contrast between life and life’s end under the sun. Give yourself to enjoy life’s opportunities, which will be lost upon death.

9:7-10 – Concluding thoughts.

9:8 Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment.
9:9 Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun.
9:10 Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.

- Here again is counsel for a happy life, in view of certain death ending all, and in view of the fleeting nature of life.
- Vs. 9 – Live in joy with your wife. This is given as a command. Similar to what we see in Prov. 5:19, *“Let her breasts satisfy thee at all times, and be thou ravished always with her love”*. The implication is that a man is able to do so if he chooses to obey God. So do we need a married couple’s weekend retreat to sort that one out, or will you decide for it (for her) right here and now? See again how that spouse can become such a vital part of life, given by God to make the difficulties of life more bearable (remember 4:9-12). See again how important is the wise choice of the right spouse, one who makes it an easy task to rejoice in him/her. Indeed the finding of such a one is from the Lord (Prov. 19:14).

- 9:11 I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.
- 9:12 For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them.
- 9:13 This wisdom have I seen also under the sun, and it seemed great unto me:
- 9:14 There was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it:
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- Vs. 10 – Go for your very best.

9:11-12 – Discussion of death.

- Death is an uncertain, unpredictable, and often sudden event. “*Chance*” again referring to the view from man’s perspective “*under the sun*”, expressing unpredictability. Not only the weak and foolish die. Swiftness, strength, wisdom, understanding, and skill won’t win over death.

9:13-18 – A little city, saved by wisdom.

- The Preacher begins to exalt wisdom above folly by relating an interesting story, teaching the *supreme value of wisdom*.
- Vs. 14 – He knew of a little city (not a big

9:15 Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man.

important one), and one only sparsely populated. There were few men within to fight for their little city – no military strength (a *weak* little city). And then a great king came against that feeble little city, with great resources and power. From a human perspective the city appeared *helpless* and *hopeless*, and sure to fall.

- Vs. 15 – Enter poor wise man. Then a nameless poor man, by his wisdom, rescued that little city. We’re not told how, only that his *wisdom* proved stronger than great military might. He couldn’t buy off the attackers, being a poor man. And he could muster no army, with few men in the city to follow him. His only resource was his wisdom. That’s what impressed the Preacher. *Wisdom alone beat strength!*

But then, for all the poor man’s great benefit to his little city through his wisdom, “*yet no man remembered that same poor man*” (vs. 15), and “*nevertheless the poor man’s wisdom is despised, and his words are not*

- 9:16 Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength: nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard.
- 9:17 The words of wise men are heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools.
- 9:18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war: but one sinner destroyeth much good.
-

heard” (vs. 16). The wise man went *unrewarded* and even *unremembered* for the deliverance his wisdom brought.

- Vs. 16-18 – The Preacher’s conclusion. “Wisdom is *better* than strength” (vs. 16) and “*better* than weapons of war” (vs. 18). Yet still wisdom just doesn’t impress folks as do power and greatness and wealth. Wisdom’s value is less obvious or striking to the people of earth. In fact, only the wise are capable of properly prizing wisdom. Wisdom is *better* than great, impressive strength, and always will be, though the world refuses to see it . . . and they always will.

Compare Hezekiah’s experience and example with King Sennacherib of Assyria (II Ki. 19). The great Assyrian Empire had come up against the city of Jerusalem. There was simply no human hope! No other city had withstood Assyria! No nation existed big

enough to challenge them. To whom could Jerusalem run for help? Yet King Hezekiah's wise response proved far greater than Assyria's military might. He simply humbled himself before the Lord and *prayed*. And behold how Assyria's formidable threat dried up over night (vs. 35-36)!

Thus, *true strength* is to fear God and depend on Him, as godly Hezekiah. This a greater power than all the combined powers of earth, yet with no impressive, visible earthly resources, and thus easily missed and quickly forgotten by man. Let the people of earth set up their great memorials and halls of fame to their mighty ones. Let them stock their museums with the bones of great awesome dinosaurs. Yet see how they entirely lose track of the *God* who in His wisdom and might *created* those great beasts. See how natural man, in his folly, misses the quiet truth that such impressive creatures exist no more *because* the invisible God of heaven is bigger than they, and took them out when He pleased (Job 40:19, "I can make him, and I can take him!"). To be wise enough to trust in God is to have hidden resources greater than anything this earth

could ever muster. Yet the world will ever be blind to this might, because they cannot see in it something tangible and impressive.

Chapter 10

- 10:1 Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour.
- 10:2 A wise man's heart is at his right hand; but a fool's heart at his left.
- 10:3 Yea also, when he that is a fool walketh by the way, his wisdom faileth him, and he saith to every one that he is a fool.
- 10:4 If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place; for yielding pacifieth great offences.
-

Still exalting wisdom above foolishness (the word “fool” and its forms found 9 times in this chapter).

10:1 – Little foolishness is required to spoil the ointment of an otherwise wise life.

10:2 – Heart on display.

- The wise hold their heart in a place of honour (“*right hand*”), while the fool in dishonour. Compare Prov. 4:23, “*Keep thy heart with all diligence* [above all your keeping]”.

10:3 – Life has a way of exposing what’s in us.

10:5 There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, as an error which proceedeth from the ruler:
10:6 Folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in low place.
10:7 I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth.
10:8 He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him.
10:9 Whoso removeth stones shall be hurt therewith; and he that cleaveth wood shall be endangered thereby.
10:10 If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength: but wisdom is profitable to direct.
10:11 Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment; and a babbler is no better.
10:12 The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious; but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself.
10:13 The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness: and the end of his talk is mischievous madness.

10:4 – Don't run from threatening authorities.

- A yielding attitude pacifies even great offences.

10:5-7 – Foolishness applied. Inequities in life.

10:8-10 – Wisdom applied.

- The dangers of daily living can be avoided through practical wisdom. Again, wisdom goes farther than brute strength (vs. 10).

10:11-15 – A fool's talk.

- The words of a fool are self-condemning,

10:14 A fool also is full of words: a man cannot tell what shall be; and what shall be after him, who can tell him?
10:15 The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city.
10:16 Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning!
10:17 Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness!
10:18 By much slothfulness the building decayeth; and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through.
10:19 A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry: but money answereth all things.
10:20 Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter.

hurtful, madness, too abundant, and as right in his own eyes as they are ignorant.

10:16-19 – Wisdom & folly in leadership.

- Vs. 16-17 – Two kinds of leaders – selfish and sharp.
- Vs. 18 – An illustration of the wisdom of diligence.
- Vs. 19 – An example of a selfish attitude. Compare Prov. 31:4-9.

10:20 – Danger of slandering authorities.

“He that observeth the wind
shall not sow;
and he that regardeth the clouds
shall not reap”
(Ecd. 11:4)

Chapter 11

- 11:1 Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.
- 11:2 Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.
- 11:3 If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth: and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be.
- 11:4 He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.
- 11:5 As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all.
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11:1-6 – The wise investment of a life.

- Vs. 1-2 – An illustration from *shipping*. Dividing investments is necessary because of our uncertainty of what the future holds. Don't be inactive (vs. 1), and don't put all your eggs in one basket (vs. 2). Invest wisely (diversified) and diligently, and you will get an eventual return.
- Vs. 3-6 – An illustration from *farming*. The Preacher speaks of diligent investment of labour, though we don't understand how it all works out (4 times "*thou knowest not*" here). Again the concept of giving now with hope of a future multiplied return. Keep

11:6 In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold
not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper,
either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.
11:7 Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the
eyes to behold the sun:

your focus on planting without regard to time or circumstances. Don't let anything distract you from that main focus, even as Nehemiah could not be veered from his focused purpose of putting up that wall. If you're only ever concerned with *caution* and *conserving* precious resources rather than investing, you'll never reap a harvest. If you're always waiting for just the right circumstances, you'll never produce anything (vs. 4). The Lord is equally at work in the evil, unpromising days and people and circumstances as He is in the good.

With these two illustrations we are urged on to constant, diligent effort, combined with prudent, diversified investment of energy and resources, while recognizing that all is in God's sovereign control, with the outcomes unknown to us.

*Put your all into doing your best,
While putting your trust in God for the rest.*

- 11:8 But if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity.
- 11:9 Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.
- 11:10 Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity.
-

Consider these thoughts applied to *outreach* as well as business. If your only concern is preserving your own gains rather than investing in the blessing of others, your resources will never reap a harvest. Compare Luke 6:38, “*Give and it shall be given unto you...*”, and Prov. 3:9-10, “*Honour the Lord with thy substance...*”, and Prov. 19:17, “*He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord...*”

11:7-12:7 – Final reminder of certain death.

- Vs. 7-8 – Light is sweet, but darkness is coming.
- Vs. 9-10 – Joying, yet mindful of judgment. Put away both sorrow and evil.

“Let us hear
the conclusion of the matter:
Fear God,
and keep his commandments:
for this is the whole duty of man”
(Ecdl. 12:13)

Chapter 12

- 12:1 Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them;
- 12:2 While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain:
- 12:3 In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened,
- 12:4 And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low;
- 12:5 Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets:
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12:1-7 – “Remember now thy Creator”.

- Remember God while you have the mental and physical facilities to love and serve Him. This is a dramatic, poetic description of aging and death, and always in view of the fact that before Him we must give account (vs. 7).

12:8-14 – The Preacher’s conclusion.

- Vs. 8 – The Preacher starts his conclusion by restating his starting point (1:2).

12:6 Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.
 12:7 Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.
 12:8 Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity.
 12:9 And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs.
 12:10 The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth.
 12:11 The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd.

- Vs. 9-10 – His purpose was to teach upright words of truth.
- Vs. 11-12 – Wisdom’s effect.
 - o Vs. 11 – The goads and nails of wisdom. Goads are sharp pointed rods for prodding oxen into some course. God’s truth is as goads, spurring us on (painfully perhaps) to accomplishment, development, embellishment, etc. And His eternal wisdom is as fastened nails, leashing our hearts to the centre pin of right and preventing our straying (II Tim. 3:16-17).

Undershepherds (“masters of

- 12:12 And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.
- 12:13 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.
- 12:14 For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.
-

assemblies) under one Shepherd. The Preacher reveals the source of his teaching.

- Vs. 12 – A warning not to seek answers beyond what God has given.
- Vs. 13-14 – “*The conclusion of the whole matter*”. When all the writings of men are considered (vs. 12), we come to the conclusion that this exalted Book is that Book of all books. And when bringing the message of this blessed Book of God to conclusion, we find that it all funnels into one clear pathway before man; to fear God, to honour His commandments (true fear of God will be evident in obedience to Him), and to live with a view to His judgment. This is that true life for which man was created.

Focus on Fearing God

- 3:14 – The unchangeable nature of God's works lead us to fear Him.
- 5:7 – The command to fear God through all, like a ship cutting a straight course through the waves and currents of man's vain words & dreams.
- 7:18 – One fearing God will come through to a proper balance in life.
- 8:12-13 – The Preacher's assurance of future wellness for God-fearers .
- 12:13 – The concluding command “*of the whole matter*” to fear God as the “*whole duty of man*”.

