

Ecclesiastes

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Author: Solomon (the Preacher/Qoheleth) · Written: c. 935 BC · Category: Wisdom/Poetry

Introduction

Ecclesiastes stands as **Scripture's most brutally honest assessment of life 'under the sun'**—that is, life lived from an earthly, horizontal perspective apart from divine revelation and eternal hope. Known in Hebrew as 'Qoheleth' (the Preacher or Assembler), this book confronts the apparent meaninglessness, injustice, and futility that characterize human existence in a fallen world. The Preacher's repeated verdict —'**vanity of vanities, all is vanity**'—employs the Hebrew word *hebel* (vapor, breath, fleeting) thirty-eight times to describe life's ephemeral, frustrating, and ultimately unsatisfying nature when pursued as an end in itself.

The book records **an exhaustive empirical search for meaning and satisfaction** conducted by someone uniquely qualified for the experiment: the wisest, wealthiest, most powerful person of his era. The Preacher tested wisdom (1:12-18), pleasure and laughter (2:1-3), great works and possessions (2:4-11), and work itself (2:18-23). His verdict on each: 'vanity and vexation of spirit'—striving after wind, ultimately empty and frustrating. The problem is not that these pursuits are evil in themselves, but that **they cannot bear the weight of ultimate meaning** we try to place upon them. Every earthly pleasure is temporary, every achievement forgotten, every wise insight insufficient, and every worker destined for the grave where wisdom and folly, rich and poor, meet the same end.

Yet Ecclesiastes is not nihilistic despair but **therapeutic disillusionment**—stripping away false hopes so that true hope can emerge. The book's dialectical style presents apparent contradictions: wisdom is better than folly (2:13), yet both the wise and fool die (2:16); righteous living is commended (7:15-18), yet the righteous sometimes suffer while the wicked prosper (8:14). These tensions drive readers toward the book's resolution: **Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man** (12:13). Apart from God, life is meaningless; in relation to God, even life's mysteries and frustrations can be borne with faith.

The book's repeated call to **enjoy life's simple pleasures as God's gifts**—eating, drinking, working, loving—is not Epicurean hedonism but humble contentment. Since we cannot comprehend God's full purposes ('no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end' 3:11), we should receive each day's provision with thanksgiving rather than striving anxiously after more. Ecclesiastes teaches what C.S. Lewis would later express: if we aim at earth, we get neither earth nor heaven; if we aim at heaven, we get earth 'thrown in.' The book liberates us from the tyranny of achievement by declaring its ultimate futility, freeing us to work and live for God's glory rather than earthly legacy.

Book Outline

- **Prologue: All Is Vanity** (1:1-11) — The book opens with its shocking thesis: **'Vanity of vanities... all is vanity'** (1:2). The Preacher introduces himself as 'son of David, king in Jerusalem'—clearly Solomon—possessing unparalleled qualifications to evaluate life's meaning. He presents life as wearisome, repetitive cycles: generations come and go, the sun rises and sets, wind circles endlessly, rivers flow to the sea which never fills (1:3-7). Nothing is truly new (1:9-10), and past generations are forgotten, as will be future ones (1:11). This bleak introduction establishes the 'under the sun' perspective that will be tested throughout the book.
- **The Preacher's Personal Quest for Meaning** (1:12-2:26) — The Preacher describes his **systematic search for life's meaning** through various pursuits. First, he applied himself to wisdom and knowledge, only to discover that 'in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow' (1:18). Wisdom reveals life's vanity more clearly. Second, he tested **pleasure**—laughter, wine, folly—but found it empty (2:1-3). Third, he pursued **great works**: building houses, planting vineyards, making gardens and parks, acquiring servants, flocks, herds, silver and gold, and surrounding himself with entertainers (2:4-11). Yet after achieving everything his heart desired, he assessed it all as 'vanity and vexation of spirit' (2:11). Wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness (2:13), yet both wise and fool die and are forgotten (2:14-16). Even work becomes burdensome when one considers that the fruit of one's labor must be left to another who may squander it (2:18-23). The chapter concludes with the first appearance of a repeated refrain: **there is nothing better than to enjoy God's simple gifts** of food, drink, and satisfaction in work (2:24-26).
- **Times, Eternity, and Injustice** (3:1-4:16) — Chapter 3 opens with the famous **poem on times and seasons** (3:1-8)—a time for birth and death, planting and uprooting, killing and healing, breaking down and building up, and so on through fourteen contrasts. God has made everything beautiful in its time and set eternity in human hearts, yet we cannot fathom His full purposes (3:11). The Preacher observes **injustice in courts** (3:16), the shared fate of humans and beasts (3:18-21), and concludes that enjoying one's work is God's gift (3:22). Chapter 4 catalogs more vanities: **oppression** with no comforter (4:1-3), envy-driven labor (4:4), the lonely worker without companion to share his wealth (4:7-8), the advantage of partnership (4:9-12), and the fickleness of popular acclaim even for a king (4:13-16). These observations paint a bleak picture of life 'under the sun.'
- **Wisdom for Worship, Wealth, and Authority** (5:1-8:17) — This section offers **practical wisdom** amid life's vanities. Chapter 5 counsels careful speech in worship: 'Be not rash with thy mouth' (5:2), and warns against making unfulfilled

vows (5:4-6). **Fear God** is the recurring command (5:7). The Preacher notes that wealth doesn't satisfy—the more one has, the more one wants, and riches can be lost suddenly (5:10-17). Again comes the refrain: enjoy God's gifts (5:18-20). Chapter 6 describes the tragedy of gaining wealth but being unable to enjoy it (6:1-2). Chapters 7-8 contain proverbial wisdom: a good name is better than ointment (7:1), sorrow is better than laughter for the heart's good (7:3), wisdom preserves life (7:12), yet no one is perfectly righteous (7:20). The Preacher warns against excessive righteousness or wickedness (7:15-18)—both paths lead to trouble. He observes that **women are a snare** (perhaps reflecting his own experience with foreign wives, 7:26) and that he found one upright man in a thousand but not one upright woman (7:28)—a statement reflecting his particular experience rather than universal truth. Chapter 8 counsels submission to authority (8:2-5), acknowledges that no one knows the future (8:7), notes that the wicked sometimes receive what the righteous deserve (8:14), and concludes: fear God (8:12-13) and enjoy life (8:15). God's work is inscrutable (8:17).

- **Death, Chance, and Seizing the Day** (9:1-11:6) — The same fate awaits righteous and wicked, clean and unclean (9:2-3)—death is the great equalizer. A living dog is better than a dead lion, so one should **enjoy life with one's spouse** (9:4-10). Yet 'time and chance happeneth to them all' (9:11)—outcomes are not guaranteed by wisdom, strength, or skill. Wisdom is better than weapons, yet one sinner destroys much good (9:18). Chapter 10 offers proverbial wisdom about fools, rulers, diligence, and speech. Chapter 11 counsels **prudent risk-taking**: casting bread on waters (11:1), diversifying investments (11:2), yet acknowledging that we cannot control outcomes (11:5-6). The section ends with beautiful counsel: 'Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth' (11:9), enjoy life while remembering you will give account to God, and 'remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth' (12:1).
- **Conclusion: Fear God** (12:1-14) — The book's climax begins with urgent counsel: '**Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth**' (12:1), before old age comes (described poetically in 12:2-7 as 'the evil days'—a beautiful, haunting portrait of aging and death). When the silver cord is loosed and the golden bowl broken (12:6), when dust returns to earth and spirit returns to God (12:7), then 'vanity of vanities, all is vanity' (12:8)—the book's refrain returns. The epilogue (12:9-14) describes the Preacher's work: he taught knowledge, arranged many proverbs, and sought to write truthfully (12:9-10). The words of the wise are like goads and nails (12:11). The conclusion: 'Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment' (12:13-14). This ending introduces **divine judgment**, transcending 'under the sun' observation and providing ultimate purpose and accountability that the horizontal perspective lacked.

Key Themes

- **The Vanity (Hebel) of Life Under the Sun:** The book's central concept, **hebel**, appears 38 times and means vapor, breath, or mist—something insubstantial, transient, and frustratingly elusive. All human endeavors 'under the sun' (the earthly perspective without God) share this quality: they pass away quickly, leave no lasting impact, and fail to satisfy the human soul. This is not to say earthly things are worthless, but that they cannot provide ultimate meaning or lasting fulfillment. Ecclesiastes forces readers to confront this uncomfortable truth as preparation for finding meaning in God alone.
- **The Inescapability of Death and Its Leveling Effect:** Death is **the great equalizer** that renders all earthly distinctions ultimately meaningless from an earthly perspective. The wise and the fool, the rich and the poor, humans and animals—all go to the same place, return to dust, and are forgotten (2:14-16; 3:18-21; 9:2-3). This stark reality confronts every attempt to find lasting meaning in earthly achievement. Yet the book's conclusion points beyond death to divine judgment (12:14), suggesting that death is not truly the end and that eternal consequences do differentiate the righteous from the wicked.
- **The Limits of Human Wisdom and Knowledge:** Despite being the wisest man alive, the Preacher confesses that **wisdom cannot penetrate life's deepest mysteries**. God has 'set eternity in their hearts, yet so that man cannot find out the work that God doeth from the beginning to the end' (3:11). We long to understand ultimate purposes but lack the perspective. Human wisdom, while better than folly (2:13; 7:11-12), cannot explain why the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper, why time and chance affect all, or what happens after death. This humbles intellectual pride and cultivates appropriate epistemic modesty before God's inscrutable providence.
- **Time, Chance, and Divine Sovereignty:** The famous poem on times and seasons (3:1-8) establishes that **God has appointed times for everything**, yet from our limited perspective, events often seem governed by 'time and chance' (9:11). We cannot control outcomes or guarantee success through wisdom, strength, or skill. This tension between divine sovereignty (God determines times) and apparent randomness (we cannot predict or control events) calls us to humble dependence on God rather than confident self-reliance. We must work diligently while recognizing that results ultimately lie in God's hands.
- **Injustice and the Prosperity of the Wicked:** The Preacher observes with distress that **'in the place of judgment, wickedness was there'** (3:16), that the wicked sometimes receive what the righteous deserve and vice versa (8:14), and that oppression goes unpunished (4:1). This pervasive injustice is one of life's most

troubling 'vanities.' Yet the book points toward ultimate accountability: 'God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing' (12:14). Present injustice does not negate divine justice—it merely demonstrates that full justice awaits a future reckoning beyond 'under the sun.'

- **The Gift of Enjoying Simple Pleasures:** Seven times the book counsels enjoying life's **simple, God-given pleasures:** eating, drinking, finding satisfaction in one's work, and loving one's spouse (2:24-25; 3:12-13, 22; 5:18-20; 8:15; 9:7-10; 11:9-10). This is not hedonistic 'eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die,' but grateful reception of God's common grace gifts. Since we cannot comprehend all of God's ways, we should humbly enjoy what He provides today rather than anxiously chasing after more or demanding explanations for life's mysteries. **Contentment is wisdom's practical fruit.**
- **The Fear of God as Life's Anchor:** The book's theological foundation and conclusion is **fearing God** (3:14; 5:7; 7:18; 8:12-13; 12:13). This reverent awe and submission to God's authority provides stability amid life's mysteries and frustrations. Even when we cannot understand God's ways, we can trust His character. The fear of God prevents both presumption (thinking we can comprehend all) and despair (thinking life has no meaning). It is 'the whole duty of man'—the purpose for which we were created and the stance appropriate to our creaturely status before the infinite Creator.
- **Eternity Set in the Human Heart:** God has '**set eternity in their heart**' (3:11 NASB)—given humans an awareness of transcendence, a longing for ultimate meaning, and an intuition that there must be more than 'under the sun' existence. This innate sense that we were made for eternity explains why earthly pleasures never finally satisfy and why death feels so wrong. We are exiles longing for home, beings made for infinity trying to find fulfillment in finite things. Only relationship with the eternal God can satisfy this eternity-shaped void. Ecclesiastes exposes the void; the gospel fills it with Christ.

Key Verses

Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.

— Ecclesiastes 1:2 (The book's **thematic introduction** uses the Hebrew superlative ('vanity of vanities') to emphasize the extreme, comprehensive futility of life 'under the sun.' The word hebel (vapor, breath) will appear 38 times, establishing the transient, insubstantial nature of all earthly pursuits when divorced from divine purpose. This shocking opening grabs attention and prepares readers for the book's unflinching realism about fallen human existence.)

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.

— Ecclesiastes 1:9 (This verse captures the **wearisome cycles** of life without redemptive purpose—history repeating, generations replacing one another, nothing truly advancing toward resolution. From an earthly perspective, life is endless repetition without progress or meaning. This pessimistic view of history contrasts sharply with the biblical meta-narrative of creation-fall-redemption-consummation, suggesting that 'under the sun' (apart from revelation) leaves us trapped in meaningless cycles.)

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.

— Ecclesiastes 3:1 (The beginning of Scripture's most **famous poem on divine sovereignty over time** (3:1-8). God has appointed appropriate times for contrasting activities—birth and death, planting and uprooting, weeping and laughing. This provides comfort (nothing lasts forever; hard times will pass) and humility (we cannot control timing; God's purposes unfold according to His schedule, not ours). The poem acknowledges life's rhythms while submitting them to divine governance.)

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.

— Ecclesiastes 3:11 (This verse beautifully expresses **the tension between divine purpose and human limitation**. God's works are beautiful and purposeful ('everything beautiful in its time'), yet He has placed 'eternity' (or 'the world') in our hearts—an awareness of transcendence and longing for ultimate meaning—while simultaneously ensuring we cannot fully comprehend His ways. We know enough to trust God but not enough to explain Him. This cultivates faith that trusts God's wisdom when it cannot trace His hand.)

For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.

— Ecclesiastes 7:20 (The Preacher's assessment of **universal human sinfulness** anticipates Paul's declaration in Romans 3:10-12, 23. No one is perfectly righteous; all fall short. This reality undermines self-righteousness and exposes the futility of trying to earn God's favor through moral performance. It prepares readers for the gospel truth that righteousness must come from outside ourselves—ultimately, from Christ's perfect obedience credited to believers.)

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.

— Ecclesiastes 9:10 (This verse commands **whole-hearted engagement in present tasks** precisely because life is short and death is final (from an earthly perspective). We should not work anxiously as if to create lasting legacy, but neither should we waste our limited time. Instead, we should work diligently 'as to the Lord' (Colossians 3:23), maximizing opportunities while we have them. Death's reality makes present faithfulness urgent, not futile.)

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.

— Ecclesiastes 12:1 (The book's **climactic practical counsel**: establish relationship with God in youth, before old age and death approach (described vividly in 12:2-7). Youthful vigor tempts us to think we have unlimited time and self-sufficient strength, but aging and mortality humble all. Remembering our Creator—acknowledging our dependence on Him, submitting to His authority, and living in light of eternity—is wisdom's first and most essential act. Delaying this is folly.)

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

— Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 (The book's **conclusion** resolves its tensions. After exploring life's mysteries, injustices, and frustrations, the Preacher declares the 'whole duty of man': fear God and keep His commandments. This simple yet profound conclusion provides the anchor for living faithfully amid uncertainties. The reference to future judgment (12:14) introduces an eschatological perspective absent from much of 'under the sun' observation, reminding readers that present injustice will be rectified and hidden deeds revealed. This transforms how we live now.)

Historical Context

Ecclesiastes presents itself as the words of **'the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem'** (1:1), who possessed unprecedented wisdom, wealth, and power (1:16; 2:4-9). While the name Solomon never appears, the description unmistakably fits him. First Kings 4:29-34 records that God granted Solomon wisdom surpassing all others, and that he spoke 3,000 proverbs. The references to great building projects (2:4-6), accumulated wealth (2:7-8), and many wives who turned his heart away (1 Kings 11:1-8) align with Solomon's biography. The book was likely written **late in Solomon's reign** (c. 935 BC), after his spiritual compromise with foreign gods—perhaps as a reflective confession of the emptiness all his achievements produced.

The **Hebrew name 'Qoheleth'** (translated 'Preacher' in KJV) comes from the root qahal (to assemble), suggesting one who assembles or addresses an assembly—perhaps someone gathering and teaching wisdom to the congregation. The Greek Septuagint translated this as 'Ekklesiastes' (from ekklesia, assembly or church), from which we get 'Ecclesiastes.'

The book's **philosophical perspective** engages questions common to ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature. Mesopotamian and Egyptian texts wrestled with life's apparent meaninglessness, injustice, and the certainty of death. Yet Ecclesiastes is unique in its stark honesty and its ultimate resolution in fearing the God of Israel. Where pagan pessimism ended in despair or hedonism, biblical wisdom ends in humble submission to Yahweh's sovereignty and goodness, even when His ways are inscrutable.

In **Israel's liturgical calendar**, Ecclesiastes was one of the five 'Megillot' (scrolls) read during annual festivals. It was assigned to the **Feast of Tabernacles** (Sukkot), when Israel dwelt in temporary booths to remember their wilderness wandering. The book's emphasis on life's transience and the theme of enjoying God's gifts despite life's brevity suited this celebration of God's provision during Israel's most vulnerable period. The temporary booths served as annual reminders that earthly dwellings are temporary—we are pilgrims journeying toward an eternal home.

Literary Style

Ecclesiastes employs a **unique and sophisticated literary style** that has puzzled and fascinated readers for millennia. The book's apparent contradictions and shifting perspectives create interpretive challenges, yet these very features serve the Preacher's pedagogical purpose.

The central literary device is the **repeated use of *hebel***** (vapor, breath, mist, vanity)—appearing 38 times throughout the book. This evocative word suggests something insubstantial, transient, enigmatic, and frustrating. The superlative 'vanity of vanities' (1:2; 12:8) brackets the book, emphasizing the comprehensiveness of life's futility 'under the sun.'

The phrase '**under the sun**' appears 29 times, designating the earthly, horizontal perspective—life viewed without divine revelation or eternal hope. This phrase establishes the experimental parameters: the Preacher will evaluate what human wisdom and experience can discover apart from special revelation. The results are pessimistic precisely because the perspective is limited. The book's conclusion (12:13-14) transcends this limitation by invoking divine commandments and final judgment.

The book exhibits **dialectical structure**—presenting thesis and antithesis without always offering immediate synthesis. For example, wisdom is better than folly (2:13), yet both wise and fool die the same death (2:16). The righteous and wicked both face the same fate (9:2), yet 'it shall be well with them that fear God' (8:12). Work is toilsome vanity (2:18-23), yet we should find satisfaction in our work (2:24; 3:22). These tensions are not logical contradictions but perspectives that require nuanced integration. They prevent simplistic readings and drive readers toward the book's conclusion.

Refrains create unity and emphasis. The call to **enjoy life's simple pleasures** appears seven times (2:24-25; 3:12-13, 22; 5:18-20; 8:15; 9:7-10; 11:9-10), establishing this as the book's practical wisdom for living amid uncertainties. The command to '**fear God**' appears throughout (3:14; 5:7; 7:18; 8:12-13; 12:13), providing theological grounding.

Poetry and prose alternate. The book includes lyrical passages—the poem on times and seasons (3:1-8), the allegory of old age (12:1-7)—interspersed with proverbial wisdom and philosophical reflection. This variety maintains reader engagement while addressing both intellect and emotion.

Observational wisdom dominates the book. The Preacher repeatedly says 'I saw,' 'I perceived,' 'I turned'—grounding his conclusions in empirical investigation rather than

abstract speculation. This creates the sense of a genuine search for meaning through life experience.

The **frame narrator** (12:9-14) concludes the book with an external assessment of the Preacher's work, confirming that his words are trustworthy while providing the final theological resolution. This literary frame helps interpret the sometimes troubling observations within the book's body.

Theological Significance

Ecclesiastes makes crucial contributions to **biblical theology**, particularly in areas that challenge superficial or triumphalistic readings of faith. The book provides essential **balance** to more optimistic biblical literature, offering a realistic assessment of life in a fallen world.

Regarding **theology proper** (the doctrine of God), Ecclesiastes affirms God as **Creator** ('Remember thy Creator,' 12:1), **sovereign** over times and seasons (3:1-8, 11), and **judge** who will bring every work into judgment (12:14). Yet the book also emphasizes God's **inscrutability**—His ways are beyond human comprehension (3:11; 8:17; 11:5). This guards against presumption while cultivating appropriate creaturely humility. God is not a puzzle we can solve or a force we can manipulate; He is the infinite Creator before whom we must bow in reverent awe.

In **providence**, the book teaches that God governs all events ('everything beautiful in its time,' 3:11), yet from our limited perspective, life seems governed by 'time and chance' (9:11). We cannot guarantee outcomes through wisdom or diligence, nor can we discern God's full purposes. This **tension between sovereignty and mystery** calls us to trust God's character when we cannot trace His hand, to work faithfully while relinquishing anxious control over results.

Regarding **anthropology**, Ecclesiastes presents humans as **created beings** with eternity set in their hearts (3:11)—an innate sense that we were made for transcendence. Yet we are also **fallen and mortal**, returning to dust (3:20; 12:7). No one is perfectly righteous (7:20). Our wisdom is limited, our time brief, our strength fleeting. This humble anthropology corrects both secular humanism (which exalts human potential) and prosperity theology (which promises earthly fulfillment).

The **problem of evil and injustice** receives sustained attention. The Preacher observes that wickedness sits in places of judgment (3:16), the wicked sometimes receive what the righteous deserve (8:14), and oppression goes unpunished (4:1). These observations validate our troubled experience of living in a fallen world. Yet the book's conclusion (12:14) points to ultimate divine judgment, indicating that present injustice does not negate God's justice—it merely demonstrates that full justice awaits eschatological fulfillment.

Hamartiology (the doctrine of sin) appears in the confession that no one is perfectly righteous (7:20) and in the observation that humans are bent toward evil: 'God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions' (7:29). Original righteousness was corrupted by human rebellion, explaining the fallen state Ecclesiastes describes.

Regarding **eschatology**, while the book's dominant 'under the sun' perspective offers no clear hope beyond death, the conclusion introduces **divine judgment** of all works, including secret things (12:14). This transcends the horizontal perspective and implies that death is not the final word, that moral distinctions matter eternally, and that justice will ultimately prevail. The book thus prepares readers for fuller revelation of resurrection and eternal life.

In **epistemology** (the theory of knowledge), Ecclesiastes teaches the **limits of human wisdom**. We cannot find out all of God's works (3:11; 8:17). Increased knowledge may increase sorrow (1:18). Wisdom is valuable yet insufficient to explain life's mysteries. This humbles intellectual pride and drives us to revelation. We know enough to trust and obey God, but not enough to judge His ways.

Finally, the book's emphasis on **enjoying God's gifts** (eating, drinking, work, marriage) as the good hand of God (2:24-25; 3:12-13, 22; 5:18-20; 8:15; 9:7-10) provides a theology of **common grace and creational goodness**. God's gifts are not salvific, but they are real blessings to be received with gratitude. This guards against both worldly hedonism (which makes these things ultimate) and false asceticism (which rejects them as unspiritual).

Christ in Ecclesiastes

While Ecclesiastes does not directly prophesy Christ as Messianic Psalms do, the book **creates a void that only Christ can fill** and points toward needs that only the gospel satisfies. The Preacher's search for meaning, satisfaction, and wisdom 'under the sun' ends in frustration precisely because these cannot be found apart from the eternal Son who entered time to redeem it.

The Preacher's cry that **'all is vanity'** exposes the futility of seeking ultimate meaning in created things rather than the Creator. This prepares hearts for Christ's invitation: 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest' (Matthew 11:28). Where Ecclesiastes shows that earthly striving produces weariness, Christ offers soul rest. Where the Preacher finds that wisdom increases sorrow, Paul declares Christ to be 'the wisdom of God' (1 Corinthians 1:24) in whom 'are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' (Colossians 2:3). **True wisdom is not finding answers to all questions but knowing the One who is the Answer.**

The book's emphasis on **death as the great equalizer** (2:14-16; 3:18-21; 9:2-3) highlights humanity's desperate need for One who can conquer death. Ecclesiastes offers no clear hope beyond the grave from an earthly perspective, creating longing for resurrection. Christ's victory over death—'O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?' (1 Corinthians 15:55)—transforms Ecclesiastes' pessimism into Christian hope. Death is not the end; Christ 'abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel' (2 Timothy 1:10).

The observation that **'God has set eternity in their hearts'** (3:11) describes the universal human longing for transcendence, meaning, and permanence—a void Augustine later described: 'Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.' This eternity-shaped void cannot be filled by earthly pleasures, achievements, or relationships. **Christ alone satisfies** because He is eternal life incarnate: 'I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly' (John 10:10).

The book's warnings about **injustice** and its call for divine judgment (12:14) point toward Christ as the righteous Judge who will 'judge the world in righteousness' (Acts 17:31). Yet Christ first came not to judge but to save (John 3:17), bearing the judgment sinners deserve so that those who believe might escape condemnation. The judgment Ecclesiastes anticipates has been absorbed by Christ on behalf of His people.

The command to **'fear God and keep his commandments'** (12:13) as humanity's whole duty exposes our inability to do so perfectly. Where Ecclesiastes declares 'there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not' (7:20), the gospel

proclaims Christ as the Just One who perfectly obeyed on behalf of the unjust. His righteousness is credited to believers (Romans 4:5), fulfilling the duty we cannot.

Finally, Ecclesiastes' counsel to **enjoy life's simple pleasures** as God's gifts finds its fullest expression in Christ, through whom we receive 'all spiritual blessings' (Ephesians 1:3) and whom we can enjoy forever. Earthly pleasures are shadows pointing to the ultimate pleasure of knowing God through Christ. Augustine's principle applies: earthly goods are meant to be used and enjoyed on the way to God, not as substitutes for Him. In Christ, we can enjoy creation without idolizing it, receiving gifts with gratitude while loving the Giver supremely.

Relationship to the New Testament

The New Testament's engagement with Ecclesiastes is less direct than with other Old Testament books, yet its themes and perspectives deeply inform New Testament theology, particularly regarding **the futility of earthly existence apart from God** and **the hope that transcends 'under the sun' limitations**.

Jesus' teaching frequently echoes Ecclesiastes' perspective on wealth and earthly pursuits. His parables of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:16-21) and the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) illustrate Ecclesiastes' warning that wealth cannot be taken beyond death and that earthly prosperity may mask spiritual poverty. Christ's rhetorical question, 'For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?' (Mark 8:36), summarizes Ecclesiastes' verdict on earthly achievement divorced from eternal purpose. Jesus' command, 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth... but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven' (Matthew 6:19-20), transforms Ecclesiastes' pessimism about earthly treasures into gospel motivation for eternal investment.

Paul's theology reflects Ecclesiastes' assessment of creation's current state. Romans 8:20-21 declares that 'the creature was made subject to vanity (mataiotes—the Greek equivalent of hebel), not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope.' Paul sees all creation groaning under futility and corruption, awaiting redemption. This cosmic 'vanity' is precisely what Ecclesiastes observes 'under the sun.' Yet Paul adds what Ecclesiastes could only hint at: creation will 'be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God' (Romans 8:21). **Christ transforms Ecclesiastes' diagnosis into gospel hope.**

Paul's declaration that **'to live is Christ, and to die is gain'** (Philippians 1:21) radically reorients Ecclesiastes' perspective on death. Where the Preacher saw death as the great tragedy equalizing all distinctions, Paul sees it as the doorway to being 'with Christ; which is far better' (Philippians 1:23). Where Ecclesiastes counseled enjoying life before death comes, Paul counsels that 'whether we live... or die, we are the Lord's' (Romans 14:8). Resurrection hope transforms death from a wall into a door.

First Corinthians 15, Paul's great resurrection chapter, addresses Ecclesiastes' despair about death head-on. Paul quotes skeptics who sound like the Preacher: 'Let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die' (1 Corinthians 15:32). But Paul argues that **because Christ rose**, death is defeated, Christian labor is not in vain (15:58), and bodies will be raised imperishable (15:42-44). This gospel hope transforms how we view both work and death—our labor matters because it will endure in the resurrection, and death is not the end but transition to eternal life.

James' epistle echoes Ecclesiastes' realistic assessment of life's fragility: 'For what is your life? It is even a vapour (atmis—mist/vapor, like hebel), that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away' (James 4:14). Yet James uses this to encourage humble dependence on God's will (4:15) rather than anxious control—counsel harmonious with Ecclesiastes.

Peter's eschatology in 2 Peter 3:10-14 describes how the present 'heavens shall pass away... and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up' (3:10). This confirms Ecclesiastes' assessment that earthly things are ultimately fleeting (hebel). Yet Peter transforms this into motivation: 'seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness' (3:11). The temporary nature of 'under the sun' existence should spur godly living and hope for 'new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness' (3:13).

Hebrews describes believers as 'strangers and pilgrims on the earth' (11:13), seeking 'a better country, that is, an heavenly' (11:16). This pilgrim perspective resonates with Ecclesiastes' assessment that earthly existence is transient and unsatisfying—we were made for something more, something eternal. The 'eternity set in their hearts' finds its fulfillment in the eternal city whose builder and maker is God (Hebrews 11:10).

Revelation's vision of the new creation (Revelation 21-22) is the ultimate answer to Ecclesiastes' 'vanity.' In the new Jerusalem, **'there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away'** (Revelation 21:4). All that Ecclesiastes laments—death, injustice, toil, futility—will be abolished. God will wipe away every tear, and His servants will serve Him forever (22:3). The 'under the sun' perspective gives way to eternal day where the Lamb is the light (21:23). Ecclesiastes prepares us to long for this consummation by exposing how unsatisfying anything less must be.

Practical Application

Ecclesiastes offers profound **practical wisdom for contemporary believers**, particularly in a culture obsessed with achievement, wealth, self-actualization, and temporal success. The book's unflinching realism serves as **therapeutic disillusionment**, freeing us from false hopes so we can embrace true hope.

For those pursuing success and achievement, Ecclesiastes provides a sobering reality check. The Preacher achieved more than most people could imagine—unprecedented wisdom, vast wealth, grand building projects, international fame—yet declared it all 'vanity and vexation of spirit.' This liberates us from **the tyranny of achievement**. We need not prove our worth through accomplishments, climb endless ladders of success, or define ourselves by résumés. Our identity and purpose rest in relationship with God, not in earthly legacy. This doesn't make work meaningless; rather, it frees us to work for God's glory and others' good rather than our own validation.

For materialists and consumers, the book exposes wealth's inability to satisfy. The Preacher notes that the lover of money never has enough (5:10), that wealth can be lost suddenly (5:13-14), and that we cannot take it with us (5:15). In our consumerist culture that constantly promises fulfillment through the next purchase, Ecclesiastes calls us to **radical contentment**. We should gratefully enjoy God's material gifts (2:24-25; 5:18-19) without making them ultimate. This creates freedom to give generously, live simply, and resist the relentless pressure to accumulate more.

For workaholics, Ecclesiastes offers both warning and wisdom. The Preacher saw that toil can be motivated by envy (4:4), that ceaseless work leaves no time to enjoy its fruit (4:7-8), and that we must leave our work's results to others who may waste them (2:18-21). Yet he also counsels finding **satisfaction in one's work** (2:24; 3:22) and working wholeheartedly (9:10). The key is to work diligently without making work an idol, to labor faithfully while recognizing that results lie in God's hands. We work 'as to the Lord' (Colossians 3:23), not to build lasting earthly legacy (which is 'vanity'), but to serve God and others.

For those facing injustice, the book validates our outrage while calling us to trust. The Preacher honestly observes oppression (4:1), wickedness in places of judgment (3:16), and the wicked prospering while the righteous suffer (8:14). He doesn't offer glib explanations or easy answers. But he does point to ultimate **divine judgment** (12:14), when every secret thing will be evaluated. This eschatological perspective doesn't erase present pain but provides hope that injustice will not prevail forever. God sees, God cares, and God will judge righteously.

For those anxious about the future, Ecclesiastes teaches humble relinquishment of control. We don't know what will happen tomorrow (8:7), 'time and chance' affect all (9:11), and we cannot guarantee outcomes through wisdom or effort. This could produce fatalism, but instead should cultivate **trust in God's sovereignty**. We plan and work diligently (11:1-6), but we hold plans loosely, acknowledging that God directs our steps (Proverbs 16:9). We live faithfully today without anxiously trying to control tomorrow.

For young people, the book offers urgent counsel: **'Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth'** (12:1). Don't waste years pursuing 'vanity'—pleasures, achievements, wealth—that cannot ultimately satisfy. Establish relationship with God early, build life on the eternal rather than temporal, and enjoy youth while acknowledging accountability to God (11:9). The book also liberates young people from the illusion that 'more experience' will bring satisfaction; the wisest, wealthiest, most experienced person who ever lived found it all empty apart from God.

For the aging and dying, Ecclesiastes offers the beautiful, haunting poem describing old age (12:2-7). It validates that aging is difficult—faculties fail, pleasures diminish, strength wanes. Yet it also dignifies the process as part of God's sovereign purposes. The command to fear God (12:13) remains valid at every age. Death is not the end (spirit returns to God, 12:7; judgment awaits, 12:14). We need not desperately cling to youth or deny mortality, but can face aging and death with faith in the God who made us and to whom we return.

For all believers, Ecclesiastes teaches that **simple pleasures are God's gifts** to be enjoyed with gratitude (2:24-25; 3:12-13, 22; 5:18-20; 8:15; 9:7-10). Eating and drinking, satisfying work, loving relationships—these are not distractions from spirituality but provisions from God's gracious hand. We should receive them joyfully without making them ultimate. This guards against both hedonism (which makes pleasure god) and asceticism (which rejects pleasure as unspiritual).

Finally, the book's conclusion—**'Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man'** (12:13)—provides life's anchor. When we cannot understand God's ways, we can trust His character. When life seems meaningless, we find purpose in relationship with our Creator. When earthly pursuits disappoint, we discover that knowing God is life's ultimate good. Ecclesiastes strips away false hopes so that we cling to the only Hope that endures.

Chapter 1

Vanity of Vanities

- 1 The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.
 - 2 Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.
 - 3 What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?
 - 4 One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever.
 - 5 The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose.
 - 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.
 - 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.
 - 8 All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.
 - 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.
 - 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.
 - 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.
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The Preacher's Quest for Meaning

- 12 I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem.
- 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.
- 14 I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.
- 15 That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.

- 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.
- 17 And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit.
- 18 For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.
-

Chapter 2

The Futility of Pleasure and Possessions

- 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 I said of laughter, It is mad: and of mirth, What doeth it?
- 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.
- 4 I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards:
- 5 I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits:
- 6 I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees:
- 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:
- 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.
- 9 So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me.
- 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.
- 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.

The Futility of Wisdom

- 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.
- 13 Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness.
- 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.
- 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.

- 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.
- 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.
-

The Futility of Labor

- 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.
- 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.
- 20 Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labour which I took under the sun.
- 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.
- 22 For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun?
- 23 For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity.
- 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.
- 25 For who can eat, or who else can hasten hereunto, more than I?
- 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.
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Chapter 3

A Time for Everything

- 1 To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:
 - 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 A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;
 - 4 A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
 - 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;
 - 6 A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
 - 7 A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
 - 8 A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.
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- 9 What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth?
 - 10 I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it.
-

God's Works Are Eternal

- 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.
- 12 I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life.
- 13 And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God.
- 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.
- 15 That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past.

Injustice and the Judgment to Come

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.

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.

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.

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.

20 All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again.

21 Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?

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?

Chapter 4

The Vanity of Labor and Isolation

- 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.
- 2 Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive.
- 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 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.
- 5 The fool foldeth his hands together, and eateth his own flesh.
- 6 Better is an handful with quietness, than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit.
- 7 Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun.
- 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.
- 9 Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour.
- 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.
- 11 Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone?
- 12 And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

Wisdom Is Better Than Folly

- 13 Better is a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished.
- 14 For out of prison he cometh to reign; whereas also he that is born in his kingdom becometh poor.
- 15 I considered all the living which walk under the sun, with the second child that shall stand up in his stead.

- 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.
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Chapter 5

Fear God and Keep Your Vows

- 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.
 - 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.
 - 3 For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words.
 - 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 Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.
 - 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?
 - 7 For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities: but fear thou God.
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The Vanity of Wealth

- 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.
- 9 Moreover the profit of the earth is for all: the king himself is served by the field.
- 10 He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity.
- 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?
- 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.
- 13 There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt.
- 14 But those riches perish by evil travail: and he begetteth a son, and there is nothing in his hand.

- 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.
 - 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?
 - 17 All his days also he eateth in darkness, and he hath much sorrow and wrath with his sickness.
 - 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.
 - 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.
 - 20 For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answereth him in the joy of his heart.
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Chapter 6

The Vanity of Wealth Without Enjoyment

- 1 There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men:
 - 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.
 - 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.
 - 4 For he cometh in with vanity, and departeth in darkness, and his name shall be covered with darkness.
 - 5 Moreover he hath not seen the sun, nor known any thing: this hath more rest than the other.
 - 6 Yea, though he live a thousand years twice told, yet hath he seen no good: do not all go to one place?
 - 7 All the labour of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled.
 - 8 For what hath the wise more than the fool? what hath the poor, that knoweth to walk before the living?
 - 9 Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire: this is also vanity and vexation of spirit.
 - 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.
 - 11 Seeing there be many things that increase vanity, what is man the better?
 - 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?
-

Chapter 7

Wisdom and Folly Compared

- 1 A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth.
- 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.
- 3 Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.
- 4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.
- 5 It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools.
- 6 For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool: this also is vanity.
- 7 Surely oppression maketh a wise man mad; and a gift destroyeth the heart.
- 8 Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.
- 9 Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools.
- 10 Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not enquire wisely concerning this.
- 11 Wisdom is good with an inheritance: and by it there is profit to them that see the sun.
- 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.
- 13 Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked?
- 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.

The Limits of Human Wisdom

- 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.

- 16 Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself?
- 17 Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time?
- 18 It is good that thou shouldest take hold of this; yea, also from this withdraw not thine hand: for he that feareth God shall come forth of them all.
- 19 Wisdom strengtheneth the wise more than ten mighty men which are in the city.
- 20 For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.
- 21 Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee:
- 22 For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others.
- 23 All this have I proved by wisdom: I said, I will be wise; but it was far from me.
- 24 That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out?
- 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:
- 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.
- 27 Behold, this have I found, saith the preacher, counting one by one, to find out the account:
- 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.
- 29 Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.
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Chapter 8

Obey the King

- 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.
 - 2 I counsel thee to keep the king's commandment, and that in regard of the oath of God.
 - 3 Be not hasty to go out of his sight: stand not in an evil thing; for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him.
 - 4 Where the word of a king is, there is power: and who may say unto him, What doest thou?
 - 5 Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing: and a wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment.
 - 6 Because to every purpose there is time and judgment, therefore the misery of man is great upon him.
 - 7 For he knoweth not that which shall be: for who can tell him when it shall be?
 - 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.
 - 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.
-

The Wicked Prosper While the Righteous Suffer

- 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.
- 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.
- 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:
- 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.

- 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.
- 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.
- 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:)
- 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 further; though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it.
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Chapter 9

Death Comes to All

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 4 For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion.
- 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.
- 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.
- 7 Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works.
- 8 Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

Wisdom Is Better Than Strength

- 13 This wisdom have I seen also under the sun, and it seemed great unto me:
- 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:
- 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.
- 16 Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength: nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard.
- 17 The words of wise men are heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools.
- 18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war: but one sinner destroyeth much good.
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Chapter 10

The Folly of Fools

- 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.
- 2 A wise man's heart is at his right hand; but a fool's heart at his left.
- 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.
- 4 If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place; for yielding pacifieth great offences.
- 5 There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, as an error which proceedeth from the ruler:
- 6 Folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in low place.
- 7 I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth.
- 8 He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him.
- 9 Whoso removeth stones shall be hurt therewith; and he that cleaveth wood shall be endangered thereby.
- 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.
- 11 Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment; and a babbler is no better.
- 12 The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious; but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself.
- 13 The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness: and the end of his talk is mischievous madness.
- 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?
- 15 The labour of the foolish wearith every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city.
- 16 Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning!
- 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!

- 18 By much slothfulness the building decayeth; and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through.
- 19 A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry: but money answereth all things.
- 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.
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Chapter 11

Cast Your Bread Upon the Waters

- 1 Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.
 - 2 Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.
 - 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.
 - 4 He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.
 - 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.
 - 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.
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Rejoice in Your Youth

- 7 Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun:
 - 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.
 - 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.
 - 10 Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity.
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Chapter 12

Remember Your Creator in Your Youth

- 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;
 - 2 While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain:
 - 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,
 - 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;
 - 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:
 - 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.
 - 7 Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.
 - 8 Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity.
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The Conclusion of the Matter

- 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.
- 10 The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth.
- 11 The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd.
- 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.
- 13 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.

- 14 For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

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