

ECCLESIASTES or, *The Preacher*

INTRODUCTION

1. Title. The name of this book in the Hebrew is *Qoheleth*, “Preacher.” This title the speaker applies to himself in ch. 1:12. *Qoheleth* probably refers to a “convener” of a meeting, or to the official “speaker” or “preacher” at such a gathering. The feminine form of the word in Hebrew and its use with a feminine verb in ch. 7:27 suggest the possibility that, as used in Ecclesiastes, this word designates not only Solomon as “preacher” but also divine Wisdom speaking through him. Figuratively, Wisdom addresses the people (Prov. 1:20). Thus, *Qoheleth* appears both as the agent for the communication of divine wisdom, and again as Wisdom personified.

The words of the wise are spoken of as “goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies” (Eccl. 12:11). In ch. 12:9 it is stated that “because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge.” In 1 Kings 4:32, 33, the word “spake” is repeated three times. This refers, not to written compositions, but to addresses delivered before an assembly convened for the purpose. The Holy Spirit meant it to be understood that Solomon’s teaching was intended for the “great congregation,” the church of God in all places and in all ages (see Ps. 22:25; 49:1–4).

The Greek and Latin titles of *Qoheleth* have been “Ecclesiastes,” presumably a translation of *Qoheleth*. The meaning is somewhat similar. *Qoheleth* comes from the Heb. *qahal*, “to call an assembly,” whose noun form means “gathering,” or “congregation.” In Greek the word for “congregation” is from the verb root *kaleo*, “to call,” the noun form of which is *ekklesia*, “church.” Such English words as “ecclesiastic” and “ecclesiastical” are derived from *ekklesia*.

2. Authorship. From the most ancient times, by universal consent, King Solomon has been considered the author of Ecclesiastes (see PK 85). The Hebrew descriptive phrase, “son of David, king in Jerusalem” (ch. 1:1), was considered sufficient proof in favor of Solomon as author. Martin Luther, in his *Table Talk*, was the first to cast doubt upon Solomonic authorship.

It was also the unanimous opinion of all writers on Ecclesiastes, from earliest times to Martin Luther, that Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon were written by one author. It has been pointed out, however, that there are differences in literary style. But this difference in the style of Ecclesiastes, as compared with that of Proverbs and the Song of Solomon, may readily be attributed to different subject matter or to maturity of outlook at a later period of Solomon’s life. The Song might be attributed to the time of Solomon’s first love for God; Proverbs to a later period; and Ecclesiastes to his old age.

To surrender belief in Solomon as the author—as most modern writers do—is to be utterly at sea with respect to the authorship of Ecclesiastes. Certainly no other person can be fixed upon as author with any show of plausibility. Such a view makes the “Preacher” of ch. 1:1 a mere literary figure who wrote “in the spirit and power of” King Solomon (see Luke 1:17).

It is quite impossible to arrive at a precise date for the writing of Ecclesiastes. Modernists generally hold that it was produced in the 3d century B.C. But King Solomon

died in the year 931/30 B.C. (see Vol. II, p. 134), and if he is assumed to be the author, the date of writing would be immediately prior to that time.

The position of the book of Ecclesiastes in the Hebrew canon may be of some help in the attempt to discover the approximate date of the insertion of the book as we now have it into the canon. In the first place, Ecclesiastes is included in the *Megilloth*, the five miscellaneous “rolls,” or books—Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther. In the second place, Ecclesiastes is one of the last five books as they stood in the Hebrew canon—Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra–Nehemiah, and Chronicles. In both cases we find Ecclesiastes immediately preceding Esther. This may suggest that these two books became part of the canon at approximately the same time (see Vol. I, pp. 36–38). It is entirely possible, even probable, that the book had been written and was in circulation years, perhaps even centuries, before it became part of the canon.

3. Historical Setting. The setting of Ecclesiastes is clearly stated in the book itself. After the prologue, the first eleven verses, appears Solomon’s own terse statement, “I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem” (ch. 1:12). The Hebrew verb “I was” is in the perfect tense, the very form Solomon would use in speaking before an assembly convened in his old age. Still king, he makes a statement concerning his own personal experience. It deals, not so much with historical events, with which his hearers were no doubt well acquainted, as with his own search for happiness.

4. Theme. Though Solomon was pre-eminent among Hebrew kings, both in wisdom and in temporal prosperity, he relates how all of these advantages failed to provide true and lasting happiness. And how was man to acquire happiness? By cooperating with his Creator and thus realizing the divine purpose that brought him into existence.

Having considered the uncertainty of human happiness, the Preacher turns to contemplate the actual misery with which the world is filled. For a world full of distress the “wise man” does not propose any kind of “welfare state” as a solution to social inequalities and injustices. As the Preacher draws his survey to a close, he sets forth a series of practical suggestions. Individually, we should give such help as we can to the poor and to those who suffer. But the most important thing is to give our hearts and our affections to God, to yield obedience to Him, and so be ready for the final judgment. Ecclesiastes thus provides a sound philosophy of life, of the purpose of man’s existence, of duty and destiny.

By setting forth his personal experiences Solomon essays to guide others along the pathway to faith in God. He recounts the tyranny in the world, the injustices, the disappointments that might undermine man’s faith in his Creator. But the day of retribution cannot be ignored or postponed indefinitely. Even though inequalities persist for a time, these are often essentially disciplinary measures; therefore man’s duty and final happiness consist in meeting life with the determination to seize its opportunities and to make the most of them. God will take care of the future.

In the book of Ecclesiastes God’s people are thought of, not as a chosen nation but rather as an assembly of individuals, meeting together under the leadership of *Qoheleth*, the Preacher. Discussion in the assembly concerns the interests of the individual as a member of the group, directly and personally accountable to God. Ecclesiastes thus provides a fitting transition from Israel after the flesh to Israel after the spirit. The sermon of Solomon, king of Israel, whose name means “peace” but who did not find it in his own personal life till well advanced in age, was appropriately included by the Jews in the

closing section of the Old Testament, a fitting climax to the philosophy of life illustrated throughout God's dealings with His people in ancient times.

When Solomon lost sight of the source of the wisdom, glory, and power Heaven had so graciously bestowed upon him, natural tendencies gained the supremacy over reason. Confidence in God and reliance on divine guidance imperceptibly gave way to increasing self-confidence and the pursuit of ways of his own choosing. As reason was subordinated more and more to inclination, Solomon's moral sensibilities were blunted, his conscience seared, and his judgment perverted. Atheistic doubt and unbelief hardened his heart, weakened his moral principles, degraded his life, and eventually led to complete apostasy. For years he was harassed by the fear that inability to turn from folly would end in utter ruin (see PK 51–77).

Toward the close of his life, however, conscience finally awakened and Solomon began to see folly in its true light, to see himself as God saw him, "an old and foolish king" who would "no more be admonished" (ch. 4:13). The time was drawing near when he must die, and he found no pleasure in reflecting upon his wasted life (ch. 12:1). Both mind and body were already feeble as a result of indulgence (vs. 2–5; PK 77). Sincerely repentant, he sought to retrace his wayward steps; chastened in spirit, he turned, wearied and thirsting, from earth's broken cisterns to drink once more at the fountain of life.

But restoration to favor with God did not miraculously restore the wasted physical and mental strength of former years (see MH 169). "Through sin the whole human organism is deranged, the mind is perverted, the imagination corrupted" (MH 451), and Solomon's repentance "did not prevent the fruition of the evil he had sown" (Ed 49). "He could never hope to escape the blasting results of sin" (PK 78). Solomon nevertheless did recover a limited measure of the wisdom he had so recklessly discarded in his pursuit of folly. Through bitter experience he had "learned the emptiness of a life that seeks in earthly things its highest good" (PK 76). Gradually, he came to realize the wickedness of his course, and sought how he might lift a voice of warning that would save others from the bitter experiences through which he himself had passed (PK 80–82, 85), and thereby counteract, as best he could, the baleful influence of his folly.

Accordingly, by the Spirit of inspiration, Solomon recorded for aftergenerations the history of his wasted years, with their lessons of warning (PK 79). The book of Ecclesiastes is "a record of his folly and repentance" (PK 85), a delineation of "the errors that had led him to squander for naught Heaven's choicest gifts" (PK 80). It is "full of warning" (PK 82) and contains much that was not intended by Inspiration as an example to be followed, but rather as a solemn warning. It pictures in vivid terms his pursuit of pleasure, popularity, wealth, and power; but the thread that binds this sad narrative together is Solomon's own candid analysis of the perverted thought processes by which, in his own mind, he had justified his wayward conduct. Those portions of Ecclesiastes that relate the experience and reasoning of his years of apostasy are not to be taken as representing the mind and will of the Spirit. Nevertheless, they are an inspired record of what he actually thought and did during that time (see PK 79), and that record constitutes a sober warning against the wrong kind of thought and action. For instance, the cynical attitude toward life expressed in chs. 2:17; 4:2; 7:1, 28 is far from being a model for the Christian (see also chs. 1:17; 2:1, 3, 12; etc.). Passages such as these should not be wrested from their context and made to teach some supposed truth that Inspiration never intended them to teach.

In studying the book of Ecclesiastes it is therefore most important to differentiate between the subtle, perverted reasoning to which Solomon refers, and the clearer insight that came with his repentance. The context of a statement often makes evident whether Solomon is speaking of the false reasoning of former years, or of the chastened reflections of the days of his repentance. A delineation of the perverted thinking and attitudes of former years is often introduced by such expressions as “I saw,” “I said,” “I sought,” “I made,” “I gave my heart,” etc. (see chs. 1:13 to 2:26). In contrast, sober conclusions drawn from the experience are often introduced by “I know” or “I have seen” (see chs. 3:10–14; 5:13, 18). Again, a note of cynicism and uncertainty generally marks the thinking of former years (see chs. 1:18; 2:11, 14–20; 4:2, 3; 6:12; 7:1–3, 27, 28; 9:11). In contrast, conclusions reflecting the considered judgment of later life are positive in tone (see chs. 5:1, 10; 9:11; 11:1; 12:1), and the principles stated (see chs. 5:10, 13; 6:7; 8:11; 11:9; 12:7, 13, 14) are confirmed elsewhere in Scripture.

It should also be noted that Solomon uses the word “wisdom” to refer both to worldly wisdom (chs. 1:18; 7:12; etc.) and to true wisdom (chs. 7:19; 8:1; 10:1; etc.). When entering upon his pursuit of pleasure and folly, he intended to enjoy all the pleasures of sin and at the same time retain his wisdom and sound judgment unimpaired (ch. 2:3). In his folly, he thought himself wise (ch. 2:9), but of this fatal self-deception he did not become aware until many years had passed, and, like the prodigal (Luke 15:17), he came to himself, a sadder and wiser man (Eccl. 7:23). Such is the deceptiveness of sin, as Eve found out to her chagrin and bitter disappointment (see Gen. 3:5–7).

5. Outline.

- I. Prologue: The Futility of Life, 1:1–11.
 - A. Generations come and go, seemingly in vain, 1:1–4.
 - B. The cycles of nature appear endless and purposeless, 1:5–8.
 - C. Is there anything “new,” any great objective to existence? 1:9–11.
- II. Solomon’s Quest for Happiness, 1:12 to 2:26.
 - A. Increased knowledge brings increased disappointment, 1:12–18.
 - B. The vanity of pleasure, mirth, and material possessions, 2:1–11.
 - C. In death, sage and fool are alike, 2:12–17.
 - D. The wise unsatisfied with the results of his efforts, 2:18–23.
 - E. Satisfaction comes only from God, 2:24–26.
- III. A Season for Everything, 3:1 to 4:8.
 - A. A time for various human activities, 3:1–15.
 - B. A time for divine judgment, 3:16–22.
 - C. A time allowed for human injustices, 4:1–8.
- IV. Four Ideals, 4:9 to 5:9.
 - A. The value of companionship, 4:9–12.
 - B. The value of wisdom, 4:13–16.
 - C. The value of reverence, 5:1–7.
 - D. The value of justice, 5:8, 9.
- V. The Folly of Life, 5:10 to 6:12.
 - A. The folly of materialism, 5:10–12.
 - B. The incomprehensibility of suffering, 5:13–17.
 - C. The futility of effort, 5:18 to 6:12.
- VI. Things Worth Living For, 7:1–22.

- A. Reputation and character formation, 7:1–10.
- B. Wisdom to understand God’s dealings, 7:11–14.
- C. A balanced outlook on life, 7:15–18.
- D. None are perfect, 7:19–22.
- VII. The Search for Wisdom, 7:23 to 12:7.
 - A. Its disappointments, 7:23–29.
 - B. Resolving its conflicts, 8:1–15.
 - C. The inscrutable ways of God, 8:16 to 9:6.
 - D. Contentment amid the vicissitudes of life, 9:7 to 10:6.
 - E. Every deed its due reward, 10:7 to 11:10.
 - F. The close of life, 12:1–7.
- VIII. Epilogue. What God Expects of Man, 12:8–14.

CHAPTER 1

1 *The preacher sheweth that all human courses are vain: 4 because the creatures are restless in their courses, 9 they bring forth nothing new, and all old things are forgotten, 12 and because he hath found it so in the studies of wisdom.*

1. The words of. Thus begins the title verse of the book. Three other Bible books begin in a similar way: Nehemiah, Jeremiah, and Amos. The Hebrew term translated “words” also means “tidings,” “report,” “message,” “story,” “charge.”

The Preacher. Heb. *Qoheleth*, from the verb *qahal*, “to assemble,” “to come together.” For examples of the use of *qahal* see 2 Chron. 20:26; Esther 9:2, 16, 18; etc. The cognate noun, translated “assembly,” “congregation,” “company,” appears 122 times in the OT.

Jewish writers have explained *Qoheleth* as meaning “one who assembles a congregation and expounds teaching.” Others render it “Preacher” because, it is said, Solomon delivered these discourses before a congregation. It is similar to an Arabic root variously translated as “great collector,” “deep investigator” (see PK 85; also the Introduction to Ecclesiastes).

The son of David. That is, Solomon. Who better than he, whom God had endowed with the capacity of a genius (1 Kings 3:9–13) but who wasted his heritage in the wild pursuit of happiness, was qualified to set forth the profound truths here recorded?

King in Jerusalem. This phrase has reference to the Preacher, not to King David. At the time of speaking the “Preacher” rules as “king.” Undoubtedly this expression is a direct reference to King Solomon, despite the fact that his name does not appear in the book. Other expressions that point to Solomon are the references to his wisdom and to him as author of various proverbs (see Eccl. 1:12, 13, 16; 2:15; 12:9; cf. 1 Kings 3:12; 4:32).

The city of Jerusalem, the capital of the nation, gloriously situated, was not only the place of the royal residence, but above all, the chosen seat of God among His people. Here religion and divine wisdom should have been at their purest and highest degree of excellence. The ruler on his throne in such a city should have been the ideal agent, amenable to God’s guidance and subject to His will, to radiate divine wisdom to a waiting and receptive people.

2. *Vanity of vanities.* Heb. *habel habalim*. These words state the subject of the entire book and constitute the theme of the preface. *Hebel*, “vanity,” occurs 37 times in Ecclesiastes and but 33 times elsewhere in the OT. Its primary meaning is “breath,” or “vapor.” It is used of “idols” as things vain and worthless, and also of their worship (2 Kings 17:15; Jer. 2:5; 10:8). Some say that in Ecclesiastes there is not a word against idolatry, yet this very key word of the book is one often used of idols and their worship. The Preacher says that anything man may seek in place of God and obedience to Him is “vanity.”

Habel habalim is a superlative comparable to such emphatic expressions as “heaven of heavens” (1 Kings 8:27) and “song of songs” (S. of Sol. 1:1). By this emphatic form, literally, “breath of breaths,” Solomon stresses the futility and unsatisfactory end of all human effort and life unless it be oriented toward God.

Saith. Literally, “said.” The Hebrew constantly employs the past tense where English usage requires the present or present perfect. The expression “saith the Preacher” is a reminder that Solomon is the speaker, and thus the author.

All is vanity. This could well be translated, “the sum total is vanity,” meaning that the world in its totality, including all life, is as it were but a breath and offers no promise of hope.

3. *Profit.* Heb. *yithron*. This word occurs nine other times in this book (chs. 2:11, 13; 3:9; 5:9, 16; 7:12; 10:10, 11), and is variously translated “excelleth,” “excellency,” “profitable,” and “better.” *Yithron* is from a verb meaning “to remain over,” and the noun derived from it therefore carries the idea of “remainder,” and then “excess,” “abundance,” and in Hebrew, “superiority,” “advantage.” Man is perpetually toiling, yet for all his toil there is no abiding result.

It is possible that the metaphor Solomon here used is one of the business world with its ceaseless activities, whose objective is the attainment of a worth-while material goal (see on ch. 2:11). But often a man’s life is spent in building up something his successor tears down. Futility and insecurity characterize all human endeavor.

The interrogative “what?” calls for an emphatic negative answer. It may be compared with the words of Matt. 16:26, where the Master asks, literally, “What shall a man be profited, if he should gain the whole world, and should lose his soul?” The reply anticipated by the Preacher is, “Nothing.”

Man. The Hebrew word is the generic term for “man,” or as we would say, “mankind.” The cycle of human life is repeated over and over again with each new generation.

Labour. From a Hebrew word that means, “toil,” “trouble,” or “mischief.” Here the term is applied to the sum total of a man’s efforts during his lifetime.

Which he taketh. This expression refers to every form of activity that takes place under the light of the sun.

Under the sun. Equivalent to such a phrase as “under heaven” (chs. 1:13; 2:3; 3:1). It appears in Ecclesiastes about 30 times.

4. *Generation.* Heb. *dor*, “period,” “age,” “generation,” from a verb meaning “to heap up,” “to pile up.” Originally it had the meaning of “to move about in a circle,” then “to dwell in tents,” probably with reference to the instability of nomadic life. There is,

therefore, the inherent idea of instability in the word. It is concerned with such things as kind, quality, condition, as in the phrase “crooked generation” (Deut. 32:5), and with reference to people who curse freely (Prov. 30:11) and to those who are utterly ruthless (Prov. 30:14).

Passeth. In the Hebrew both this and the word “cometh” are simple participles stressing continuous and endless change (see Job 10:20–22; Ps. 39:13).

Abideth. Heb. *‘amad*, the usual Hebrew word meaning “to stand.” It conveys the thought of continuity and durability. The contrast Solomon sets forth in this verse is, in part, drawn forth by the seeming permanence of the mountains, the ceaseless flowing of the rivers, and the uninterrupted succession of day and night.

For ever. The Hebrew word thus translated is from a verb root whose precise meaning we do not know. The noun, used here with the preposition “for,” is masculine, and, like its Greek equivalent, is used in many ways. It may refer to “antiquity,” “ancient days,” “long duration,” “continuous existence”; it may mean “indefinite,” “unending future,” “eternity,” etc. Again, like its Greek equivalent, it is best understood in each case in harmony with the nature of the subject with which it is used (see on Ex. 12:14; 21:6).

5. Hasteth. Heb. *sha’aph*, “to pant after,” “to grasp for eagerly,” “to be eager for.” The figure is of a spirited horse snuffing up the air in his eagerness to burst into speed in a race. See Jer. 2:24 as an example of the figure, and Ps. 119:131 for its application to spiritual life.

Arose. Heb. *zarach*, in the participial form, which emphasizes continuous or repeated activity.

6. The wind. Heb. *ruach*, “wind,” a word that always implies activity. It is used many times in connection with God’s various activities in the economy of the plan of salvation.

Turneth about. A picture of ceaseless activity and repetition. The “north” and “south” are mentioned in contrast with the “east” and “west” of v. 5, the places of the rising and the setting of the sun.

Whirleth about continually. Four times in the Hebrew of this verse word forms derived from the root “to turn,” “to circle about,” are used, by way of stressing ceaseless activity and repetition. The word is also used of Joshua’s army marching around Jericho (Joshua 6:3, 15), and of the Israelites’ having “compassed mount Seir many days” (Deut. 2:1, 3).

Solomon was not complaining of the ceaseless cycles of nature, but saw in them a parallel to the cycles of human life (Eccl. 1:4). Is man’s life, from generation to generation, a mere matter of repetition, with no more sublime object in view? Will there not be a climax to the life of the human race? Does not God have an eternal purpose that will eventually supersede this seemingly endless repetition of human activity from generation to generation?

The scientific accuracy of the description here given of the motion of air masses about the surface of the earth is unparalleled in ancient literature and reveals an insight into the laws of nature greatly superior to that of most men in ancient times.

7. All the rivers. As a third example of the ceaseless round of nature Solomon presents the moisture cycle. Though the forces of nature provide a picture of endless repetition, their activity was nevertheless designed by God and functions in harmony with His will. But man’s activities, in most cases, were not designed by God and do not tend to

the satisfactory end God had in mind when He created man. Mankind continually seeks new paths to happiness and satisfaction, whereas he can attain to his true end in only one way—by being at peace with his Maker (see Matt. 11:28–30).

8. Things. Heb. *debarim*, translated “words” in v. 1, but no doubt meaning “things” here. In the NT the Gr. *rhema*, “word,” or “thing,” bears the same twofold meaning as the Hebrew word here used.

Full of labour. The Hebrew word thus translated is an adjective from the verb “to toil,” and is related to an Arabic root meaning “to have pain,” “to suffer.” The apparent fruitlessness of human activity and the disappointments that accompany it are the points emphasized here.

Man cannot utter it. The word translated “man” is not the generic term of v. 3, but one that refers to “man” as distinct from woman. The verb translated “utter” is the root form of “words” in v. 1 and of “things” in v. 8. “It” is a supplied word. In the Hebrew the verb “utter” refers to “all things.”

Not satisfied. Outward experience cannot satisfy the inner cravings of the heart. Things, that is, material blessings, do not satisfy the thoughtful person. A true approach to God is not made through the outward senses, but through an inner experience. God is spirit (John 4:24), and must, accordingly, be approached by man’s spirit. Similarly, the things that fall on the outer ear cannot make for lasting good unless relayed to the inner ear of man’s spiritual nature, by which he hears the voice of God.

9. The thing. The clause reads literally, “That which has been, that is what shall be.” This is a reference to the changeless cycles of nature, repeated in obedience to the laws ordained of God. The LXX and the Vulgate translate this and the following clause incorrectly as questions.

No new thing. No variation, that is, in the endless cycles of nature. Having witnessed one cycle, man has seen all of them, and each blends imperceptibly into another that is different in no way. The cycles seem not to lead on to any greater objective than self-perpetuation.

10. Is there any thing? The author counters an implied objection to his statements in v. 9 with a challenge to name anything “new.”

It hath been already. What seems new has its roots in the past. The context makes evident that Solomon’s remarks in vs. 9, 10 apply to the various phenomena of nature, the cycle of human life included.

Of old time. Literally, “of the ages.” The word *‘olam*, translated “old time,” is the same one given as “for ever” in v. 4 (see on Ex. 12:14; 21:6). The word rendered “time” is plural, but the verb is singular, the noun being treated as collective.

11. No remembrance. What may seem to be new appears so only because men have forgotten the past. Similarly, some things of this generation will be forgotten by the next. This may well apply also to human fame. The prominent person of today, seemingly so much needed, is displaced and forgotten tomorrow. “What profit hath a man?” (v. 3).

Former things. “Things” is a supplied word. Inasmuch as the Hebrew adjective “former” is masculine plural, it should probably be understood to refer to persons. Thus not only every “thing” (v. 10) but also all persons pass into oblivion.

Things that are to come. Again “things” is a supplied word, and the Hebrew adjective translated “that are to come” is masculine plural. Generations of *men* is

probably the thought here. The celebrity of this generation is forgotten by the coming generation. Solomon concludes the prologue to his book with a comment on the transitory quality of fame. This is stressed by the word “after,” literally, “in the hereafter.”

12. Was king. More correctly, “have been king” (see on v. 1). The Hebrew does not necessarily imply that the speaker is no longer king. The simple past of the Hebrew verb is often best translated into English as a present or present perfect (see on v. 2). The “Preacher” was Solomon, for only under David and Solomon was Jerusalem the capital from which a king ruled “over Israel,” and the speaker is “the son of David” (v. 1).

13. Gave my heart. This phrase or its equivalent occurs repeatedly in the book (chs. 1:17; 7:25; 8:9, 16) and elsewhere in the Bible. Among the Hebrews the heart was regarded as the seat not merely of feeling but of the intellect. Therefore “I gave my heart” would mean the same as “I applied my mind” (see 1 Chron. 22:19; Job 7:17). Solomon diligently cultivated his mind; he “gave” himself to the study of natural history, philosophy, poetry, and other useful knowledge.

To seek. Heb. *darash*, a word of broad meaning, embracing such ideas as “to search out,” “to expound a meaning,” “to discuss,” “to practice,” “to seek with application and study” (see Gen. 25:22; Ex. 18:15; Deut. 19:18; 2 Chron. 14:7; Ps. 119:10; Amos 5:14).

Search. In the sense of “explore,” “spy out.” It is used of the spying out of the land of Canaan (Num. 13:16, 17, 25, 32). It signifies pioneer research for knowledge. The two words “seek” and “search” together suggest going to the root of a matter and exploring it in all its aspects.

By wisdom. Literally, “the wisdom,” perhaps in reference to the wisdom Solomon had acquired during life, by God’s good pleasure, by personal study, and by observation. The Hebrew word is applied to skill and cleverness in various fields.

All things. “Things” is a supplied word. The Hebrew reads, “upon all which is done under heaven,” referring here primarily to human activities.

This sore travail. Literally, “this affliction of evil,” or “this evil affliction.”

Exercised therewith. God has implanted in the heart of man the urge to study and investigate. It is a laborious task, making great demands on one’s physical and mental powers.

14. I have seen. The Hebrew word often means more than a view of outward form and appearance; namely, keen insight, or perception. The derived noun means “vision,” that is, a revelation. Here it denotes the keen observations of Solomon, based on his study of the facts involved.

Works. That is, human projects and activities, many of which prove to be without value or benefit.

Vexation of spirit. The word translated “vexation” may come from the root “to feed,” “to pasture.” “Spirit” is from the usual word for “wind.” Thus the expression might be rendered “a striving after wind” (RSV) or “a feeding on wind.” Compare Hosea 12:1, “Ephraim feedeth on wind, and followeth after the east wind.” However translated, this word picture stresses the unsatisfying character of much of human effort and study. Compare also Isa. 44:20, “He feedeth on ashes.”

15. Crooked. This is from a form of the root meaning “to bend,” “to twist.” It does not refer so much to something that is inherently crooked or out of line, but to that which

is caused to become so. Note that the preceding words, “that which is,” are supplied. It is the “works” of man (v. 14) that have been made “crooked.”

Straight. From a Hebrew word whose root means “to arrange,” “to put right,” “to set in order.” The emphasis is on man’s inability, in his own strength, to cope with the situations that continually confront him.

Cannot be numbered. The lack is so great that man cannot even give a valid estimate of it, to say nothing about beginning to make up the deficiency. The word translated “numbered” may also be rendered “assigned,” “appointed.”

16. I communed. An emphatic statement in the Hebrew, implying personal meditation, as opposed to talking things over with another person.

I am come. Literally, “I have caused to become,” in reference to the discipline of his faculties in work and study and to the resulting growth in knowledge and experience.

Gotten more wisdom. Or, “caught up wisdom.”

In Jerusalem. More exactly, “over Jerusalem,” that is, “over” the city as its rulers. This refers to wise men and rulers before Solomon’s day.

Had great experience. The Hebrew verb translated “had” is the same one given as “seen” in v. 14: literally, “saw [received a keen insight into] much,” that is, “of wisdom and knowledge.” The LXX renders “wisdom” by a word denoting ethical and moral values, and “knowledge” by one that means the speculative side of mental effort.

17. Folly. The word thus translated is probably from a root that means “to lay crosswise.” There may be the suggestion here that wisdom did not always guide Solomon in the matter of the topics he investigated.

Vexation of spirit. See on v. 14.

18. Grief. The word thus translated is from a root meaning “to be vexed,” “to be provoked.” Overstudy brings on sleeplessness, frayed nerves, and sometimes ill-health. However, it must not be concluded that Solomon endorses the idea that ignorance is bliss (see Prov. 4:7).

Sorrow. Literally, “pain,” both mental and physical. If one desires wisdom, he must dig deeply (see Prov. 2:4); and constant digging and research take their toll of health and strength. It is also true that even great knowledge is not an index to character. The righteousness of Jesus Christ received by faith opens the door to the heavenly kingdom, and knowledge alone cannot accomplish this.

CHAPTER 2

1 *The vanity of human courses in the works of pleasure.* 12 *Though the wise be better than the fool, yet both have one event.* 18 *The vanity of human labour, in leaving it they know not to whom.* 24 *Nothing better than joy in our labour; but that is God’s gift.*

1. In mine heart. That is, “to myself” (RSV). Here the rational part of Solomon’s mind addresses the part that represents physical desire and satisfaction. This soliloquy is equivalent to an act of the will. Compare the experience of the rich man of Luke 12:17–19 as he addresses himself.

Prove. That is, “make a test” or “experiment” to discover the results of a certain course of action.

Mirth. Or, “pleasure.” The Hebrew word is broad in meaning: “gladness,” “joy,” “gaiety”—all give pleasure to the physical senses. Its use here is confined to the emotions and appetites aroused by partaking of earthly pleasures, though elsewhere the word may denote religious joy and happiness.

Enjoy pleasure. Literally, “look at good,” that is, “have your fill of the good things of life.” A modern idiomatic equivalent would be, “have a good time.” Solomon proposed to quaff the pleasures the world has to offer to the point of satiety, in the endeavor to find lasting satisfaction in them.

2. Laughter. Heb. *śechoq*. The word also means “sport” (Prov. 10:23) and “derision” (Lam. 3:14). The verb form may mean “to play” (2 Sam. 2:14). The choice of sensory pleasure and amusement as a means to ultimate happiness in life represents a long step on the downward path (see PK 76).

Mad. Literally, “foolish.” Compare with the related Hebrew word in ch. 1:17.

Mirth. The Hebrew word is used both of arrogant and lusty rejoicing and of common lawful pleasure.

What doeth it? Or, “What use is it?” Literally, “What does this do?” What effect does it have? or, What result does it bring? Compare Paul’s pertinent inquiry in Rom. 6:21.

3. To give myself unto wine. Rather, “to refresh my body with wine.” The word translated “to give” means literally “to draw” (see Deut. 21:3; Ps. 28:3; Hosea 11:4).

“Myself,” Heb. *beśari*, literally, “my flesh,” that is the physical nature, the body. “Wine,” Heb. *yayin* (see on Gen. 9:21; Num. 28:7). This word is used to describe the “drink offering” in the sanctuary service and in heathen rites (Ex. 29:40; Lev. 23:13; Num. 15:5, 7, 10; 28:14). Solomon is saying then, “I drew [or, stimulated] my body with intoxicating drink,” as if the body were a vehicle drawn by a horse under the figure of wine.

Acquainting. Literally, “guiding.” The same verb is translated variously as “lead” or “guide” (Deut. 4:27; 28:37; Ps. 48:14; 78:52; Isa. 49:10). According to the implied metaphor, Solomon intended that his better judgment should hold the lines of appetite and passion in control and in the path of moderation. In other words, as he entered upon the experiment (see on v. 1), he purposed not to abandon good sense completely and go to excess. This, of course, is the intention of most people who yield to sensory pleasures. But the idea that it is possible to use moderately things inherently wrong, is a fatal deception.

Folly. Perhaps, in this connection, “that which may lead to sin,” without actually being sinful in itself. The meaning seems to be that Solomon sought these experiences to get the most out of them, with a view to learning by experience what satisfaction they had to offer, but without allowing them to master him.

Till I might see. Here Solomon explicitly states his objective. No one required him to pursue so risky and unwise a course; God could not commend him for doing it.

Men. Heb. *’adam*, the generic term that includes both men and women (see on Gen. 1:26; 3:17; Num. 24:3).

All. Literally, “number,” or “tale,” from the root *saphar*, “to recount,” “to count,” “to relate,” “to measure.” The noun *sepher*, “book,” is from the same root.

4. I made me great works. Literally, “I made great my works,” referring doubtless to the size and splendor of the buildings he constructed. This was certainly a more commendable form of indulgence than that of vs. 1–3 (see 1 Kings 7:1; 9:1).

I builded me houses. See 1 Kings 7:1–12; 9:15–19. Solomon engaged in extensive building operations.

Vineyards. Compare Cant. 8:11. The economic condition of the common man in Solomon's time is suggested in 1 Kings 4:25, "every man under his vine and under his fig tree."

5. Gardens. Literally, "enclosures," from the verb "to enclose," "to surround." On account of the unrestricted grazing habits of goats, donkeys, and other animals in the Near East, it is impossible to have a garden without a strong, well-kept fence.

Orchards. Heb. *pardes*, from the Persian *pairi-daêza*, which designated the vast botanical and zoological gardens of Persian kings (see on Gen. 2:8). A *pardes* was thus a royal preserve, enclosure, or park. The English word "paradise" is a transliteration of the Greek form of the word, *paradeisos*. *Pardes* appears in Neh. 2:8 as "forest" and in Cant. 4:13 as "orchard." See on Gen. 2:8.

Trees. Evidently Solomon indulged himself in a large program of horticulture, specializing not only in "orchards," which we would call parks, but also in fruit orchards. He kept a royal garden on the sides of the hills south of Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:4), a vineyard at Beth-haccerem, "the house of the vine," usually identified with 'Ain Kârim 4 mi. (6.4 km.) west of Jerusalem, but more recently with *Ramoth Rahel*, 21/2 mi. (4 km.) south of Jerusalem (Jer. 6:1), and another at Baal-hamon (Cant. 8:11).

6. Pools. The rainfall of Palestine is hardly adequate to provide a sufficient water supply (see Vol. II, p. 110; see on Gen. 12:10). Irrigation is necessary today, even as it was in ancient times when farmers excavated tanks and reservoirs. The "king's pool" of Neh. 2:14 is called "Solomon's pool" by Josephus (*Wars* v. 4. 2). The so-called Solomon's pools probably date from the time of the Romans; the largest was approximately 600 ft. (182.9 m.) long, 207 ft. (63.1 m.) wide, and 50 ft. (15.2 m.) deep. These pools are about 3 mi. (4.8 km.) southeast of Bethlehem. Solomon may also have built fish hatcheries and raised various kinds of fish (Cant. 7:4).

7. Servants and maidens. A large retinue of servants and workmen would be needed to maintain Solomon's extensive projects. The queen of Sheba was astounded at the number of employees in Solomon's establishments (1 Kings 10:5). Undoubtedly he kept non-Hebrew slaves (1 Kings 9:21; 2 Chron. 8:8), as well as a large number of Hebrew servants in a milder type of servitude (see on Ex. 21:2, 20; Deut. 15:12, 15).

Servants born in my house. Literally, "children of the house were [born] to me." These were in addition to those he "got," or acquired otherwise. Slaves who had been purchased or captured would themselves have children. Concerning the number of Solomon's servants see 1 Kings 4:21-27; 10:25, 26.

Great and small cattle. Or, "herds and flocks" (RSV). The tremendous size of Solomon's flocks and herds is apparent from the number of sacrifices offered at the dedication of the Temple (1 Kings 8:63). In addition to the sacrifices offered, a large meat supply would be needed for the army of servants and slaves in the king's employ (see 1 Kings 4:22, 23; 1 Chron. 27:29-31).

8. Silver and gold. On Solomon's wealth in precious metals and in utensils of gold and silver, see 1 Kings 9:28; 10:14-27; 2 Chron. 1:15; 9:20-27. The tribute demanded of Hezekiah by the king of Assyria was paid in part from the king's treasury (2 Kings 18:14-16). Hezekiah also exhibited his hoard of wealth to the representatives of the Babylonian monarch (2 Kings 20:13).

Peculiar treasure. Literally, “possessions.” This is probably a reference to the tribute and taxes of various kinds that Solomon levied. The word translated “peculiar treasure” is also applied by God to His people (Ex. 19:5; Ps. 135:4; cf. Deut. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Mal. 3:17, “my jewels”).

Of the provinces. The definite article probably implies that this phrase should read, “and their provinces.” If so, it refers to tribute levied on subject rulers and their peoples (see 1 Kings 4:21, 24; 10:15).

I gat me. Literally, “I made for myself.” Here the verb may be understood as meaning “acquired,” “appointed,” or “instituted.” In Gen. 12:5 it is translated “gotten.”

Singers. Solomon must have done considerable entertaining, including the receiving of visitors from many countries. This would necessitate a large corps of professional entertainers (see 2 Sam. 19:35; Amos 6:5).

Musical instruments. Heb. *shiddah weshiddoth*, generally thought to mean “many concubines,” literally, “a concubine and concubines.” *Shiddah* is of uncertain derivation, but possibly from the verb “to despoil,” in reference to the taking of the women of a defeated people. Again, it may be from a verb equivalent to the Arabic “to moisten,” from which the Hebrews derived a word meaning the female breast. The LXX suggests “cupbearers, male and female.” Perhaps Solomon is saying, “I gat me ... the delights of the sons of men, a wife [literally, “a breast”] and wives [literally, “breasts”], which of course, Solomon did. According to this explanation *shiddah weshiddoth* would be comparable to *racham rachamathayim*, “a damsel or two,” literally, “a womb or two” (Judges 5:30).

And that of all sorts. These words are supplied by the translators.

9. So I was great. With unconcealed satisfaction Solomon reflects upon the grandeur of his reign—in much the same spirit as that in which Nebuchadnezzar boasted of his glory: “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?” (Dan. 4:30). Here Solomon points with pride and satisfaction to the fact that he surpassed all his predecessors, even his father, in wealth and wisdom.

My wisdom remained. Literally, “my wisdom stood to me.” This may be taken to mean that his wisdom stood by him in the sense of helping him to acquire all his possessions, or, that it kept him from going to excess in any indulgence (see on v. 3). Jewish commentators suggest both ideas. In the midst of folly Solomon thought himself wise, as an intoxicated person thinks himself sober.

10. Desired. Heb. *sha'al*, meaning literally, “begged,” “requested.” The popular Hebrew name *Sha'ul*, “Saul,” literally, “requested,” is from this root (see on 1 Sam. 9:2). Solomon here implies that he went to extremes, that there was little if anything with which he did not experiment (see 1 John 2:15–17).

Joy ... rejoiced. Heb. *śimchah* ... *śameach*, the noun being derived from the verb. Either word may refer to practically every kind of pleasing emotion, whether in religious experience, in legitimate pleasure, in labor, or in dissipation and debauchery. Solomon certainly means no less than that he tasted the fruits of all he studied and undertook.

Portion. That is, “share” or “award,” whether of booty, spoil, food, property, or a mode of life. In Ps. 50:18 it is rendered “partaker,” referring to companionship with “adulterers.” Solomon evidently refers to his way of life, his pursuit of happiness.

11. I looked. Literally, “I turned to,” to take particular notice of. The Hebrew word means much more than “to look at casually.” The noun from this root, meaning “face,” contains the idea of facing up to something in order to take account of it. Further, in Hebrew, the emphatic pronoun is used as if Solomon had said, “I personally took stock of.”

Vexation of spirit. Banquets, festivities, music, sensual pleasure—these do not provide lasting satisfaction. According to John 4:24, literally, “God is spirit,” not “a Spirit” in the sense of being one spirit among many, but spirit essentially, absolutely. And man must approach God through his own human spirit. Only in such a union can man find perfect satisfaction and contentment. All the pleasures of the world were found by Solomon to be mere “wind,” “breath,” or “a striving after wind” (see on ch. 1:14).

Profit. See on ch. 1:3. “Profit” is an important word in the philosophy of Ecclesiastes, where it occurs ten times. It does not occur elsewhere in the OT. Solomon tested each experience, each undertaking, each pleasure, in which he indulged, in terms of the “profit” to be derived from it. The literal meaning of the Hebrew root of the word so translated is “surplus,” or “balance.” The suggestion has been made that it was probably a word used in Jewish trade relations.

Under the sun. This expression appears 29 times in Ecclesiastes, in reference to the sphere of human activity. Similar expressions are found in various languages.

12. I turned myself. See on v. 11. Solomon had experienced and taken account of the material joys of life. Now he begins an examination of wisdom and folly from the practical angle.

For what? A literal translation of this clause would read, “For what the man who will come after the king?” The sense is probably that of the king asking what use would it be for a lesser man than he to seek to carry out the various experiments he had undertaken. He was a king, with every resource at his command; even more, he was wiser than ordinary men.

Already done. The lesser person coming “after the king” could scarcely hope to do more than Solomon had already accomplished. Solomon had proved the emptiness and futility of the pleasures of this world, and the matter might therefore be considered settled.

13. I saw. The pronoun is emphatic. The one who doubted, who could not be content without personally exploring every matter, now “saw.”

Wisdom excelleth folly. Literally, “there is profit to wisdom over folly.” Solomon had satisfied himself that true wisdom is worth while.

Light excelleth darkness. Literally, “the profit of the light over the darkness.” In this figure of speech light denotes spiritual and mental development, whereas mental and moral depravity and deterioration are compared to darkness. The apostle Paul used the same metaphor in Eph. 5:8; 1 Thess. 5:5. The ways of righteousness are compared to light (Ps. 37:6; 119:105; Isa. 51:4); the ways of wickedness are portrayed as darkness (Job 37:19; Prov. 4:19). The apostle John sets forth Jesus Christ as the light of heaven shining forth in the darkness of this world (John 1:4, 5).

14. Eyes. The eyes of a wise man are where God intended them to be—in a position to look straight ahead and thereby avoid stumbling. Compare the words of Jesus in John 11:9. For another spiritual application see Eph. 1:18.

The fool. The wise man sees where he is going and takes the most direct route; the fool gropes in uncertainty and stumbles. A similar idea, under another metaphor, is given in Prov. 17:24, “The eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth.”

I myself. Emphatic; literally, “I even I,” suggesting that Solomon found it imperative to praise wisdom.

One event happeneth. Literally, “happeneth one happening” (see Ps. 49:10; 90:3–5). Ultimately, wise man and fool are both overtaken by death.

15. So it happeneth. Sage and fool both die. On the surface there appears to be no distinction.

Was I then more wise? What profit, then, is there in a laborious program of study, “burning the midnight oil”? A man who puts forth strenuous effort in life to meet and solve its problems is as truly dead when he dies as the simpleton, who has merely existed.

This also is vanity. Ambition and effort to advance in life are therefore valueless, a mere passing breath—thus Solomon reasoned. In reality there is no answer to life and all its problems, aside from God. It is only as man grows in divine wisdom, and orders his life in harmony with God’s will, that he finds the true end of existence (see Matt. 6:33).

16. No remembrance. Both fool and wise are soon forgotten by their fellow men. This statement is true, of course, so far as this world is concerned, but a man who orders his life in keeping with divine wisdom has an everlasting remembrance (Ps. 112:6; Prov. 10:7), and he can rejoice with confidence because his name is written in heaven (Luke 10:20; Phil. 4:3).

Forgotten. The world forgets, but God remembers (see Mal. 3:16, 17; John 14:1–3).

And how. The latter part of v. 16 was probably meant to read, “How dieth the wise man like the fool?” In Hebrew as in English the adverb “how” may be used as an exclamation as well as an interrogation.

17. Hated. The Hebrew does not indicate a feeling of hatred or hostility so much as one of revulsion, disgust, weariness, or antipathy. The primary root meaning is “ugliness,” or “deformity,” either in a physical sense or in temper or disposition. The same verb appears in Mal. 1:3, where God says he “hated” Esau. God looked on Esau in disappointment and disgust, not with “hatred” in the usual sense of the word. Though God hates sin, He loves the sinner. In the latter part of Eccl. 2:17 Solomon clarifies his meaning: “The work that is wrought under the sun is *grievous* unto me.” All that Solomon tried was so far from providing him with the satisfaction he had hoped for that the very thought of these things served only to increase his discontent.

Grievous unto me. Literally, “evil upon me” (see Job 3:24–26; 7:14–16).

Vexation of spirit. Or, “a feeding on wind” (see Hosea 12:1; see on Eccl. 1:14; 2:11).

18. All my labour. Solomon found it a distressing thought that all the great buildings he had erected and the other projects he had carried out would remain for another person’s enjoyment (see on v. 19).

19. Who knoweth? Solomon commonly uses the verb “to know” to express doubt. Here he is distressed because he does not know whether those who inherit his works will appreciate them and be worthy of them. They may carry on his labors or may discard

them. The maddening thing is that he has little control over the matter. Some refer Solomon's anxiety to his concern over Rehoboam as his successor.

Rule. This word in the Hebrew suggests complete power over persons or things. It is a most distressing thought that the fruits of the labors of a lifetime may be squandered by a successor (see Job 27:16, 17; Ps. 39:6; Prov. 23:5; Isa. 65:22; Luke 12:20).

20. I went about. Better, "I turned about," that is, to go in a different, or in the opposite, direction. It suggests a complete change in Solomon's outlook, and possibly his activities, as the outcome of a survey of his lifework.

To despair. Solomon unwillingly resigns himself to the facts as he has found them (see 1 Sam. 27:1; Job 6:26).

21. Equity. The word here translated "equity," not found in any other book of the Bible, is from a root meaning "proper," "fit," "right," and may, therefore, be translated "aptitude," "natural ability." Accordingly, Solomon's thought is that should there be a man who has shown every aptitude and has been eminently successful, he must still leave the fruits of his labors to one who has had no part in building them up, and will therefore be unable to appreciate them.

Leave. Literally, "give," in the sense of "handling over."

Portion. That is, his inheritance—a share of land, possessions, or booty.

22. What hath man? What permanent result or fruit to be enjoyed? The answer expected is, Nothing. The gain does not seem commensurate with the labor involved.

23. Days. In contrast with "night." The working hours have been filled with activity, and the "night" with a wakeful pondering of the cares of the day. Solomon seems not to have fully realized the blessings of the discipline of toil, sorrow, and disappointment (see Job 35:10; cf. Rom. 8:35; 2 Cor. 12:9; Heb. 12:11; Rev. 3:19).

24. Eat and drink. Here Solomon states his conclusion, one based upon his experiments with life. The end gain, he feels, is nil; therefore why not eat and drink, and enjoy the things life has to offer.

Make his soul enjoy good. Literally, "show his soul good." The word "soul" here refers to one's desires or appetites (see Prov. 10:3; 13:25; 27:7; see on Gen. 2:7; 9:5; Deut. 6:5). The statement may refer to the actual enjoyment of the fruits of his labors, and also to the satisfaction that comes in the carrying out of one's plans and commitments.

The hand of God. It is God's will that man should not only enjoy the fruits of his labor but also find pleasure in the carrying out of his tasks. This expression also suggests Solomon's recognition of the overruling power of God, and the good end He has in view for His earthborn children, in spite of suffering and disappointment.

25. Hasten. Better, "who will experience more than I?" Solomon may be speaking of the work of his lifetime, and of his ability to appreciate the fruits of it more than another could. Or, God may be the speaker (see v. 24). In v. 25 the reading of the verse would be, "Who will eat and who will have experience apart from Him?"

More than. A more accurate reading would probably be, "apart from Him," that is, from God. The sentiment would then be that God alone is the One who stands back of the lives of all men, and that nothing may happen apart from Him.

26. For God giveth. The "for" coordinates v. 26 with v. 25; and both must in turn be linked with v. 24. Solomon confesses God's omnipotent power and universal oversight; God does not abandon man.

The sinner. The transgressor, the one who rejects and resists God's will; literally, "the one who misses the goal."

To gather. The sinner spends his life in labor that does not give entrance to the eternal kingdom. All he accumulates is for this life only. He toils to gather riches together; he heaps them up, but to no eternal end (see Matt. 13:12; 25:28; Luke 12:20).

Good before God. The idea that the fruit of the labors of the wicked may be given to the righteous is found in Job 27:16, 17; Prov. 13:22; 28:8.

Vexation of spirit. See on ch. 1:14. The emphasis here is on the fundamental fact that God disposes as He wills.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

4-12, 17, 18 Ed 153

4-18PK 76

26 ML 213

CHAPTER 3

1 *By the necessary change of times, vanity is added to human travail. 11 There is an excellency in God's works. 16 But as for man, God shall judge his works there, and here he shall be like a beast.*

1. Season. Literally, "an appointed time," from a root meaning "to determine," "to decree." A season is therefore not merely a convenient time, but a decreed time. God has ordained certain seasons for the various natural phenomena (see Lam. 3:37; cf. James 4:15).

Time. From a common Hebrew word for "time," often signifying the beginning of a period of time.

Purpose. From a Hebrew word whose root means "to take delight in," "to have pleasure in." The noun, therefore, basically means, "that in which one takes delight," a vocation or an avocation. This same noun is translated "pleasure" in Isa. 58:3, 13; Mal. 1:10, and "delight" in Ps. 1:2; 16:3.

2. To be born. Some regard the verb form as active and translate it, "a time to bring forth." However, most scholars contend that the verb should be understood intransitively, and hence prefer the translation, "to be born."

To die. Birth and death are, naturally, the two most important events in a person's life. A man has no control over the time of his entrance into the world, and under ordinary circumstances little control over the time of his exit from it.

To plant. This expression corresponds to the one that precedes it, "to plant" being the counterpart of "to bring forth," and "to pluck up," of "to die." The one is concerned with human life and the second with plant life.

To pluck up. Literally, "to root up." There comes a time when even the finest fruit trees must be cut down.

3. To kill. Commentators disagree as to whether Solomon here refers to war or to other circumstances. It is possible that he is speaking of the execution of criminals, and of measures for the protection of threatened communities. Or he may be thinking of an injured domestic animal, and the fact that the extent of injury must determine whether it is more merciful to put the creature out of its misery or to attempt to "heal" it.

To break down. There is a time when buildings must be demolished and more convenient ones put up in their stead. For millenniums it has been a common habit in the

Near East to utilize the ruins of one civilization as building materials for the new. Solomon may here refer to his own great building projects.

4. To weep. It is a good thing at times to allow pent-up emotions to express themselves. Israel wept bitterly in exile (Ps. 137:1). Also, the day will come when God's people will laugh (Ps. 52:1–6).

To mourn. The word translated “mourn” is a technical term used for the loud, public lamentations and expressions of grief indulged in by Eastern peoples (see 2 Sam. 3:31; Jer. 4:8; 9:17–22; 49:3).

To dance. In ancient times dancing was an important part of religious and festive ceremonies, particularly in the East (see 2 Sam. 6:14, 16; 1 Chron. 15:29; cf. Matt. 11:17; see on Ex. 15:20; 32:19).

5. To cast away stones. Reference is probably here made to cleaning the fields of the stones that impede cultivation, and then using them to build demarcation walls as boundaries and retaining walls for fields and vineyards (see Isa. 5:2, 5).

To embrace. Perhaps a euphemism for the marital relations of husband and wife (see Prov. 5:20), or perhaps a figurative expression for idleness (see Eccl. 4:5, where “the fool foldeth his hands”).

6. To get. Literally, “to seek,” the common Hebrew term for searching or seeking.

To lose. Perhaps better, “to give up as lost,” which would balance the expression “to seek.” The reference here may be to the lost member of the flock or herd. The pressing of an intensive search might lead to unpleasant reactions from neighboring families, or might prove futile.

To cast away. Compare the following as illustrations of this expression: 2 Kings 7:15; Prov. 11:24, 25; Jonah 1:5; Matt. 16:25; Acts 27:18, 19, 38.

7. To rend. Compare Gen. 37:29; 2 Sam. 1:11; 1 Kings 11:11; 2 Chron. 23:13; Job 1:20; 2:12.

To keep silence. There are circumstances under which “silence is golden” (see Lev. 10:3).

8. To love. Compare the words of Christ in Matt. 5:43, 44.

Of war. Perhaps one illustration of the truth of this statement is that the battle of the great day of the Lord, yet to come (Rev. 16:15–17), will be followed by everlasting peace (Rev. 21; 22).

9. What profit? See on ch. 1:3. Solomon's question implies a negative reply. Why should man toil to improve his status in life when he is thwarted at every turn? He must learn that the One who places tests along life's pathway is a loving Father, disciplining His earthborn children for their eternal good (see Heb. 12:11; Rev. 3:19–21).

10. Travail. See on ch. 1:13. The stern discipline of life necessary for the seeker after immortality (see Rom. 2:6, 7) is all under the hand of an omnipotent, loving Father. Yet man is free to choose his own way of life, to develop his own character, and to decide his own eternal destiny. The practical difficulties of life can be met successfully only under God's leading.

11. Beautiful. Compare the account in Gen. 1:31, of God's work in creation. Not only was everything “good,” but beautiful also, aesthetically pleasing; not only perfect for practical use, but lovely in its appeal to the eye and to the taste. This was true not only of some things but of “every thing.”

Also. This word suggests an additional point that the author would not have the reader overlook.

Set. Literally, “given.” This meaning should be emphasized, as it suggests the goodness of God in supplying man’s needs.

The world. Heb. ‘*olam*, from a root meaning “to conceal.” ‘*Olam* therefore signifies that which is obscure. For a further discussion of the meaning of ‘*olam*, see on Ex. 12:14; 21:6. The translation of ‘*olam* as “world” is most unusual; it appears more commonly as “eternity,” “enduring,” “continuity.” Deeply implanted within man is a concern for the future. This awareness of the infinite in time and space stirs dissatisfaction with the transitory nature of the things of this life. See on v. 14.

In their heart. That is, in their thoughts. It is God’s design that man realize that the present, material world does not constitute the sum of his existence. He is linked to two worlds, physically to this world, but mentally, emotionally, and psychologically to the eternal world. Even with his consciousness beclouded by sin, man seems dimly aware that he ought to continue living beyond the narrow confines of this unsatisfying life.

No man can find out. The unaided human intellect cannot enter into the intricacies of God’s created marvels or the mysteries of eternity that God has not seen fit to reveal. This fact in itself should lead men to seek a closer union with the God of all creation.

12. Them. That is, the “sons of men.”

13. Also. See on v. 11.

Eat and drink. An ascetic life is contrary to God’s will for man. It was the will of the Creator that man enjoy, in moderation, the good things provided for his needs and happiness.

14. For ever. From the same Hebrew word translated “world” in v. 11 (see on v. 11). Here Solomon affirms the effective immutability of the divine will, operative in the affairs of men (see Ps. 33:11; Isa. 46:10).

Men should fear. Not abject fear (see on Deut. 4:10; 6:5) but a reverential awe based on an enlightened understanding of the divine attributes (Ps. 40:3; 64:9) and the operation of the divine will in human affairs (see Isa. 45:18; Mal. 3:6; cf. Rev. 15:3, 4).

15. That which hath been. This verse presents a word picture of the completeness and permanency of God’s works. In a sense there is with Him no past and no future; eternity is ever present (see Rev. 1:8).

God requireth. Literally, “God seeks.”

That which is past. Literally, “the pursued,” from *radaph*, “to pursue,” “to chase,” “to persecute.” It is translated “pursue” in Joshua 8:16 and “persecute” in Jer. 29:18. The idea here may be that all things in past time are open before God as if they were present; He projects His thinking into the past as readily as He thinks in terms of the present or the future. If this be the meaning, “the pursued” would refer to the cycles of past ages, personified as if they were pursuing one another.

16. The place of judgment. Or, “the place of justice,” that is, the place dedicated to the administration of justice. Bribery and corruption resulted in enthronement of wickedness in the very courts sacred to the dispensing of justice.

Iniquity. From the same Hebrew word translated “wickedness.” In both instances the word “wickedness” is preferable. By the word “righteousness” Solomon designates the person of the judge, who is supposed to be the embodiment, or personification, of right

dealing. Thus the first expression indicates the place, and the second, the person who sits in authority in that place.

17. God shall judge. The Hebrew verb “to judge,” used with reference to God, expresses the concept that He is not only the one who will act as arbiter to decide the cases of the righteous and the wicked, but also the one who executes the penalty.

Every purpose. See on v. 1. The same Hebrew word is translated “pleasure” in Eccl. 5:4; 12:1; Isa. 44:28; 46:10; Mal. 1:10, and “delightful” in Mal. 3:12.

Work. See on ch. 1:14.

18. The estate. Compare “the order [manner]” (Ps. 110:4). A better translation of the entire phrase here would be simply “concerning the sons of men.”

Manifest. Literally, “purify,” “select,” “test,” “prove.” In Isa. 52:11 the verb is translated “be ye clean,” in Dan. 11:35, “to purge,” in Dan. 12:10, “shall be purified.” Solomon thus expresses the desire that God test men as a disciplinary measure, in order to cleanse and purify them (see Job 5:17; 23:10; see on Eccl. 3:19).

That they might see. There is hope for the man who recognizes his sinful and unclean condition.

Beasts. Usually translated “cattle.” It is from the root “to be dumb,” and is related to an Arabic word meaning “to be impeded in speech,” “to be tongue-tied.”

19. Befalleth. Three times in this verse we have this English word. In each of the three instances of its occurrence in v. 19 this word is from a Hebrew term meaning “chance,” “fate,” “fortune.” It is from the verb “to encounter,” “to meet,” “to befall.” In Ruth 2:3 the noun form of the word is given as “hap,” in 1 Sam. 6:9 as “chance,” in 1 Sam. 20:26 as “something hath befallen,” and in Eccl. 9:2, 3 as “event.”

Dieth. That inscrutable phenomenon, death, is the lot of all living creatures, whether man or beast. The psalmist says that “man being in honour abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish” (Ps. 49:12). In the matter of being subject to death, man is in no way superior to beasts.

Breath. Heb. *ruach*. When the breath of life departs, the living creature dies, whether it be man or animal (see on v. 21).

No preeminence. All living creatures are identical in that, with the cessation of breath, the creature dies; the *physical* consequences of death are the same. Outward appearances suggest no superiority for man. But through faith in the Inspired Word we believe that God will redeem man from the power of the grave (1 Cor. 15:51–58).

20. One place. That is, the grave (see Job 7:9, 10).

Dust. See Gen. 2:7; 3:19; Dan. 12:2.

21. Who knoweth? The RSV reads, “Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward?” Without divine wisdom no one “knows.” The destiny of the body is known—it returns to dust, through a process of disintegration—but human wisdom cannot ascertain what happens to the “spirit,” or “breath,” except that it “shall return unto God” (see on ch. 12:7).

Spirit. Heb. *ruach*, “breath,” as it is translated in v. 19. The life principle does not belong to the physical realm, the realm of flesh, for it is of God and returns to Him (ch. 12:7). In v. 21 *ruach* is translated “spirit.” Note that man and beast both have a *ruach*, and that the *ruach* of man is “one” with that of the beast. If, then, the *ruach*, or “spirit,”

of man becomes a disembodied conscious entity at death, the *ruach* of beasts must also. But the Bible nowhere so much as infers that at death a disembodied, conscious “spirit” continues to live on; and no Christian claims this for animals. In v. 21 Solomon incredulously asks who knows—who can prove—that the *ruach* of man ascends, while that of the beast descends. Solomon knows nothing of such a proceeding and doubts that anyone else does. If so, let him prove it. It is important to distinguish between the use of *ruach* to denote the literal breath (see Job 9:18; 19:17) and its figurative use denoting the life principle (see Gen. 6:17; 7:22), as here. The figurative use of *ruach* to mean “life” is similar to the figurative use of “blood” (see on Gen. 4:10; 9:4).

22. Rejoice in his own works. That is, find contentment and satisfaction in what this life has to offer. This is the normal outlook of the man who does not have faith firmly based on eternal things.

What shall be? What lies beyond the grave is outside the scope of human knowledge. Similarly, it is beyond human power to bring a dead person back from the grave. God alone can do so (see 1 Thess. 4:14–18). There are Christians today who, like the Sadducees of old, have no faith in a future resurrection. But God is the God of the living (see Matt. 22:23–32), and “sons of God” (1 John 3:1, 2) will live again. Life beyond the grave has been made a certainty by Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:16–22; 2 Tim. 1:10).

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

11 Ed 198, 248

12 ML 166

14 DA 769; Ed 50; PP 754

CHAPTER 4

1 *Vanity is increased unto men by oppression, 4 by envy, 5 by idleness, 7 by covetousness, 9 by solitariness, 13 by wilfulness.*

1. I returned, and considered. A Hebrew expression equivalent to “I reconsidered,” or “again I saw” (RSV).

Oppressions. Heb. *‘ashuqim*, from a root meaning “to oppress,” “to wrong,” “to extort.” It is related to an Arabic word meaning “roughness,” or “injustice.” Solomon here refers to things that have been the lot of the poor and weak throughout history (see Job 35:9; Amos 3:9; cf. 1 Sam. 12:4).

Tears. The tears of the oppressed move the heart of God (Ps. 39:12; 56:9; Isa. 38:5). In contrast, the tears of a hypocrite are offensive to Him (Mal. 2:13).

Comforter. From the verb “to console,” “to comfort.” The hearts of men in sore distress long for words of consolation from one who understands, and their distress deepens when there is none to comfort (see Ps. 69:20; Lam. 1:2).

Power. The Hebrew word is used of physical strength, such as Samson’s (Judges 16:5, 6, 15), but also in the broader sense of ability and efficiency in any direction (Prov. 24:5). Here it pictures the ruthless dealings of stronger men with respect to the weak and defenseless.

2. I praised. Or, “I congratulated.”

More than the living. Compare Job 3:13 and the words of Christ in reference to Judas (Matt. 26:24). Under certain evil conditions and from certain points of view it may be better to be dead than to continue to live. It is from this standpoint that Solomon writes. It

represents a mood stirred up by the inequalities and evils that have resulted from thousands of years of sin. Today more than ever before, men and women feel the futility of life.

3. Better. Pessimism, which is of the devil, is best met by faith in God and firm trust in the Saviour (Matt. 11:28). Compare the calm confidence of Paul (Rom. 5:1).

4. Travail. Literally, “trouble,” “labor,” “toil.”

Every right work. Literally, “all the skillfulness of work.” The expression may also mean “successful work” or “profitable work.”

Envied. Rivalry stirs up envy and bitterness as competition becomes close. The principle here set forth applies to labor conditions, business rivalries, and international problems, as well as personal relations.

Vexation of spirit. Or, “a striving after wind” (RSV), a figure of speech that describes the futility of worldly success as a guarantee of happiness.

5. Foldeth his hands. Literally, “the embracer of his hands,” a Hebrew expression for idleness (see Prov. 6:10; 24:33).

Eateth his own flesh. Jewish commentators use the word “meat” instead of “flesh,” and so suggest the picture of a stolid person sitting down to his meals, concerned exclusively with the pleasures of life. They quote Ex. 16:8 and Isa. 22:13 in support of this interpretation. Probably a more reasonable explanation of this expression is that the lazy dullard is brought to extreme poverty, and his family with him.

6. Handful with quietness. Literally, “a filling of the hand with quietness.” The Hebrew indicates the cupped hand. No doubt “quietness” here refers to peace of mind. The word appears in ch. 6:5 as “rest,” meaning well-being, and in ch. 9:17 as “quiet,” meaning gentleness (see Isa. 30:15).

Full with travail. Intense activity, a nervous rushing about in the endeavor to get a multiplicity of things done each day, in order to reap the maximum reward. A full and happy life does not depend on an abundance of the things of this life.

7. I saw vanity. Solomon tells of considering another phenomenon of life—avarice.

8. One alone. The picture is of a solitary person, alone and without either friends or close associates. He has neither kith nor kin, nor heir to succeed him or to carry forward his labors.

Neither child nor brother. A pathetic picture of loneliness, with little incentive to encourage one in his endeavors. To labor to provide for loved ones is a noble and satisfying task. Responsibility for loved ones is an effective means to the development of character. Without such incentives a man becomes self-centered, and the springs of benevolence within him dry up.

End. Or, “cessation,” from the verb root, “to cut off.” This lonely man, with no responsibility for others, nevertheless continues to work and hoard with a zeal worthy of more commendable objectives.

Satisfied with riches. The more he accumulates, the more he craves. The acquisition of wealth has become an obsession with him (see Prov. 27:20). Few men are content with their lot.

Bereave my soul. That is, “deny myself” (see on Ps. 16:10 for this use of *nephesh*). This avaricious person never questioned why he labored so incessantly. He was blinded by desire, and therefore devoted himself to amassing wealth, yet without finding contentment. It is a Christian virtue to be industrious, yet entirely contented under God’s

hand (Rom. 12:11; Eph. 4:28; 1 Tim. 6:8; Heb. 13:5). Indolence is not commended in the Christian (Prov. 12:24; Eccl. 10:18).

Sore travail. Better, “an evil business” or “a wretched task.”

9. Two are better. Two workmen engaged in cooperative effort can often earn more than double the wage of a single person. The word translated “reward” is the common Hebrew term for wages. It is used of servants (Gen. 30:28, 32, 33), of soldiers (Eze. 29:18, 19), and of the hire of animals (Zech. 8:10).

10. Fall. The Hebrew verb may be applied to a physical fall, to death, to falling into the power of another, or to failure in one’s undertakings. The last meaning is preferable here, referring as it does to evil circumstances that may befall one, and to his partner coming to his rescue. The conditions of travel in ancient times were usually fraught with peril, owing to poor facilities and to robbers. Two could safely make a journey where one might fail. Cooperation is invaluable and isolation is often dangerous. Compare the sending forth of the disciples (Luke 10:1). Companionship and mutual joy in an undertaking well done are blessings most worth while (Acts 13:2; 14:27).

11. Two lie together. Verse 10 speaks of help and support in difficulty; this, of comfort. Solomon here thinks of the heat of the day followed by the cold of night, and of the poverty of the common man, whose only bedding often consisted of his outer garment (see Ex. 22:26, 27).

12. If one prevail. The blessing of help and protection is here stressed. The same truth is expressed in our aphorism, “in union there is strength.”

Threefold cord. Separately, three pieces of string may be broken with ease, but when twisted into one cord, they cannot be broken so readily.

Some commentators have gone to unwarranted lengths in an exposition of this verse, professing to see here an allusion to the Trinity. They quote such incidents as the love and companionship between Lazarus and his two sisters, Mary and Martha, and Christ choosing three disciples to accompany Him to the Garden of Gethsemane. Such fanciful exegesis should be avoided.

13. Child. Perhaps preferably “youth” or “young man.” This Hebrew word is used of Joseph at seventeen years of age (Gen. 37:30), and of “young men” in many places (1 Kings 12:8, 10, 14; 2 Chron. 10:8, 10, 14).

And foolish. Better, “but foolish.”

Admonished. The word thus translated is from the root “to advise,” “to enlighten,” “to counsel,” “to warn.” In his old age the king had become stubborn and set in his ways. In his obstinacy he rejected all advice, and thereby became a danger to himself, his people, and his kingdom.

14. Out of prison. Literally, “from the house of prisoners;” perhaps figuratively, from the midst of forbidding circumstances. The meaning is that a young man may overcome the disadvantages confronting him, and if he is wise and teachable, become a success in life. He may even attain to the highest position in the land (see 1 Kings 11:26–28).

Poor. An unwise king with no concern for the welfare of his subjects may be deposed, suffer great hardships, and possibly lose his life.

15. I considered. A transitional expression.

The second child. This verse may refer to the enthusiasm attendant upon the accession of the new ruler who takes the place of one deposed.

16. No end. A continued description of the enthusiasm of the crowds mentioned in v. 15. This is borne out by the Hebrew of the following phrase, which is better understood as meaning, “even all of them over whom he was ruler.”

Before them. Literally, “all them in front of whom he was,” meaning, “over whom he ruled.” The Hebrew speaks of “going before” in the sense of leadership (1 Sam. 18:16; 2 Chron. 1:10).

Not rejoice in him. Public acclaim today may become public denunciation tomorrow. Joseph in Egypt illustrates the fickleness of the world’s regard (Ex. 1:8).

CHAPTER 5

1 *Vanities in divine service, 8 in murmuring against oppression, 9 and in riches. 18 Joy in riches is the gift of God.*

1. Keep thy foot. In Hebrew Bibles, in the LXX, and in the Vulgate, this is v. 17 of ch. 4. “Keep thy foot” is equivalent to the colloquial expression “Watch your step,” and is used here in a figurative sense, in harmony with the thought of Gen. 17:1 and Ps. 119:101.

House of God. The ancient tabernacle was called “the house of Jehovah” (1 Sam. 1:7; 2 Sam. 12:20). The same title was later used of the Temple in Jerusalem (see 1 Kings 3:1).

Sacrifice of fools. The “fools” here referred to “do evil” when they enter “the house of God” by not keeping their “foot” and not being “ready to hear.” They are unaware of Him in whose presence they stand (v. 2), their thoughts are upon earthly things, and as a result their words are often rash, hasty, and many. Those who attend church, so unaware of the presence of God that they think and converse on common topics, are here classed by the wise man as “fools.” Their worship is mere form.

They do evil. Ignorant of God’s spiritual requirements, they fail to worship Him sincerely and intelligently (see John 4:24). They sin in their self-imposed ignorance, and as a result their worship and their gifts—thoughtlessly offered—are unacceptable to God.

2. Rash. Or, “hasty,” as the same word is translated in chs. 7:9 and 8:3. Hasty, thoughtless, precipitate words, whether in conversation, petition, or prayer, are dangerous. The tongue, like a horse, needs careful control. Note the advice of Christ in respect to prayer (Matt. 6:7).

Before God. God should be addressed with reverent awe (see 1 Kings 8:43). God cannot be approached as we would approach a man.

Words be few. Compare the appeal of the priests of Baal (1 Kings 18:26). God is not ignorant of our needs. An excess of words depicting minute details of our requirements is unnecessary (Matt. 6:7, 8; cf. Luke 18:9–14).

3. Dream. Heb. *chalom*, a word used of the whole range of dreams, including the dreams of both true and false prophets. The reference here may be to the confused state of mind of the worldly man, entrapped in a multiplicity of cares, but not experiencing peace in God.

Is known. These words are not in the Hebrew, and are best omitted. The meaning is that, as dreams testify to overwork and nervous strain, so an excess of words marks as a fool the one who speaks them.

4. Vow unto God. See Deut. 23:21. See also Ps. 50:14; Prov. 20:25.

No pleasure in fools. Note that the words “he hath” are supplied. The Hebrew reads literally, “There is no pleasure in fools.” In other words, says Solomon, neither God nor

man takes pleasure in a person who thoughtlessly promises much but fulfills little. Compare the story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1–10.

5. Not vow. One may be impressed to promise a gift to God's work because of some signal blessing received. Such a promise must then be carried out.

6. Flesh to sin. The first clause of v. 6 reads, literally, "Do not allow your mouth to bring sin upon your flesh." Failure to fulfill a vow is a sin of omission.

The angel. The LXX and the Syriac read, "God." It has been suggested that the word "angel" may sometimes have been used in making reference to God, out of a desire to avoid using the sacred name. Judaism is known to have developed various expressions as synonyms for the divine name.

God be angry. On God's being "angry," see on Judges 2:20; 2 Kings 13:3; 17:11. Why should a man needlessly incur God's displeasure?

Fear thou God. A godly fear should be the guiding force in life (see Eccl. 7:18; 8:12; 12:13; Hab. 2:20); see on Deut. 4:10; 6:2).

8. Oppression. Exploitation by a corrupt officialdom is not uncommon. Political schemes rarely prove beneficial to the poor. Solomon himself had been guilty of oppressing the poor in order to advance his own grandiose plans (1 Kings 12:4).

Province. Translated from an Aramaic word meaning the "province" of an empire (see Esther 1:1; Dan. 8:2).

Marvel not. That is, do not be surprised that oppression exists, or disturbed about the fact. It is only to be expected.

Higher. Probably a reference to the various ranks of officials in an Oriental government system, each being required to check and report on the men below him. God, however, observes even the highest of them (see Ps. 33:13–15; Ps. 50:21; Zeph. 1:12).

9. The profit of the earth. The meaning of the Hebrew of v. 9 is obscure. Perhaps a clearer rendering of the first part of the verse would be, "There is a profit from the land in return for all [honest labor]."

The king. King Uzziah engaged extensively in agriculture (2 Chron. 26:10). The ruler of an agricultural country is often close to his people, for he meets his subjects with no lines of greedy officials between him and them.

10. Loveth silver. The life devoted to the acquisition of wealth is rarely satisfied with what is accumulated. Solomon may have in mind the crowds of petty and higher officials in an Oriental government, each eager to feather his own nest.

Increase. No matter how much his possessions increase he counts them insufficient and wishes for more.

11. They are increased. The Hebrew reads, "The eaters of it are increased." With the growth of wealth, a man enlarges his establishment. He is called upon to entertain lavishly. Retainers, servants, and hangers-on multiply, and relatives clamor for financial help.

What good? Or, "what advantage?" There is no place for wealth aside from this life. The accumulation, investment, and protection of wealth may be the cause of great anxiety, and lead to nervous breakdown. The riches of this world afford no passport to immortality.

Beholding. The wealthy man finally realizes he cannot take his wealth with him at death (Job 1:21; Luke 12:19, 20). He should not take undue pride in his ability to

accumulate money; neither should he make a display of it, but rather use it to the glory of God (1 Tim. 6:10, 17–19).

12. Labouring man. Denoting specifically, a farmer, a tiller of the soil. The word thus translated is, however, also used of servants in general, also, of those who serve God. A day of physical work is excellent preparation for a night of refreshing sleep.

Not suffer him to sleep. The responsibility of caring for riches often proves troublesome and robs a man of rest to the extent of causing ill-health and nervous collapse.

13. A sore evil. That is, a grievous wrong.

Riches kept. This wrong consists in the hoarding of wealth instead of putting it to use. With the possession of means comes the obligation to use it for the common good (see Matt. 19:20, 21). Compare the counsel of Paul (1 Tim. 6:9, 10).

To their hurt. Loss of sleep, due to anxiety over the investment and guarding of wealth, often plagues its possessors (see v. 12). Certain criminal elements consider them fair game for exploitation. Again they worry that their heirs may squander the fruits of their arduous labors. But the most grievous injury occasioned by the hoarding of wealth is to one's character (see Prov. 11:24; Luke 12:16–21).

14. Evil travail. Better, “a bad venture” (RSV), that is, a poor investment or business deal that results in serious loss. Unwise speculation may wipe out a man's life savings overnight. Constant care is essential if a businessman would hold capital and with it earn a profit.

Begetteth. “Hath begotten” is closer to the Hebrew. The son is here thought of as the prospective heir to his father's estate.

Nothing in his hand. If the pronoun “his” refers to the father, then the meaning is that at the time of death he finds that he has nothing to bequeath to his son. If “his” refers to the son, then the meaning is that after the father's death and his affairs are settled, the son finds nothing left of the inheritance he had anticipated. The first suggestion is preferable.

15. Naked. Compare Job's statement (Job 1:21) and that of David (Ps. 49:16, 17). These observations are reminiscent of God's word to Adam (Gen. 3:19).

Shall take nothing. Only the spiritual “wealth” a man has accumulated in his life may be carried beyond the grave (see John 3:36; cf. Rev. 22:14). Character is the only treasure he can take with him from this world to the next (COL 332). Accordingly, the Christian will seek ways of depositing his riches in heaven (see Luke 12:33, 34).

16. This also. In all ages men have been distressed at the seeming futility of life. What point, asks the writer, is there in working hard for a lifetime, only to forfeit the fruits of toil at death?

What profit? None at all, of course, is the implied answer.

Laboured for the wind. Here a figure for utter futility (see Job 15:2; Prov. 11:29). The wind is unsubstantial, elusive, and cannot be grasped and held. So are the riches of this world.

17. Eateth in darkness. A metaphor descriptive of the fact that the man who lives exclusively for the accumulation of material wealth never realizes the satisfaction he hopes to attain thereby. Contrast the outlook of one whose hope is on eternal things (Micah 7:8), who endures the material discomforts of the present, with a view to things he now sees only with eyes of faith (Heb. 11:27).

Much sorrow. For the remainder of the verse the RSV follows the LXX: “in much vexation and sickness and resentment.” This is a further analysis of the experience of the man who “eateth in darkness.”

18. I have seen. In vs. 12–17 Solomon has set forth vividly the folly of amassing wealth for its own sake. Now, from the background of his own experience, he observes that wealth is of value only as it is put to work, as it contributes to the needs and joys of life.

Comely. That is, “fitting” or “appropriate.”

Which God giveth him. True happiness and serenity of mind come of through right relations with God, through the realization that His hand is over all for good (see Rom. 8:28). Therefore the serene acceptance of one’s lot in life is the road to contentment and happiness. This was the counsel of Paul (1 Tim. 6:7, 8).

19. Eat. Here used figuratively of putting “riches and wealth” to work, rather than hoarding them (see v. 13).

The gift of God. The ability to acquire wealth comes from God (Deut. 8:18; James 1:16, 17). All the abilities we possess are gifts from God. Whatever we have acquired by reason of these abilities should be a cause of thankfulness to God.

20. Not much remember. The man who counters a life of cooperation with God encounters no experience for which God does not have a solution (Matt. 6:34). His future is sure, and his life can be serene.

God answereth. The verb root here translated “answereth” also has the meaning, “to testify to [something].”

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

4 3T 411; 4T 476

4, 5 4T 472

4–65T 284

6 4T 471

8 Ed 144; PK 68, 78

9 Ed 219

10 MH 210

18 ML 142

CHAPTER 6

1 *The vanity of riches without use.* 3 *Of children,* 6 *and old age without riches.* 9 *The vanity of sight and wandering desires.* 11 *The conclusion of vanities.*

1. Common among men. Literally, “it is much upon men.” Solomon states what he has personally witnessed.

2. God hath given. The Creator and Lord of the universe is God. Whatever there is of good in the world is to be credited to Him.

Riches, wealth, and honour. David acknowledged God as the source of these blessings (1 Chron. 29:12). The “honour” here referred to is that of material glory and splendor, such as God had bestowed upon Solomon (1 Kings 3:13; 2 Chron. 1:11, 12).

Soul. That is, the man himself (see chs. 2:24; 4:8).

Eat. Here used figuratively in the sense of “enjoy,” “take pleasure in,” as in Isa. 3:10; Jer. 15:16.

A stranger. Literally, “a man, a foreigner.” The same word is translated “alien” (Deut. 14:21) and “foreigner” (Deut. 15:3). Here, emphasis is laid upon the fact that this

unfortunate man will have no heir of his own to carry on his work and perpetuate his name. Compare the experience of Abraham (Gen. 15:2).

Disease. The same word is translated “grief” in Isa 53:3, 4; Jer. 6:7; 10:19.

3. An hundred children. The word translated “children” is not in the Hebrew text, but is obviously to be understood. To have many sons was the devout hope of every Jew, who looked upon his children as a rich blessing received from the Lord (Gen. 24:60; Ps. 127:3–5). The number given is a round figure used as equivalent to “many” (Gen. 26:12; 2 Sam. 24:3; Prov. 17:10). But compare the size of Rehoboam’s family (2 Chron. 11:21) with that of Ahab’s (2 Kings 10:1).

Years be many. Premature death was looked upon as a curse, even as longevity was regarded as a desirable blessing (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 11:9, 21; cf. Ps. 90:10).

No burial. This represents the supposed climax of all the evil that can come upon a man. Not to be properly buried was regarded as dishonoring in the extreme. Compare David’s threat to Goliath (1 Sam. 17:46) and the experience of Jehoiakim (Jer. 22:18, 19). Like the heathen around them, the Hebrews attached great importance to burial with honor (see Isa. 14:19, 20; Jer. 16:4, 5).

Untimely birth. A stillborn child, one that had never lived (see Job 3:16; Ps. 58:8). Though the stillborn child enjoys none of the pleasures of life, it also suffers none of life’s pains and disappointments.

4. He. Rather “it,” the stillborn child—not the rich man.

With vanity. The meaning is that the stillborn child comes into the world to no purpose.

Darkness. The stillborn child is immediately disposed of, with no funeral rites, no ceremony to pay it honor, to keep it in remembrance. It remains nameless, unrecorded. A child may eventually achieve glory, honor, and fame, but the stillborn child never emerges from the silence and darkness of death.

5. Not seen the sun. A figure of speech in which the sun stands for all the experiences and pleasures of life (see Job 3:16; Ps. 58:8).

More rest. Rest is an Oriental ideal, one that has found expression in such concepts as nirvana, the ideal future state of the Buddhist religion, and the Hindu desire for reabsorption into the great Atman. The experience of a stillborn is here cynically regarded as more desirable than vicissitudes that constitute a normal part of human existence.

6. A thousand years twice. Or, two thousand years. If a rich man lives twice as long as Methuselah (see Gen. 5:27), but derives little or no true enjoyment from life, longevity would have been of little profit to him. Without health and happiness, mere length of years is of little advantage.

Seen no good. It is better not to be born than to miss the supreme good God wills for each of His earthborn children. Life proves worth while only if that supreme good is realized.

One place. Ancient Jewish belief held that all men, good or bad, go to one place, the grave (Eccl. 3:20; see on Prov. 15:11). The grave receives all that die. The stillborn child, says Solomon, is to be congratulated in that it arrives in *she’ol* without passing through a life of sorrows, ills, and disappointments.

7. Mouth. A figure for indulgence in pleasures of sense (Ps. 128:2; Prov. 16:26; Eccl. 2:24; 3:13).

Appetite. Heb. *nephesh*. The same word appears in v. 3 as “soul” and in v. 9 as “desire.” The reference here is to the more sensuous side of one’s being (see Job 12:11; Prov. 16:26; Isa. 29:8). A lifetime is spent in labor to meet the requirements of an ever-demanding appetite, observes the wise man, yet without attainment of the supreme good.

8. What hath the wise? Literally, “What advantage hath the wise?” The Heb. *yother*, left untranslated by the KJV, means “superiority,” “advantage,” “profit.” Like the fool, the wise man toils to satisfy the cravings of appetite.

What hath the poor? Another contrast similar to that in the first clause is no doubt intended here—“What advantage hath the poor man, who knows how to walk before the living, than the fool who does not?” The poor man in his poverty and adverse circumstances has learned how to make the best of what he has. The fool, thinking of nothing but his desires and his appetites, constantly frets and strives for more than he possesses. Yet the poor man and the fool are alike in that neither is able to get all he would like to have.

9. Sight of the eyes. It is better to be content with that which is at hand than to be ever longing for what is not. A fool’s eyes are in the ends of the earth.

Wandering. The intense desire for that which is beyond one’s reach. This “wandering of the desire” often leads to crimes of violence.

10. Named already. Another way of stating the point of view expressed in ch. 1:9—“There is no new thing under the sun.”

It is man. No person is more than human, irrespective of who he may be. The Hebrew word here used for “man” is *’adam*, which describes a human being as being taken from the dust, *’adamah* (see on Gen. 1:26; Num. 24:3). The greatest of men are but mortal, destined to return to the dust (Eccl. 12:7).

Contend with him. Presumably, with God, in harmony with Isa. 45:9; Rom. 9:20 (see Job 33:12). Jewish commentators prefer the translation, “mightier than it,” making the pronoun refer to death. The KJV translation is preferable.

11. Things. Preferably, “words,” the basic meaning of the Hebrew word thus translated. Men are prone to talk and to complain, but a superabundance of words does not tend to improve any situation. It is more profitable that a man should learn to trust his Creator (Isa. 45:11–18; Acts 17:24–31).

What is man the better? Literally, “what advantage to man?” Many words and vain speculations contribute little to the solution of life’s problems.

12. What is good. That is, the things in life that are worth living for. Inasmuch as man himself cannot discover the ultimate good of life, he should recognize the futility of complaining and disputing with God. The question here asked anticipates a negative answer.

A shadow. Man is compared to a passing shadow, here for a brief moment and then gone (see 1 Chron. 29:15; Job 8:9; Ps. 102:11; 144:4; cf. James 4:14).

What shall be. Man cannot disclose the future. His life is but a moment between two eternities. The things of time are transient; the unseen things are eternal, and are in the hand of God (see 2 Cor. 4:17, 18).

CHAPTER 7

1 Remedies against vanity are, a good name, 2 mortification, 7 patience, 11 wisdom. 23
The difficulty of wisdom.

1. A good name. Compare Prov. 22:1. A good reputation, based on character, is a priceless possession.

“He that filches from me my good name
Robs me of that which not enriches him,
And makes me poor indeed.”

One of the intimate rewards to be bestowed upon the saved is the “new name” promised all who overcome the world (Rev. 2:17).

Precious ointment. The word rendered “precious” is the same word that is translated “good”—“a good name.” The word translated “ointment” is given as “oil” in Gen. 28:18; 35:14; Ex 25:6; 29:2; etc.; and again as “ointment” in Prov. 27:9, 16; Eccl. 9:8; 10:1 (see Cant. 1:3). Perfumed oil was highly valued in the Orient, where fine-grade soap was not available (see Ruth. 3:3; 2 Sam. 12:20). In the Hebrew there is similarity of sound between the words “name,” *shem*, and “oil” or “perfume,” *shemen*.

The day of death. The parallel nature of the second clause to the first is clear when it is realized that the person who lives honorably and attains to a good reputation need have no fear of death. At birth, his life lay ahead, and he knew nothing of its pitfalls, disappointments, sorrows, and defeats. A ship sets sail and leaves the harbor, with little intimation of the perils that may be encountered on the voyage. Upon entering the harbor at the conclusion of a safe ocean crossing, a vessel is welcomed with rejoicing.

One’s birth. Literally, “the day of his birth.” One’s birth is the beginning of a brief “threescore years and ten” (Ps. 90:9, 10), but death may be the prelude to an eternity in the new earth (Luke 20:36; 1 Cor. 15:51–55), of rest (Rev. 14:13), of supreme content (Rev. 7:16), and of eternal glory in contrast with the present afflictions (2 Cor. 4:17).

2. Mourning. The period of mourning among the Jews was seven days (Gen. 50:10), with mourners in attendance to comfort the sorrowing (Mark 5:38; John 11:19, 31).

Feasting. Marriage festivities also continued seven days (Gen. 29:27), and, like the time of mourning, were shared by others (Rom. 12:15; cf. Gal. 6:2).

All men. Literally, “each man.” It is a sobering thought for a man to bear in mind that the day will come when he must meet his Maker. Throughout life he will not forget to prepare for that solemn moment of meeting his Maker.

3. Sorrow. Frivolity does not strengthen character. There is a Greek maxim that affirms, “To suffer is to learn” (see Heb. 2:10; 12:1–11).

The heart. Grief is often a blessing in disguise that softens the heart. The fires of affliction purify the motives and create the capacity to be sympathetic toward others.

4. The wise. The minds of the wise turn to the sobering things of life, and learn to appreciate its moral and spiritual lessons. The fool, on the other hand, is attracted to the lighter side of life and seeks satisfaction in amusement, with little thought of the hereafter.

5. The rebuke. Verse 5 develops still further the thought of v. 4. The “rebuke” of Jehovah is the protection of His people.

Song of fools. Including, no doubt, the ribald and unedifying songs of places of amusement (see Amos 6:5), but referring to the kind of counsel one might expect from fools.

6. The crackling. In the Orient good fuel is often lacking, and as a result dry leaves and twigs are carefully gathered for use in cooking food and heating houses. Thorns,

twigs, and dry stubble burn quickly and with considerable noise, but do not give the steady heat needed to cook a meal or to heat a room (see Ps. 58:9; 118:12; cf. Isa. 9:18).

The laughter. A fool's laughter is easily aroused, noisy, and meaningless (see Job 20:5). Some understand this to refer to the applause of a fool, which lacks value because there is no sense in it or responsibility behind it.

7. Oppression. The same Hebrew word is translated "extortion" in Eze. 22:12. It refers to a tyrannical use of opportunity and ability to defraud others in order to enrich oneself.

Mad. That is, demoralized. If a wise man falls into the sinful habit of oppression and extortion, he will become demoralized, and most certainly be despised by others.

A gift. That is, a bribe. A man's judgment is warped and rendered ineffective by the acceptance of bribes (see Ex. 23:8; Deut. 16:19; Prov. 15:27). The "heart" is a symbol of the understanding, and also of one's moral nature (Hosea 4:11).

8. A thing. The Hebrew word thus translated more often means "word" or "remark." It is rare that one can see in advance the ultimate influence a word or remark may have.

Patient in spirit. The root of the word translated "patient" means "to be long." Thus a person "patient in spirit" is, literally, "long of spirit." Contrast the expression "hasty of spirit" (Prov. 14:29). A similar usage appears in the NT, where "patiently endured" (Heb. 6:15) and "be ye also patient" (James 5:8) are, literally, "be long of soul."

Proud in spirit. Literally, "high," or "exalted in spirit" (see Ps. 138:6; Isa. 5:15; 10:33; cf. Jer. 13:1–15).

9. Hasty. Or, "disquieted," "dismayed," "disturbed." One's emotions are to be held in control (see James 1:19).

Anger. See Eph. 4:26, 31; Titus 1:7.

Resteth. Words and actions that result from anger often inflict great damage, are extremely hard to forget, and are often held against the perpetrator of them for many years (see Prov. 14:33).

10. Former days. A person with an undisciplined spirit often feels that the present is more trying than the past, and as a result becomes peevish and petulant. It is also easy for elderly people to take such an attitude, forgetful of the problems of bygone days, and perhaps of their own shortcomings. In the wilderness the children of Israel habitually looked back to their former life in Egypt. Job exhibited a similar weakness (Job 29:2). Compare the attitude of the old men described in Ezra 3:12 and Haggai 2:3, and also of the psalmist (Ps. 77:5–9).

11. Wisdom is good. Some take this to mean that wisdom is the best kind of an inheritance; others, that an inheritance, with wisdom to make the best use of it, is a twofold blessing.

12. Defence. Or, "protection." The first part of the verse reads, literally, "In the shade is wisdom, in the shade is silver." Both wisdom and money afford shelter and help, even though not of the same kind. The wealthy man who is also wise thus has a double shelter. "Shade" is a common figure used of a shelter from danger (Ps. 17:8; 91:1; Isa. 32:2). Riches may at times save lives (Prov. 13:8), and wisdom may deliver a city (Eccl. 9:15). Wealth cannot buy eternal salvation (Ps. 49:6, 7) or give genuine peace of mind (Luke 12:15). True wisdom can bring a man into right relationship to God (Ps. 111:10; cf. Job 28:28). James 3:17 presents an inspiring word picture of true wisdom.

Excellency of knowledge. The word translated “excellency” is used 12 times in this book. “Advantage” is a preferable rendering here, in reference to the superiority of knowledge over money.

Giveth life. Better, “preserveth alive.” Wisdom may save a man’s life in time of danger, whereas riches may be the cause of a wealthy man’s death. Wisdom may keep a man from the excesses of appetite that shorten life; riches make possible the excessive indulgence of appetite and thus may be the means of leading a man to ill-health and eventually to death. But something more than mere physical life is suggested here. Wisdom in the highest sense leads to the practice of true piety (Prov. 3:13–18; 8:35). It is in the realm of the spirit that the true preservation of life, leading to immortality, is worked out (John 5:21; 6:63).

13. Consider. Literally, “see.”

The work of God. That is, the way by which Providence leads us through life (see Job 9:12; 11:10; 12:14).

Crooked. Probably a reference to the various experiences of life, its afflictions, difficulties, trials, and sufferings. Abraham had his “cross” to bear (Gen. 15:2, 3), as did Hannah (1 Sam. 1:5, 6), and Paul (2 Cor. 12:7). One must recognize the hand of God over all, and proceed in faith (Rom. 11:36; 2 Cor. 4:18; Heb. 2:10), never questioning the wisdom or goodness of God (Job 9:12; 11:10; 12:14).

14. Be joyful. Literally, “be in good.” When things are well with one, he should be happy and thankful. Compare the experience of God’s people in the days of Esther (Esther 8:16, 17).

In the day of adversity consider. Literally, “In the day of evil, see.” Even if things do not go along as we would wish, we need not complain and fret. It is a sin to doubt God and to be despondent.

Set. Literally, “made.” God brings things into proper balance. Prosperity answers to adversity. It is not good for a man to live completely free from care and trials (see Job 1:21; 2:10). Man should consider thoughtfully the daily happenings of life (Prov. 4:26). True happiness does not consist in the possession of material things (Luke 12:15; cf. Matt. 6:33, 34).

Nothing after him. Man cannot foresee his future, nor can he altogether control circumstances in which he may be involved. Consequently it is man’s privilege to trust God and submit to His will, assured that in His hands all will work together for good (Rom. 8:28; cf. Gen. 42:36).

15. All things. Literally, “the whole.”

My vanity. That is, my fleeting days (see ch. 1:2).

Perisheth. The Hebrews commonly believed that God would bless the righteous man with long life (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 4:40; Prov. 3:1, 2, 13–16; 4:10; cf. Ps. 91:16). The NT presents another aspect of the life of the righteous man on earth (Matt. 5:10–12; John 17:15; 2 Tim. 3:12).

Prolongeth. Job makes the same complaint (Job 12:6; 21:7; cf. Ps. 37:7). Righteous Abel perished as a young man, whereas evil Cain lived to old age. This apparent reversal of what should be the order of things has troubled the minds of upright men throughout history. Hebrew thought normally expected the wicked to be cut off early in life (Ps. 37:9, 10; 55:23; 58:3–9). The final reckoning will be, of course, at the second coming of Christ (Matt. 16:27; cf. Rev. 20:12–15).

16. Righteous over much. A rebuke to legalism with its reliance on outward forms and expressions. True religion is a personal relation to the holy God (Lev. 19:2; Eph. 3:14), and the Saviour Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:17–19).

Over wise. Solomon has spoken of the value of wisdom; now he warns against an attitude that might bring one to question God's leadings. The apostle Paul gives the same injunction (Rom. 9:20–23).

Destroy. The Hebrew form of the verb is reflexive, thereby emphasizing the fact that conduct decides destiny. The Pharisee in the parable is an example of one who, in self-righteousness and human wisdom, destroys himself (Luke 18:9–14).

17. Over much wicked. Do not cast off all restraint; eventually the point is reached where the Holy Spirit is no longer able to bring about sincere repentance. Beware of ignoring or underestimating God (Ps. 10:11; cf. Mal. 1:2, 6; 2:17; 3:8, 13).

Foolish. The man who sins deliberately, deceiving himself into the belief that God ignores what he does, may become so obsessed with a certain course of action that, in his spiritual blindness, he comes to think there is no God at all (Ps. 14:1).

Before thy time. Wicked excesses often result in premature death, as with the antediluvians (Job 22:16) and wicked men of later days (Ps. 55:23; Prov. 10:27).

18. Take hold. An admonition to avoid excessive or precipitate action. Moderation is a good rule in life; extremes are generally dangerous.

Feareth God. The ability to go through life, achieving its true objectives, is possible only in the fear of the Lord (Neh. 5:9; Job. 28:28; Ps. 111:10; Isa. 33:6).

19. Wisdom strengtheneth. He who is truly wise gains his victories in life through an infilling of that wisdom that is from above. The same Hebrew verb here translated "strengtheneth" appears also as "prevail," or "prevailed" (Judges 3:10; 6:2; Ps. 9:19; cf. Prov. 24:5).

Ten mighty. Literally, "ten rulers." The same Hebrew word is rendered "governor" in Gen. 42:6 and "ruler" in Eccl. 10:5, as also in the Aramaic of Dan. 5:29.

In the city. The comparison is made with the ancient village council of elders that passed judgment on all local matters. The same type of council has been perpetuated in Hindu village life, where it is called the *panch*, or "five," in reference to the five elders selected to enforce the rules of community life in the village.

20. For there is not a just man. Better, "for in respect to man, there is none righteous." Even the child of God may at times make grievous mistakes, as did Abraham and David, but by the enabling grace of Christ he will obtain victory over them (see 1 John 3:6; 5:4).

Sinneth not. See 1 Kings 8:46; Prov. 20:9; Rom. 3:23; 1 John 1:8.

21. Words that are spoken. That is, about one by others. To be concerned about what others think is not conducive to success.

Servant curse thee. Familiarity often breeds contempt. The Christian should, however, be more concerned about the opinion of God than he is of the opinion of man (1 Cor. 4:3, 4).

22. Cursed. Literally, "to be light," "to be trifling," then "to despise," "to dishonor." The meaning here is "to speak disparagingly," "to speak contemptuously."

23. Far from me. Compare Job 28:12–28.

24. Exceeding deep. Compare Job 11:7–9; Rom. 11:33.

25. *Applied mine heart to know.* Literally, “I, even my heart, turned about to know.” An emphatic way of stating his sincerity in searching for wisdom.

The reason. The Hebrew word thus translated appears as “account” in v. Eccl. 7:27, and “device” in ch. 9:10. A feminine form of the word in 2 Chron. 26:15 is rendered “engines,” and in Eccl. 7:29, “inventions.”

26. *The woman.* See Prov. 7:5–23.

Bands. The word translated “bands” is used elsewhere of the “bands” used by Delilah to bind Samson (Judges 16:8). The “snares,” “nets,” and “bands” picture the utterly unscrupulous woman (see Prov. 5:22; 22:14).

Pleaseth God. Literally, “is good before God.”

27. *One by one.* Literally, “one to one.” Compare Jer. 5:1–5.

28. *A thousand.* Used commonly as a round number (see Ex. 20:6; 34:7; Ps. 105:8). Solomon here means to say that the perfect man is rare.

A woman. Solomon does not say there are no perfect women, but implies that he had found such women more rare than perfect men. His experiences with a thousand wives and concubines, many of them heathen and all of them no doubt jealous and quarrelsome—as is generally the case in such a household—had no doubt brought Solomon no end of trouble. These difficulties he seems to have blamed on the women rather than upon himself for entering into multiple marriages (see Gen. 3:12).

29. *Upright.* From the verb “to be straight,” “to be right.” The reference is to moral uprightness.

Inventions. This same word is rendered in 2 Chron. 26:15 as “engines,” that is, contrivances, or engines of war such as for hurling stones. The root verb means “to think,” “to devise,” “to invent” (see Amos 6:5). Man has fallen from his original condition of moral rectitude and has become adept at contriving things that, though not necessarily evil of themselves, are employed in such a way as to lead men into immorality.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

8 5T 50

12 Ed 126; ML 107

29 CH 108; FE 449; ML 128; PP 49; 3T 72; 4T 293

CHAPTER 8

1 *Kings are greatly to be respected.* 6 *The divine providence is to be observed.* 12 *It is better with the godly in adversity, than with the wicked in prosperity.* 16 *The work of God is unsearchable.*

1. Who is as the wise man? Several ancient versions read, “Who then is wise?”

The wise man. Wisdom, Solomon affirms, is superior to all other possessions.

Who knoweth? The truly wise man will know how to interpret the experiences of life. Daniel was a noble example of this (Dan. 5:10–29). The apostles Paul (1 Cor. 2:15) and John (1 John 2:27) stress the same truth. The Aramaic form of the word translated “interpretation” is found 31 times in the book of Daniel.

Face to shine. Inward serenity and wisdom are reflected in the face of one who is truly wise (see Job 29:24; cf. Num. 6:25; Ps. 4:6).

Boldness. Heb. ‘oz, commonly translated “strength.” Here the word probably means “hardness,” in description of a face that lacks gentleness, culture, and the finer virtues.

Changed. The grace of God transforming the heart will be reflected in the face by an expression of serene joy.

2. Counsel thee. These words are supplied by the translators. Most ancient versions translate “to keep the king’s commandment” as an imperative, “Keep the king’s command,” which seems more in harmony with the context as well as with the structure of the sentence.

Commandment. Literally, “mouth,” and thus, figuratively, of spoken and written commands. This usage is common in the OT (Ex. 17:1; 38:21; Num. 3:39; 10:13; etc.).

Oath of God. The king was regarded as the Lord’s anointed, appointed by Him to rule. The “oath” refers to one of obedience to the king, uttered in the name of God (see 2 Chron. 36:13; Eze. 17:13–19). Compare the teaching of Paul with respect to the conscience (Rom. 13:5).

3. Hasty to go out. Literally, “Be not hasty from his presence going forth.” The king was all-powerful; therefore one should not withdraw allegiance from him hastily, nor forsake his service. The monarch’s absolute power often caused him to be dictatorial and unreasonable, and his servants must therefore remain calm and self-possessed.

Whatsoever pleaseth him. The king’s servant may be in the right, but the king’s power is supreme. It is therefore the part of wisdom not to oppose him unnecessarily.

4. What doest thou? The same expression is used in regard to God in Job 9:12; Isa. 45:9; cf. Job 34:18; Dan. 4:32.

5. Commandment. See on v. 2. The term here is the one usually used of God’s commandments, whereas in v. 2 it is from the Hebrew word for “mouth” (see on v. 2).

Feel no evil thing. Literally, “not shall know [that is, experience any] evil thing.” Intelligent submission to the law of the land, and the law of God, is requisite to peace and security, both here and hereafter (see GC 584, 585).

Time and judgment. The wise man’s “heart,” that is, his mind, discerns the right time to speak and the right time to remain silent. The wise man knows and follows right methods and correct procedures. He recognizes opportunities and seizes upon them as they arise.

6. Purpose. The verb root of the Hebrew word thus translated means “to delight in,” and is so used more than 60 times. The noun means “delight,” “desire,” “pleasure,” and appears thus in over 40 instances. The meaning here is that there is a right time and procedure for everything that is desirable.

Misery. Preferably “evil” or “trouble.” Each undertaking calls for thoughtful planning and appropriate methods, lest it miscarry and accordingly bring trouble rather than blessing.

7. When. It is one of man’s weaknesses, and the cause of no small part of his anxiety, that he cannot foretell what may befall him and when it may happen (see Isa. 47:13).

8. Retain the spirit. Life may be cut off at any moment (Job 21:17, 18; 34:14, 15).

Discharge. Or, “exemption.” As mercenaries could not secure a discharge from their duties during time of combat, neither can man avoid death when it comes.

9. This have I seen. Solomon had a variety of experiences in life, and learned much by observation.

Hurt. Some men “hurt” others, some bring injury to themselves. In the final analysis the one who hurts his neighbor destroys himself.

10. I saw. See Job 21:30–32. Some wicked men are buried with great honors (2 Chron. 16:13, 14; cf. Jer. 22:18, 19).

Place of the holy. Rather, “the holy place,” that is, of the sanctuary (see Lev. 7:6). Some men, unconverted and evil, attend church, conform to the outward requirements of church membership, and at death are accorded expensive church funerals. This has been true of royalty in many instances.

Forgotten. Many ancient Hebrew MSS, together with numerous ancient versions, read “praised,” which accords better with the context.

The city. Probably Jerusalem.

Had so done. That is, had ruled over others to their own hurt (v. 9), had lived ungodly lives, and had enjoyed the “praise” of their subordinates. After death, their names passed into oblivion.

11. Sentence. Heb. *pithgam*, “edict,” “decree,” from an old Persian root. It is translated in Esther 1:20 as “decree”; and appears in the Aramaic of Ezra and Daniel, variously translated as “answer,” “letter,” “word,” and “matter.” The thought here is of divine judgment.

Speedily. The same mistaken idea held by wicked men, that they will not have to account for their deeds, appears in Ps. 10:6; 50:21 (see Isa. 26:10; 2 Peter 3:4).

Fully set. Compare Ps. 73:8–11 and the words of Christ regarding the heart of man (Matt. 15:17–20).

12. An hundred times. The sinner often does wrong and seems to escape paying any penalty for his misdeeds (see Prov. 17:10).

Prolonged. “Days” is a supplied word. Some feel resentful because of a seeming delay in the judgment of the wicked (Mal. 2:17). Nevertheless, in God’s own time judgment will be meted out (see Isa. 3:11; Matt. 16:27; Rev. 20:11–15).

It shall be well. All will finally be well with those who fear God (Ps. 37:11; Isa. 3:10; Mal. 3:16).

13. Not be well. Compare Job 20:4–9; 22:15, 16.

Shadow. See the teaching of psalmist (Ps. 102:11; 109:23; 144:4).

14. Vanity. Despite Solomon’s conviction stated in vs. 12 and 13, he nonetheless feels distressed because of certain perplexing paradoxes.

Just men. The Hebrew term thus rendered suggests men who practice righteousness. Job faced the same problem (Job 9:22; cf. Eccl. 9:2, 3; Eze. 21:3, 4).

Wicked men. Compare Job 21:7; Ps. 73:3; Jer. 12:1. The inequalities of the present life should not be allowed to weaken one’s faith in God’s ways of dealing. In the eternal world all wrongs will be made right.

15. Mirth. That is, living for pleasure. This suggests the eclipse of Solomon’s faith by a materialistic point of view.

Eat. The activities here listed are not wrong in themselves. God gave man the capacity to eat, drink, and enjoy the good things life has to offer. Solomon’s meaning here, however, is that inasmuch as self-control and denial of appetite had apparently brought no reward, he had, at one time, concluded that it is better to live to satisfy the senses, to extract everything possible from the material things of life.

Merry. Heb. *śamach*, “to be glad,” “to rejoice.”

Shall abide. Solomon continues his description of the feelings that once overwhelmed him.

16.Heart. That is, “mind.”

Business. The same Hebrew word is translated “travail” in chs. 1:13; 2:23, 26; 3:10; 4:8; 5:14, and again as “business” in ch. 5:3. Solomon refers to man’s incessant round of arduous toil.

Sleep. Men often work long hours, but labor was designed as a blessing (see on Gen. 3:19). Too often man in his fallen state fails to use leisure time wisely. Man’s daily toil is disciplinary and builds character. But after a day of toil, rest is sweet (Prov. 3:21–24; cf. Jer. 31:23–26).

17. The work of God. That is, God’s eternal purpose and His dealings with men (see Rom. 11:33–36; cf. Job 11:7, 8).

A wise man. Man is privileged to study God’s created works, and His revealed Word; but he must beware of being “wise in his own conceit” (Prov. 26:5) and of thinking himself able to comprehend the depths of divinity (see Job 11:7). Man’s correct attitude toward God is disclosed in the apostle John’s picture of the redeemed (Rev. 15:3, 4).

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

11 CH 109; CS 314; GC 286; PP 124; Te 45; 3T 72; 5T 208, 523

11–13PK 78; 2T 448

12, 13 GC 286, 540

CHAPTER 9

1 *Like things happen to good and bad.* 4 *There is a necessity of death unto men.* 7 *Comfort is all their portion in this life.* 11 *God’s providence ruleth over all.* 13 *Wisdom is better than strength.*

1. All this. That is, the problem of the adversity of the righteous and the prosperity of the wicked.

I considered. Solomon exercised his mind in the endeavor to solve the problem.

The righteous. A man’s deeds declare him for what he is. By his fruits he will be known (Matt. 7:15–20).

The hand of God. His will is supreme. The hand is figurative of power and authority (Deut. 33:3; Isa. 62:3).

Love or hatred. It is often difficult to know what purpose lies back of the various experiences of life. For the most part, these experiences illustrate the working of cause and effect (see Gal. 6:7). At times God may overrule for the accomplishment of that which in His wisdom He knows is best. But every experience may, in the providence of God, become an opportunity for character development.

All that is before them. Human reason alone often cannot fathom the vicissitudes of life, the nature of God’s plans for the life, or what lies in the future. Several ancient versions take the first Hebrew word of v. 2, *hakkol*, literally, “the all,” as the last word of v. 1 and read it as *hebel*, “vanity.” In the Hebrew consonantal text this represents a change of but one letter, a *b* for a *k*, which are very similar (see Vol. I, p. 22), either of which might easily be mistaken for the other. Accordingly such versions read, “everything before them is vanity” (RSV). See on v. 2.

2. All things. For the most part the same fundamental experiences come to all men. Nature gives of her bounties to all (Matt. 5:45). Rain and sun, storm and calm, come upon good and evil men alike (see Job 9:22).

One event. In Ruth 2:3 the same word is translated “hap,” in 1 Sam. 6:9 “chance,” and in 1 Sam. 20:26 “something hath befallen.”

Righteous. That is, morally upright.

To the good. All ancient versions, except the Targums, add, “and to the evil,” which seems necessary to complete the parallel.

The clean. Probably a reference to ceremonial cleanness.

Him that sacrificeth. That is, the man who is punctilious in his compliance with the outward, ritual requirements of religious life.

As is the good. In the widest, most comprehensive sense.

He that swareth. See on Lev. 19:12; see also Deut. 6:13; Ps. 63:11; Isa. 65:16. The man who fears a legal oath is generally one who has no intention of carrying out the obligation and whose conscience makes him afraid to “swear” (see Num. 5:19–22). Compare also the teaching of Christ (Matt. 5:33–37) and that of the apostle James (James 5:12).

3. This is an evil. Solomon is still unreconciled to the fact that good men and bad alike die.

Full of evil. All sin is devoid of reason and good sense. It does not seem reasonable that the majority should prefer the enjoyments of this life to an eternity in the new earth.

Go to the dead. Literally, “after it to the dead [ones]” (see Job 30:23; Isa. 14:9; 38:18; Eze. 32:18).

4. Hope. This emphatic Hebrew word translated “hope” is given as “confidence” in 2 Kings 18:19 and Isa. 36:4. The verb root has the meaning of “trust” (see Ps. 25:2; 26:1; 28:7).

A living dog. The dog is depicted in the Bible as the most despised of all animals (Ex. 22:31; 1 Sam. 17:43; Prov. 26:11; 2 Peter 2:22), and is so regarded today in Eastern countries. The dog is a symbol of the viciously wicked (Ps. 22:16; 59:2, 6, 14; Isa. 56:10, 11; Rev. 22:14, 15).

A dead lion. The lion is set forth as a symbol of majesty and might (Prov. 30:30), and, accordingly, of God and Christ (Rev. 5:5; cf. Hosea 13:4–7).

5. The living know. They are able to plan and make preparations for death, which they know they must meet.

Dead know not. See Ps. 88:10–12; Ps. 115:17

A reward. Not a reference to eternal rewards, whether of death for the wicked (Rev. 20:11–15) or of immortality for the righteous (see Rev. 21:1–4; cf. Matt. 16:27; 1 Cor. 15:51–54). Solomon is here speaking of enjoying the fruits of labor in this life.

The memory of them. That is, the memory of them in the minds of the living, not their own mental faculty of memory. This is clear from the meaning of the word *zeker*, “remembrance,” “memorial,” and from its usage in the OT. Without exception it refers to “remembrance” about persons or events, never to the faculty of memory (Job 18:17; Ps. 31:12; Ps. 112:6).

Forgotten. That is, “lost.”

6. Also their love. Love, hatred, and envy are generally the strong, ruling emotions during life; but in death they function no more.

Is now perished. In Hebrew this verb is in the singular number, by which attention is called to each passion individually.

A portion. When a man is alive he has a part to play, and may enjoy the reward of his labors. But death terminates his role in life. Job expresses the same truth (Job 14:10–14), as does the psalmist (Ps. 30:9), and the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 38:10).

7. Go thy way. Make the best of life, advises Solomon; do not sit idly brooding over the seeming inequalities and futilities of life.

Eat thy bread. Bread and wine are here used figuratively of all the necessities and luxuries of life (see Gen. 14:18; Deut. 33:28).

Thy works. God provides bountifully the blessings of this life, and it is His will that men shall enjoy them. But the day comes when a distinction is to be made between the righteous and the wicked (Mal. 3:18), on the basis of whether they have used these blessings in self-gratification, or have used them to minister to the needs of their fellow men (Matt. 25:31–46).

8. Thy garments. White garments were worn on festive occasions, and were considered symbolic of joy and gladness. Angels appeared clad in white (Mark 16:5; John 20:12), and John saw the immortal saints thus clad (Rev. 6:11; 7:9; 19:8), symbolic of their purity of character and their state of joy.

Ointment. Literally, “oil.” It was an Oriental custom to apply oil to the head to cool the body and as a perfume (see Ps. 23:5; Amos 6:6). To fail to anoint the head was considered a sign of mourning or fasting (2 Sam. 14:2; Matt. 6:17). Oil is also used as a figure of God’s richest blessings (Ps. 92:10; 104:15; cf. Isa. 61:3).

9. Live joyfully. The clause reads, literally, “see life with a woman whom thou lovest.” Marriage was ordained to bring supreme joy, and the home to be a little heaven on earth (see Prov. 5:18, 19; 18:22).

Thy portion. That is, for a man to have a happy marriage. It was God’s design that man should live a happy life, in all good conscience. Man is to make full use of the privileges and responsibilities life brings him.

10. Whatsoever. He who is wise will put his heart into the tasks life brings him, in the realization that after death there will be no chance to make up for opportunities neglected in this life (John 9:4; cf. Gal. 6:10).

The grave. Heb. *she’ol*, the figurative realm of the dead (see on 2 Sam. 12:23; Prov. 15:11). This is the only mention of *she’ol* in Ecclesiastes. It is evident that Solomon believed in a state of unconsciousness in *she’ol* (see on Eccl. 3:19–21).

Whither thou goest. Death is the lot of all men, for “in Adam all die” (1 Cor. 15:22; see on Eccl. 3:19–21).

11. The swift. Unlike men, the Lord is not dependent on the human qualities of physical and mental strength (1 Sam. 14:6; 17:47). Similarly, with man, it is not these outward qualities, which seem to give one man an advantage over others, that are most important in life.

Time and chance. There is a proper time, a right moment, for a certain task. When a man lets slip the appropriate time, his efforts will fail, in whole or in part, to accomplish what they might have, irrespective of the belated zeal he brings to the task.

12. Man. Literally, “the man,” the definite article stressing each individual’s relationship to the problem of death.

His time. Presumably a reference to death (see ch. 7:17), though it might also refer to any misfortune.

The snare. A figure depicting sudden disaster (Ps. 91:3; 124:7; Prov. 1:17; 6:5; Hosea 7:12).

13. It seemed great. Literally, “it was great,” that is, it made a deep impression.

14. A little city. The size of the place was insignificant; therefore its defenders, who were few, would be able to hold off attackers but briefly.

A great king. Commentators have speculated at length as to what particular city, if any, Solomon refers to. There is, however, no basis whatever for determining what city might be in the writer’s mind, or who was the “great king.” This may be a veiled allusion to some historical event.

15. Was found. Literally, “he found,” probably referring to the ruler of the city.

A poor wise man. Literally, “a man, a poor, wise one.”

Delivered. Compare 2 Sam. 20:13–22, where a city was saved by a wise woman.

No man remembered. When the crisis was past, the deliverer was ignored and forgotten. Compare Joseph’s experience (Gen. 40:23). Public acclaim is fickle and unreliable. This poor wise man was allowed to sink back into obscurity.

16. Wisdom is better. See ch. 7:19. The word translated “strength” is commonly used of a warrior’s strength (see Jer. 9:23, where it is given as “might”).

Despised. This poor man’s wisdom was not spurned in the sense of being ignored, but he himself was despised and pushed to one side once his service had been rendered.

His words. He had demonstrated sound judgment; but additional words of counsel, perhaps unwelcome, were not accepted.

17. Quiet. See Isa. 30:15.

Ruleth among fools. In a time of excitement a demagogue may be followed, to the nation’s great loss.

18. Weapons of war. The world today needs divine wisdom more than it does a stockpile of atomic and hydrogen bombs.

Destroyeth. One man may bring great loss upon a nation (Joshua 7:1, 4).

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

3 PK 78

5 AA 289; EW 59, 87, 262; GC 546; LS 48; 1T 39

5, 6 COL 270; DA 558; Ev 249; PP 685; 1T 298

6 GC 546

10 COL 346; Ed 267; FE 301, 316; GC 546; MH 153, 473; ML 131; 2T 504; 6T 432; 9T 127, 129

11 AA 313; 4T 410; 5T 180

12 AH 331

18 PK 85; PP 118; 3T 125

CHAPTER 10

1 *Observations of wisdom and folly: 16 of riot, 18 slothfulness, 19 and money. 20 Men’s thoughts of kings ought to be reverent.*

1. Dead flies. Literally, “flies of death,” that is, flies about to die. Oriental lands are particularly distressed by multitudes of flies and other insect pests. If, at death, a number of them should fall into the perfumed lotion of the perfumer and decompose there, the lotion would be spoiled.

Apothecary. Rather, “perfumer,” literally, “mixer,” or “compounder.”

To send forth a stinking savour. Literally, “to stink,” or “to ferment,” “to bubble.”

A little folly. The last part of the verse reads, literally, “more weighty than wisdom and honor is a little folly.” Just one act of folly may ruin a good reputation. A life spent circumspectly may end in ruin as the result of a single foolish deed.

2. A wise man’s heart. The statement reads, literally, “The heart [mind] of a wise person [is] at his right.” The right side was considered the side of favor, honor, and success (see Ps. 16:8, 11; 110:5; Matt. 25:31–34; see on Gen. 35:18; Luke 1:11).

At his left. The left side was regarded as the side of evil and misfortune. In some Oriental countries today the left hand is regarded as unclean. The figure here teaches that the unwise man’s thoughts and plans are weak, impracticable, not thought through, and that they lead, accordingly, to misfortune and disappointment.

3. Walketh by the way. That is, when he goes about his business, mingling with other men.

His wisdom faileth. He manifests a lack of ordinary intelligence and common sense.

He saith to every one. His lack of judgment, reflected in his words and actions, proclaims him a fool, and he in turn thinks others are fools.

4. Spirit. Heb. *ruach*, “breath” (see on Num. 5:14). Here it refers to one’s temper, or disposition of the mind. In Judges 8:3 *ruach* is translated “anger.”

Leave not thy place. Do not resign your post of duty. Hasty action taken in a spirit of retaliation reflects emotional instability and a lack of sound judgment; furthermore, the person who takes such action is generally affected adversely. It is better to endure the temporary displeasure of a superior.

Yielding pacifieth. Better, “gentleness sets aside,” that is, it forestalls greater exhibitions of anger on the part of the ruler.

5. An error. An unwise, autocratic ruler, a despotic administrator, is prone to make errors of judgment. The more power he has, the more widespread are the unfortunate results of these mistakes. When a prince surrounds himself with unscrupulous favorites, whose only purpose is to flatter, his errors of judgment and conduct will multiply.

6. Dignity. In the affairs of the world the folly of fools is sometimes exalted as wisdom and followed to national disaster.

Low place. Men who by birth and station in life are natural leaders, ready to serve their country from motives of loyalty, are often ignored and set aside.

7. Servants upon horses. In the time of Solomon only the privileged rode upon horses or mules (2 Sam. 18:9; 1 Kings 1:38; 2 Chron. 25:28; Esther 6:8; Jer. 17:25); men of lower degree used asses for this purpose. In early Israelite history even kings and princes rode on asses or mules (Judges 5:10; 10:4; cf. 1 Kings 1:33).

Princes walking. That is, men of high rank being treated with indignity.

8. Diggeth a pit. See Ps. 7:15; 57:6; Prov. 26:27. The statement may refer either to one who plots a conspiracy against the government or to one who plans mischief against a fellow man.

An hedge. Better, “a wall” (see Num. 22:24; Ezra 9:9; Isa. 5:5; Eze. 42:7; Hosea 2:6; Micah 7:11).

A serpent. Crevices in the rough walls in Eastern countries, built without mortar, afford excellent hiding places for such creatures as snakes and scorpions (see Amos 5:19).

9. Removeth. The Hebrew verb in the form here used means “to quarry,” or “to hew out,” that is, to lift a hewn stone out of its place in the wall of the quarry. Considerable

danger was involved in such work carried on by primitive methods. In 1 Kings 5:17 the words “they brought” are from the same verb. On the basis of Deut. 19:14 some commentators refer this expression to the removal of boundary stones.

Cleaveth wood. See Deut. 19:5. Here is a parallel to the preceding statement about one who quarries stone. Presumably Solomon is not speaking of cutting firewood, which is not particularly dangerous, but of felling trees.

10. Iron. That is, the head of an ax (see 2 Kings 6:5).

Whet. Literally, “move rapidly,” as in sharpening the edge of the ax. The Hebrew word thus translated appears in Jer. 4:24 as “moved lightly.”

Wisdom is profitable. Adequate preparation for any undertaking results in a better piece of work, accomplished with less effort. Skillful preparation often makes the difference between success and failure. The Christian should seek and make use of the finest tools of spiritual craftsmanship for the task of character construction. Effort alone is insufficient; there must be knowledge as well as zeal (see Rom. 10:2).

11. Without enchantment. Or, “before it is charmed” (RSV). The meaning is that if the snake bites the snake charmer before he has charmed it, there is no profit from any ability he may have as a charmer.

A babbler is no better. Literally, “there is no advantage to the owner of the tongue.” The phrase “owner of the tongue,” here translated “babbler,” refers specifically to the snake charmer. Snake charming was apparently done by uttering sibilant, hissing whispers.

12. Gracious. That is, acceptable to the hearers (see Ps. 45:2; Prov. 22:11; Luke 4:22). Winsome words are always pleasing.

Swallow up himself. That is, be the cause of his own undoing, of bringing him to shame (see Prov. 10:8, 21; 18:7; 29:9).

13. Foolishness. The fool opens his mouth and speaks without thinking of what he says, and so utters nothing but folly (see Prov. 15:2; 17:12; Isa. 32:6).

The end. By the time he finishes speaking the fool has made statements that are nothing but nonsense.

14. Is full. Literally, “multiplies.” He babbles about anything and everything, with no knowledge of the topics on which he speaks (see 1 Tim. 1:7).

A man. That is, one who hears the fool discoursing. It is often difficult to understand, not only what the fool means, but even what he says. In all probability the more foolish a man is, the more he will be inclined to make dogmatic statements in regard to the deepest mysteries.

15. Wearieth every one. Literally, “wearieth him,” that is, each individual fool wearies himself.

Knoweth not. The fool is so simple that if sent to town on an errand, he will sit down by the roadside, forgetful of his errand, and find himself lost (see Prov. 10:26; 26:6; Eccl. 4:5). The highway to the city, presumably, was clearly marked, so that none but a fool could miss it (see Isa. 35:8).

16. Thy king. Literally, “young man.” The emphasis is on youthfulness, an age that is often marked by lack of thought and good sense (see Isa. 3:4).

Eat in the morning. These “princes” spend time in revelry and debauchery that should be given to duties of state (see Isa. 5:11; Jer. 21:12).

17. Nobles. Men of good birth and breeding, therefore, presumably, of excellent character and conduct. The word may be translated either “freemen” or “nobles.”

Eat in due season. At the proper time, when the day’s duties have been attended to.

For strength. According to physical need, not for the sake of indulging appetite, or primarily as a social activity.

Drunkenness. Self-indulgence tends to moral and physical deterioration. Men in high position should set an exalted standard of conduct for themselves, and as an example for others.

18. Slothfulness. The dual form of the Hebrew word stresses intensity. The root is found also in Prov. 6:6; 10:26; 20:4; 24:30; 26:13.

Droppeth through. Literally, “leaks.” The flat roofs of Oriental houses need constant attention. Leaking roofs are commonplace (see Prov. 19:13; 27:15). Similarly, neglect by responsible people will bring a country to ruin.

19. A feast. Literally, “bread,” or “food.”

Maketh merry. Literally, “maketh life glad” (see Ps. 104:15).

20. Money. Money will procure for its owner almost anything of a material nature.

20. Curse not. An admonition to carefulness in thought and expression. It is generally dangerous to make strong statements about other people, particularly against those in authority (see Ex. 22:28).

A bird. A proverbial expression found in most languages, and varying only in form from one to another.

That which hath wings. Literally, “the owner of wings.”

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1, 5, 6 PK 85

16 GC 165; PK 323

16, 17 Te 53

17 AH 261; CH 118, 577; Ed 206; MH 295; ML 82; 7T 110

CHAPTER 11

1 *Directions for charity. 7 Death in life, 9 and the day of judgment in the days of youth, are to be thought on.*

1. Cast. Heb. *shalach*, “to send forth.”

Thy bread. The traditional interpretation is of exercising charity or kindness toward others, for which a reward will someday be received. Another possible application would be to wise business ventures of various kinds.

Upon the waters. Literally, “upon the faces of the waters.”

Find it. Compare Luke 16:9. Whatever the figure of “bread” may refer to, the lesson is that of acting in a spirit of liberality and without expecting immediate returns.

2. Give a portion. Perhaps advice to diversify one’s business activities rather than confine them to one field, to invest capital in several business ventures. Ethically, it suggests benevolence toward as many as possible. The two numbers “seven” and “eight,” used together, suggest an indefinite number, with a tendency in the direction of more rather than less. For examples of such enumeration see Job 33:14; Ps. 62:11; Prov. 30:15, 18, 21; Isa. 17:6; Micah 5:5.

Evil. One cannot tell what calamity may occur, whether flood, earthquake, war, or business recession.

3. *If the clouds.* The statement may preferably read, “If the clouds be full, they will pour out rain upon the earth.” Nature operates according to law. Similarly, there are laws in the moral sphere.

If the tree fall. A man cannot determine the direction in which a tree will fall during a violent windstorm. One must learn to prepare for the storm as best he can, and then bend with it rather than attempt to control it. Fanciful interpretations making this verse a comment on death and human destiny are without valid basis.

There it shall be. Whatever adversity may befall, one should not give up, but take things as they are and press courageously onward. Some events are beyond one’s power to influence. Life has many unforeseen events, but these are not to be made occasions despondency and loss of determination.

4. *He that observeth.* If a man becomes unduly careful of weather conditions, and requires precisely the right conditions ere he goes to work, his farming will suffer. One cannot always wait for a perfect day, or for perfect conditions, before making a venture. Some risks must be taken.

5. *Spirit.* Translated from the same word that is rendered “wind” in v. 4, but perhaps better understood as “spirit” here.

The bones. The growth and development of the bony structure of the fetus is a source of wonder (Job 10:8–11; Ps. 139:13–17).

Works of God. See on ch. 7:13.

6. *In the morning.* The Hebrews were an agricultural people, and illustrations from work on the farm are to be understood as representative of business generally.

Withhold not. Though we cannot know the future, this does not justify indolence. Results do not come by accident. Diligent, thorough preparation is necessary, early and late.

Prosper. From the same root word translated “right” in Esther 8:5.

Both. The uncertainty should be an incentive to added exertion, not to inactivity. Constant experimentation and effort are the prelude to success.

7. *Light is sweet.* Only in the light is it possible to appreciate the beauties of the natural world, to work effectively, or to travel safely. By following the advice given in v. 6 one may realize a fuller and more satisfying experience in life.

A pleasant thing. To live is good. To be able to cope with the duties of the day is pleasant to any normal person. The sun is used figuratively of God’s protecting care in Ps. 84:11 and Mal. 4:2.

8. *And rejoice.* Better, “let him rejoice.” The conjunction “and” is not in the Hebrew. Life is altogether too brief, and man’s allotted span of time must be used to advantage. If one is blessed with long life, the time should all be profitably and happily spent.

The days of darkness. The adverse experiences of life should be remembered for their disciplinary value. Deliverance from danger and loss should be duly appreciated. Some commentators apply the expression “darkness” to the grave, quoting Ps. 88:12; 143:3; cf. Job 10:21, 22.

9. *Rejoice.* A happy disposition and cheerful attitude toward life are commendable. There are joys that make life worth while. Solomon’s advice is not an invitation to excess, but to an appreciation of the blessings of life.

Youth. The first occurrence of this word in v. 9, Heb. *yalduth*, has reference to youthfulness; the second, Heb. *bachur*, to the prime of life. The first appears again in Ps. 110:3; the second in Eccl. 12:1.

Thine heart. All legitimate desires and needs are to be met, but debauchery and overindulgence are to be condemned and avoided.

Judgment. Sobering thought! One cannot avoid meeting his Judge. It will be of no avail to pretend there is no judgment to face, for God will not withhold His hand (see Mal. 3:5; cf. Rev. 20:11–15).

10. Sorrow. Rather, “provoking,” or “provocation” (see Deut. 32:19; 1 Kings 15:30; 21:22; Eze. 20:28), “wrath,” or “anger” (Deut. 32:27; Ps. 85:4; Prov. 12:16; Eccl. 7:9), or “spite” (Ps. 10:14). The verb form of the word is generally translated, “to provoke to anger.”

Evil. That which harms the body, a reference chiefly to moral excesses that result in physical degeneration (see 1 Cor. 6:18, 19; 2 Cor. 7:1).

Childhood. From the same Hebrew word translated as “youth” in the first clause of v. 9.

Youth. Heb. *shacharuth*, a word used in this form only here. It may be from a root meaning “blackness” (see Cant. 5:11). The meaning of *shacharuth* is uncertain, but the foregoing suggestion would make it refer to the prime of life, when a man has a head of black hair. Some think that *shacharuth* may be derived from *shachan*, “[the reddish light that precedes] dawn.” Accordingly, *shacharuth* would here mean the “dawn [of life].”

Vanity. Both youth and the prime of life quickly pass.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1 Ed 140

4 TM 183

6 CE 18; ChS 153; COL 65; Ed 105, 267; Ev 62; GW 187; LS 184, 207; 2T 11; 3T 209, 248, 420; 5T 381, 658; 6T 333; 9T 35; WM 266

7 ML 138

7–10PK 80

9 2T 626; 4T 339

CHAPTER 12

1 *The Creator is to be remembered in due time.* 8 *The preacher’s care to edify.* 13 *The fear of God is the chief antidote of vanity.*

1. Remember now. Literally, “and remember,” or “also remember,” connecting ch. 12 with ch. 11, particularly with ch. 11:9. The word translated “now” is the one commonly translated “and” and does not have time value, as the English word “now” generally does.

Creator. In Hebrew the participle of the verb “create,” as in Gen. 1:1, is used. It points to God as the Designer and Creator of the universe. Here, in Hebrew, the word is plural in form, as is the word “God” in Gen. 1:1 (see on Gen. 1:1, 26, 27).

Youth. See on ch. 11:9. In early manhood a person is physically at maximum vigor; then, certainly, if ever, the vital forces of life should be devoted to God and used to His glory.

Evil days. That is, of feeble old age, in contrast with the vigorous, hopeful days of the prime of life. Old age brings infirmities and disabilities, and its days are “evil” in the sense of being burdened with misery and vexation.

No pleasure. The word translated “pleasure” is placed at the end of the sentence for emphasis. When the desires, incentives, and hopes of abounding youth have gone, there is then little of enthusiasm in a man’s life. Compare the experience of Barzillai (2 Sam. 19:34, 37).

2. While. The highly figurative imagery of vs. 2–6 has been variously interpreted. Many commentators, both Jewish and Christian, have explained this sequence as a description of the depleted physical powers of the sunset years of life, and the separate figures as referring to anatomical details of the body. There can be no doubt that Solomon, with superb literary skill, here describes old age and death, as specifically stated in vs. 1, 5, 7. The meaning of the allegory as a whole is clear—to “remember” one’s Creator before the approach of old age, and to devote one’s life to pursuits appropriate to such a concept of duty and destiny. This is, of course, the theme of the entire book.

Solomon, fortunately, did “remember” his Creator toward the close of a long life devoted to the forgetting of God and the pursuit of folly, all of which he so vividly describes throughout this book. Looking back over the wasted years of his own life, Solomon would fain encourage others to avoid the disappointments that had been his during the time of his erst-while vain pursuit of happiness. But when it comes to the interpretation of the details of the allegory it is well to exercise caution, in view of the fact that the Scriptures do not provide a clear explanation of the symbols used. Any interpretation can reflect no more than the personal opinion of the one giving it. That set forth in the following comment on vs. 2–6 is only suggestive.

The sun. The fading luminaries of heaven are here used to illustrate the “evil days” of v. 1, the approach of old age. Some commentators make the application to failing eyesight. Jewish commentators have gone to extreme lengths in the application of details, making the “sun” represent the forehead, “light” the nose, the “moon” the soul, and the “stars” the cheeks.

Clouds return. Here Jewish commentators make the observation that eyesight, enfeebled by much weeping in a time of trouble, is meant. It is preferable to take this figure as a general word picture of advancing age, with its dulling of the natural faculties.

3. Keepers of the house. This figure is probably used in the broad sense to picture the decay of the body. Some Jewish commentators apply the expression to the flanks and ribs; others apply it to the hands and arms.

Strong men. Literally, “men of strength” or “men of efficiency.” The usual application is to the legs and thighs. Others think of the knees and the feet, or of the spinal column.

Bow themselves. Better, “shall become crooked” (see chs. 1:15; 7:13, where, the same Hebrew verb is used).

Grinders cease. The word “grinders” is feminine, and refers to the women of the household who do the grinding (see Ex. 11:5; Matt. 24:41). Some commentators see here a reference to the teeth (see Jer. 25:10).

Few. The few “grinders”—perhaps the few old and decayed teeth left—do poor work and are unable to provide the “flour” needed to sustain life.

Those that look. A feminine form referring to the women of an Eastern home, who do not appear a great deal in public and who often peer through the lattice windows of their dwellings (see on Gen. 18:10; see also Judges 5:28; 2 Sam. 6:16).

Darkened. A figure transferring the picture of the women looking out of the lattice windows, to dim eyesight (see Gen. 27:1; cf. Deut. 34:7).

4. *The doors.* In the Hebrew this word is a dual form, and thus refers to the two leaves of one door. Jewish commentators refer this figure to the pores of the body, for example, or to the two lips of the mouth.

The voice. Usually considered a figure for the sleeplessness of old age, as of an elderly person being awakened by the first chirping of a bird at earliest dawn.

Daughters of musick. The organs of speech and song, the vocal cords—perhaps a reference to the cracked and feeble voice of an elderly person.

5. *Fears.* An elderly person must often watch each step most carefully. The aged also often fear a public highway. Their bones are brittle, are consequently easily broken by a fall or any other accident, and heal slowly if at all. Also, shortness of breath and stiffness of body make climbing any elevation a strenuous exertion.

Flourish. That is, “blossom.” The almond was the earliest Palestinian tree to bloom. The figure here has been applied to the gray hair of old age or to baldness. The profuse white blossoms of the almond tree may have reminded Solomon of the hoary head of an aged person.

The grasshopper. Perhaps a symbol of smallness or insignificance (see Num. 13:33; Isa. 40:22). Elderly people often feel very trivial things to be great burdens.

Desire shall fail. Literally, “the caper berry shall become ineffective.” The caper berry was supposed to possess an aphrodisiac quality (see on Gen. 30:14). The translators here use “desire” as a euphemism for “sexual desire.”

Man goeth. Compare Job 20:21; Luke 16:9.

The mourners. See 2 Sam. 3:31; Jer. 22:10, 18.

6. *Silver cord.* The “cord” is a large, stout cord or rope (see the same Hebrew word as translated in 2 Sam. 17:13; 1 Kings 20:32). Silver may, perhaps, be figurative of that which a man values. Here it may refer to life itself, man’s greatest treasure.

Interpretations that apply the “silver cord” and the “golden bowl” to the spinal cord and the brain, while appealing from a literary point of view, and possibly what Solomon had in mind when he wrote, lack a clear Scriptural basis (see on Eccl. 12:2).

Be loosed. Or, “be snapped asunder.” The picture here may be of a large hanging lamp suspended on a cord of silver strands. The cord snaps, the lamp crashes to the floor. The first part of v. 6 reads literally, “Until when not shall be snapped asunder the cord of silver.”

The pitcher. For centuries Eastern women have gone to the village well with earthenware pots (see Gen. 24:14, 15; John 4:7, 28; etc.). The picture here is of an earthenware waterpot being smashed into fragments (see Lev. 6:28; 15:12). In the East the village well generally has a wooden wheel or a wooden fork. Each villager brings his own rope and waterpot. Constant use and climatic conditions finally cause the wheel to disintegrate and collapse. Here the fountain, or well, no doubt is a figure of life (see Ps. 36:9; cf. John 4:10; 7:37). The various figures of v. 6 all represent death.

7. *Then.* That is, at the time of death (see vs. 1, 5, 6).

The dust. That is, the physical part of man (see Gen. 2:7).

As it was. The physical part of man decays and returns to the elements from which it came. In death, man is said to “sleep in the dust” (Job 7:21; cf. ch. 17:16; 20:11; 21:26). In the resurrection those who now “sleep” in the dust of the earth will live again (see Dan. 12:2; John 11:11–13, 23–26; 1 Thess. 4:13–17).

The spirit. Heb. *ruach*, “breath,” “wind,” “spirit” (see on Num. 5:14). *Ruach* is translated “breath” of the body 33 times, as in Eze. 37:5; “wind” 117 times, as in Gen. 8:1; “spirit” 76 times, in the sense of vitality (Judges 15:19), “courage” (Joshua 2:11), temper, or “anger” (Judges 8:3), and in reference to the disposition (Isa. 54:6). *Ruach* is also used to describe the living principle in men and animals 25 times, as in Ps. 146:4; the seat of the emotions 3 times, as in 1 Sam. 1:15; the “mind” 9 times, as in Eze. 11:5; will or volition, or “heart” (2 Chron. 29:31) 3 times; moral character 16 times, as in Eze. 11:19; and of the Spirit of God 94 times, as in Isa. 63:10. In not one of the 379 instances of its use throughout the OT does *ruach* denote an intelligent entity capable of existence apart from a physical body, so far as man is concerned, and it must therefore be clear that such a concept is without basis so far as the teachings of the Scriptures themselves are concerned (see also on Gen. 2:7; 35:18; Num. 5:14; Eccl. 3:19–21; cf. on Num. 5:2; 9:6). That which here returns to God is simply the life principle imparted by God to both man and beast (see on Eccl. 3:19–21, where *ruach* is translated “breath”).

8. Vanity. See on ch. 1:2.

9. The preacher. See on ch. 1:1.

Knowledge. The word order in the Hebrew places emphasis on “knowledge.” “The people” for whom Solomon wrote were of the educated classes.

Set in order. Or, “arranged” (see 1 Kings 4:32).

10. Acceptable words. Or, “pleasing words” (RSV), literally, “words of delight.” The author endeavored to give the treatise that literary polish that would recommend it to those for whom it was particularly written—those who consider themselves wise in the things of this world.

Upright. His endeavor to achieve a pleasing literary form had not, however, led him to compromise truth.

11. Goads. Used to prod, to stimulate to action, to get results. It may be painful to be prodded, but prodding often secures results that would not otherwise be achieved. See Heb. 12:11.

Nails fastened. Nails or stakes well driven are hard to pull out (see Isa. 22:23). Points well made, ideas thoroughly taught, remain in the mind and are not easily lost. The word translated “fastened” commonly means “to plant,” figuratively, “to establish.”

Masters of assemblies. Literally, “lords of collections.” The word translated “assemblies” is from *’asaph*, “to gather” (see Ex. 3:16; 23:10; Ruth 2:7; Joel 2:16).

Though most commonly used of gathering people together, *’asaph* may denote any gathering or collection, and the context must determine the nature of the gathering. In the poetic parallelism of v. 11 the Hebrew expression translated “masters of assemblies” is parallel to “words of the wise.” To preserve the sense of the parallel it is necessary to understand its second part as referring to a “collection,” or “anthology,” of wise sayings, rather than of people. The word translated “masters” is here used idiomatically to denote superiority of quality and organization. The entire phrase might well be rendered, “a

masterful collection [of wise sayings],” or simply “a choice anthology,” and the second member of the poetic parallelism, “like nails firmly driven are the choice anthologies of one shepherd.” “The Preacher” thus refers to the counsel he has given as a goad for prodding men to follow a wise course of action, and as nails firmly driven, that the counsel not be forgotten.

12. Admonished. Or, “warned.”

Many books. Solomon may have been thinking of books made to glorify their authors or those concerning whom they were written rather than with the purpose of transmitting practical wisdom. How little of what has been written is truly worth reading! Solomon had no doubt read all the “books” he could find, perhaps including the rather extensive Canaanite literature of his day (see Vol. I, pp. 124–129, Vol. II, pp. 37, 44; and on Judges 1:11) and the wisdom literature of Egypt, already famous in his time (see 1 Kings 4:30).

Much study. Study entered into for its own sake, as an end in itself, study of the kind Solomon devoted so much of his life to, proved futile. It was impractical and therefore “vanity.” Only when study becomes a means to an end greater than itself can it avoid becoming a “weariness of the flesh.” When the Author of all truth is recognized as “the beginning of wisdom” (Ps. 111:10), and study becomes a means of seeking to think His thoughts after Him, in order that our lives may conform to the divine purpose that gave us being, then study becomes a thrilling pleasure. The philosophical speculations of pagan writers have nothing to contribute to Christian thinking (see CT 444).

13. Fear God. See on Deut. 4:10; 6:2; Luke 1:50; see also Rev. 14:6, 7.

Commandments. See Ps. 78:1–7. Heb. *miṣwah*, a common word for all God’s requirements, including, to be sure, the moral law. *Miṣwah* and *torah*, “law” (see on Num. 19:14), are, for practical purposes, used synonymously.

Whole duty. The last clause of v. 13 reads, literally, “for this every man.” The word “this” obviously refers to the preceding statement about fearing God and keeping His commandments. The words “duty of” are not in the Hebrew, and the word translated “whole” is attached to the word for “man.” The same Hebrew construction is rendered “every man” in chs. 3:13; 5:19. Solomon here thinks of the recognition of God and obedience to His wise requirements as the supreme objective of life. Paul states the same truth in Acts 17:24–31; Rom. 1:20–23 (see James 2:10–12).

It is man’s duty, his destiny, to obey God, and in so doing he will find supreme happiness. Whatever his lot may be, whether cast in adversity or prosperity, it remains his duty to yield loving obedience to his Maker.

14. Work. Or, “deed.” Words as well as deeds will be judged (Matt. 12:36, 37). But God requires even more—in his very thoughts man is to be obedient (see 2 Cor. 10:5; see on Matt. 5:22, 28; etc.).

Every secret thing. Men may think to conceal their words and deeds from other men, but “all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:13). Even the thoughts of our hearts are subject to His scrutiny (1 Sam. 16:7; Ps. 7:9; Jer. 17:10; cf. Acts 1:24; Heb. 4:12). God reads the secret motives of our hearts; He knows how much of the light of truth has penetrated the darkness of our hearts, and for every ray He will hold us accountable (see Rom. 2:16; 1 Cor. 4:5). In the great day of final reckoning it is those who have done the will of God who will enter the kingdom (Matt. 7:21–27). To profess allegiance to God and at the same time disobey even one requirement His wisdom and love may lay upon us is to deny the reality of that allegiance

(see John 15:10; 1 John 2:3–6). To do less is to worship God in vain (see Mark 7:7–9), for in that great day every man will be rewarded “according to his works” (Matt. 16:27; cf. Rev. 22:12).

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

- 1 AH 297; CG 491; FE 83; ML 156, 160; MYP 21, 369; 1T 396; 5T 323
1–7PK 81
- 6 GC 550
- 9 PK 79
- 10–14PK 80
- 12 ML 144; 3T 149; 4T 497
- 13 AH 104; FE 111, 128, 186; GC 436; ML 167; 3T 164; 4T 31
- 13, 14 GC 482; PK 187
- 14 CH 412; DA 398; GC 481; ML 163; 2T 300, 625; 3T 189, 444; 5T 245; 8T 83
1

¹Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ec 10:7). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.