

**"Remember now thy Creator in
the Days of thy Youth"**

**A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF
ECCLESIASTES**

**Study Notes prepared for the 24th Australasian Youth
Conference
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Abbreviations

Roth.	- J.B. Rotherham's Emphasised Bible
Int. Bible	- The Interlinear Bible
RV	- The Revised Version
RSV	- The Revised Standard Version

PREFACE

With all its apparent meanderings, its alternations and seeming contradictions, the Book of Ecclesiastes has an essential unity of character and purpose. It is marked by a freedom of play of thought, a ready and sometimes complex use of image and symbol which belong to poetry. And as with poetry, its meaning and purpose must be judged not in the isolated passage but in the whole. Then it is seen to lead from the exploration of life in terms of purely human experience to a loftier understanding which relates man's life to eternal aims. To follow through the thought is like tracing a stream from its earthy beginnings through all its turns and twists till with a full and even flow it merges with the sea: and it is a rich experience.

Bro. L.G. Sargent

Dear young people,

As you prepare for the 1997 Youth Conference in Brisbane you will find out the truth of Bro. Sargent's words quoted above. At first the book of Ecclesiastes seems a very difficult book to study, but with patient effort and careful reflection its secrets emerge and its "essential unity and purpose" become much clearer. It is truly "a rich experience" to follow through the thoughts of this inspired writing presented so powerfully in the language of poetry.

But even a cursory study reveals the simple fundamental truths for life that are constantly affirmed in Solomon's writing as he searched for the greatest good.

In our studies at the Conference we are going to examine many of these fundamental issues and relate them to the times and circumstances in which we live. The world today is far removed from the simple things that Solomon discovered were the true secret of happiness "under the sun". Almost everything man pursues nowadays is opposite to the course that Solomon advocates! All man's entertainments and sensual pleasures, his eating and drinking, love of sport, travel, gambling, and his attempts to make the body beautiful and to stay young run counter to the simple conclusions of Ecclesiastes.

Let us together make a diligent study of Ecclesiastes and while we do so, let us think deeply on how its lessons apply to our own lives. And let us determine to come prepared to contribute what we can to help our fellow young people face up to the challenges of these last days of the folly and vanity of man.

These study notes are designed to provide you with verse by verse notes from beginning to end of Ecclesiastes. Interspersed are charts and quotations which may be helpful in your studies. There are other notes and writings on the book of Ecclesiastes which might be of real value in your studies. We encourage you to use every source of assistance available to you but above all we counsel you to do your own research and thinking. It is only when the mind is allowed to run to and fro in meditation on the scriptures that the true value of study comes to the individual.

Our prayer is that Yahweh our God will grant his blessing on your study of His word so that we might all "Fear God and keep His commandments" now, and that it may be well with us in the day when God brings every work into judgement.

The Youth Conference Committee

INTRODUCTION

Since our earliest Biblical history mankind has searched for fulfilment and happiness outside the realm of his normal life (e.g. Eve's acceptance of the Serpent's reasoning; the rebellion of the tower of Babel). In our time we see this same search for greater things shown by enormous advances in technology, materialism, travel, adventure and thrills!! Solomon, in his wisdom, observed this characteristic of man and with divine guidance "gave his heart to seek and search out" the meaning of it all. His findings are recorded for our benefit in the book of Ecclesiastes.

The book opens with the forthright challenge to all who live - **"Vanity of vanities, all is vanity"**.

It would seem from this statement that there is not much more to say, and that the only possible reason for our short existence is to keep a population on planet Earth! But, Solomon, armed with all the necessary qualifications for the task, proceeds to logically set forward a very grand purpose in the established order of things, and by looking at every viewpoint available to him, was able to provide an accurate answer to the timeless question - "What is the purpose of life?" In the early section of chapter 1 Solomon clearly emphasises the fact that mankind is only part of a complete system subject to seemingly endless, repetitive cycles, and that even the elements follow the same pattern. After establishing this fundamental fact of life, Solomon begins his search. He exposes the lack of satisfaction that comes from all of man's diverse adventure.

Central to his discoveries is the unavoidable reality that our life is governed by a whole range of "times and seasons" over which man has no control. If we try and fight against this reality, we will only bring sorrow and frustration upon ourselves. He then turns to reflect upon the main reason for frustration and unhappiness - **Selfishness!!**

We are shown that selfishness often destroys the very things we are trying to achieve. The conclusion is then, that man is unqualified to direct his destiny, and we must look beyond human wisdom to find the answer to the question posed above. Solomon states without hesitation that the answer lies with God, and it is our responsibility to search for Him and to listen to His advice. It is then time in his deliberations for an important warning - **Don't ever think that riches and power will bring happiness - it is normally the reverse!!**

Many people waste their whole life storing up for the future in a materialistic way, and never live to "enjoy it", as the saying goes. Don't waste the best years of your life gathering up for a time that may never eventuate! To put it simply - **Enjoy what God has given to you - now!!**

Even understanding this, the real issues of life are not always easy to see, or to accept, and most of life's real priorities are often the opposite to what we first expect. Solomon then gives us one of the most important rules for making life easier - **Learn to submit to authority!!**

If we look carefully around us, our own experience will show us that the "righteous and the wicked" experience "vanity" of human existence, so therefore our happiness and fulfilment is not related to length of days, or to the number of possessions we

have. Death will eventually claim us all, so if there is any purpose in life, it must lie beyond the grave! The only answer then, to make life complete, is to accept God's wisdom, knowing that this will cause us to be rejected by the majority of mankind. Knowing the situation we will find ourselves in, Solomon gives us some simple, yet powerful advice, about things that are not easy to see. Above all else - **Be a faithful optimist at all times!!**

Without God in our life, we are incomplete, unsatisfied, frustrated, and search for things which we can never hold.

Solomon's conclusion - The best years of our life are without doubt the years of our youth, so don't waste them on fleeting pleasures. Use the wisdom of God to make your youth a time of joy and happiness, recognise the vanity and decay of the years to come and set your sights on the Age when we will be forever young!

SUMMARY OF ECCLESIASTES

Perusal of writings on the Book of Ecclesiastes shows various ways of dividing and summarising the essential arguments. The following table sets out in general terms the principal issues addressed in the Book.

Objective - "What profit hath a man of all his labour?"

SECTION	Ecclesiastes	THEME
1(a) (b)	1:1-11 1:12-2:26	Title and Purpose The Author and his experiences
2	3:1-22	The natural limits of man's world - The framework of time
3	4:1-16 5:1-20	Looking Objectively (a) Lessons from life (b) Living with God
4	6:1 - 7:29	What to avoid and what to follow
5	8:1 - 9:2	The test for one who beholds the sun
6	9:3-10	Attitudes determine destiny
7	9:11 - 11:6 11:7 - 12:14	The superiority of wisdom over folly (a) Observations of wisdom and folly (b) Wisdom fears God

THE PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

To reveal the true advantage of living this life as a day of opportunity leading to a larger and more complete purpose.

OBJECTIVE

To establish life's real values and expose its fraudulent ones.

QUESTION: (1:3)	<i>"What profit hath a man of all his labour?"</i>
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ANSWER:	Man himself is incomplete without God
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Therefore - *"Fear God and keep His commandments."* (12:13)

THIS COMPLETES HIM!

"This is the WHOLE man" (12:1)

METHOD OF APPROACH

1	QUESTION: What is permanent in natural life?	chp.1
2	Who could do more than this author?	chp.2
3	TIME as a governor underlines the limitations of natural life	chp.3
4	Finding the path of joy in the anomalies of life	chp.4
5	How to live with God	chp.5
6	The ultimate folly - A man who does not know God	chp.6
7	The ultimate achievement - To know the better way	chp.7
8	Living in the world - But not of it	chp.8
9	The superiority of wisdom	chps.9 & 10
10	Remember darkness Remember judgement Remember thy Creator	chps. 11 & 12

KEY WORDS and STATEMENTS

"Preacher" - 'Koheleth' - convenor or one who assembles - Occurs chp.1:1,2,12; 7:27; 12:8,9,10.

"vanity, vanities" - 'hebel' - breath, gentle breeze, vapour. See use in Isa.57:13; Ps.144:4; 94:11. Used 38 times in Ecclesiastes (c.p. Israel's wanderings in the Wilderness). Commonly used of anything transitory or frail (the modern meaning of the word is a little different). It is the same word for the name Abel whose brief life illustrates its meaning. See James 4:14.

"Vexation of spirit" - Best translated by the words "striving after the wind" which is an accurate description of the desires of mankind that are never satisfied, nor ever can be, without turning to behold the Sun.

"under the sun" - occurs 29 times [1:3,9,14; 2:11,17,18,19,20,22; 3:16; 4:1,3,7,15; 5:13,18; 6:1,12; 8:9,15(2),17; 9:3,6,9(2),11,13; 10:5]. This describes the realm of mortality - the position of all mankind. We are all subject to this earthly system which is intimately linked with the brilliant centre of our solar system.

The similar phrase **"under the heaven"** occurs 1:13; 2:3, 3:1. c.p. the phrase "upon earth" chp.5:2; 8:14,16; 10:7; 11:2,3.

"see the sun" - occurs only twice. In chp.6:5 negatively and in chp.7:11 positively. It defines the action that separates the truly wise from the rest of mankind. It is a simple phrase that explains those who look to the real, yet invisible source of light and life (God).

"behold the sun" - occurs chp.11:7. Conveys the same idea as "see the sun".

"profit" - yithron - from a root meaning "to abound, to be over or beyond measure"; hence the idea of that which remains after everything has been considered. The modern use of the word fits exactly the expression used in Ecclesiastes. The purpose of the book is to reveal the "profit" of Life!

"time" - Defined in Colliers Dictionary as "Finite duration as distinguished from infinity or eternity". It is the governing principle of all man's pursuits. But God is not limited or bound by time. The opposite idea is expressed in chap.3:11 by the word "world" - olahm.

"wisdom, wise, wisely" - used over 50 times. All of these words are connected to the Hebrew words denoting "intelligence, dexterity, or skill". The term can be used of divine wisdom or of man's wisdom (secular wisdom). The challenge is to determine which sense is used on each occasion.

"I, my, them, they, their, thou, thy" - The use of pronouns is important in understanding what is actually being said. Don't overlook these small words. Note the switch in pronouns between chp.3:18,19; 9:3-6,11 and chp.5:1-8; 7:8-11,17,18; 9:7-10; 11:1; 12:1.

Chapter 1

The Futility of Human Endeavour and Wisdom

Vv.1-2 - The Preacher declares the vanity of all things

V.1 - "the Preacher" - The Hebrew word is Koheleth - "one who assembles", and is from the root qahal - to convoke, or call together (it is the O.T. equivalent of "Ecclesia"). In this book Solomon gathers and assembles his practical experiences for the benefit of those who would come after him. He spent a long time in study, research, experience and meditation to produce it (Ecc.12:9-10). The result was words of wisdom endorsed by God the Master Builder for the benefit of His "sheep" (Ecc.12:11).

"the son of David, king in Jerusalem" - This could only be Solomon, and only Solomon could have produced such a writing. No man would ever again experience the combination of divinely granted wisdom and boundless wealth and scope to fully experiment in every avenue of human endeavour. He makes much of this in Chps. 1 & 2, concluding without exaggeration: "for what can the man do that cometh after the king". His qualifications were unique and his findings timeless in their application.

V.2 - "Vanity of vanities" - Heb. hebel signifying emptiness or vanity. The word conveys the idea of a breath or vapour and emphasises the transitoriness of human existence and the emptiness that attends all human endeavour.

This Hebrew word had very early beginnings. Eve named her second son Abel (hebel) when she realised that millennia of human futility and frustration lay before her before the promised redeemer would come to end the woes and problems of mortality (Gen.3:15).

"all is vanity" - This is a key phrase in Ecclesiastes and is closely associated with the phrase "vexation of spirit" (V.14). The whole point of this book is to convince us that human life lived as an end in itself can offer nothing but emptiness. If we are to seek some better thing it must be related to the things of God which alone are permanent. Mortality is identified with transitoriness. Note important references to this effect in James 4:13-15; Ps.144:4; 90:9; Job 8:9; Isaiah 40:6-8; Ecc.9:5.

Vv.3-7 - The Futility of Human Labour

The utter futility of human labour and endeavour is illustrated by the endless cycles and repetitions of nature.

V.3 - "What profit hath a man of all his labour" - The word "profit" is yithron signifying "that which is left over" and seems to be connected with business transactions, particularly to commerce and trading. Solomon's mind was deeply exercised by the question of what surplus or gain man has from the transactions of a busy life devoted to earthly pursuits. His ultimate conclusion was that nothing at all was gained of any lasting value. The good is balanced by the bad; achievements are cancelled out by frustrations; joy is counterbalanced by sorrow; so that in the final analysis there is no lasting gain.

"which he taketh under the sun" - This is another key phrase. It sets the limit of Solomon's enquiry. His study is of human life "under the sun" (a phrase which occurs 29 times in the book), i.e. he is concerned with the realm of mortality and human experience. The early chapters of Ecclesiastes which seem so negative and pessimistic can only be properly understood if this limited perspective is kept in view. It is not till later that the perspective changes when Solomon "sees the sun" (Ecc.7:11; 11:7).

The table on page 10 sets out the significance of this phrase in the book. It is useful to highlight the phrase in Ecclesiastes so that it stands out. The similar phrase "under heaven" should also be highlighted. You will find a list of occurrences on page 7.

V.4 - "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh" - While some attend a funeral, others are involved in a birth. So the cycle of human life goes on endlessly and seems to achieve nothing.

"but the earth abideth forever" - Here the word olahm ("forever") occurs for the first of seven times in the book. It refers to the hidden period or Millennium and beyond (see Eureka Vol.1 pg.127). God made the earth to be inhabited and to be filled with His glory, but man is at odds with this purpose. Multitudes come and go in successive generations knowing nothing of the higher purpose for which man was created. This is a great vanity.

V.5 - "The sun ariseth, and the sun goeth down" - Similarly the sun upon which all life depends is caught up in the endless and dreary cycle of repetition.

"and hasteth to his place" - "hasteth" is sha-aph signifying "to pant". The figure is of the sun's wearying labour and ceaseless striving which finds its counterpart in the wearying activity and repetitious labours of man which have no profit.

V.6 - "it whirleth about continually" - Air currents move in a circular pattern. Hence, wind direction can change several times in a day and seem to be aimless and capricious. So it is with man. He is always circling about seeking some new experience, pleasures or goals. But because nothing in this life provides lasting satisfaction the process is repeated endlessly by successive generations of men. This is Solomon's important message. We must observe the vanity of man and his aimless existence and seek for better things.

V.7 - "All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full" - As with the sun and wind Solomon observed the endless cycle of evaporation and precipitation which accomplished nothing, for the sea was never full. Man is locked into the same endless and vain cycle of labour.

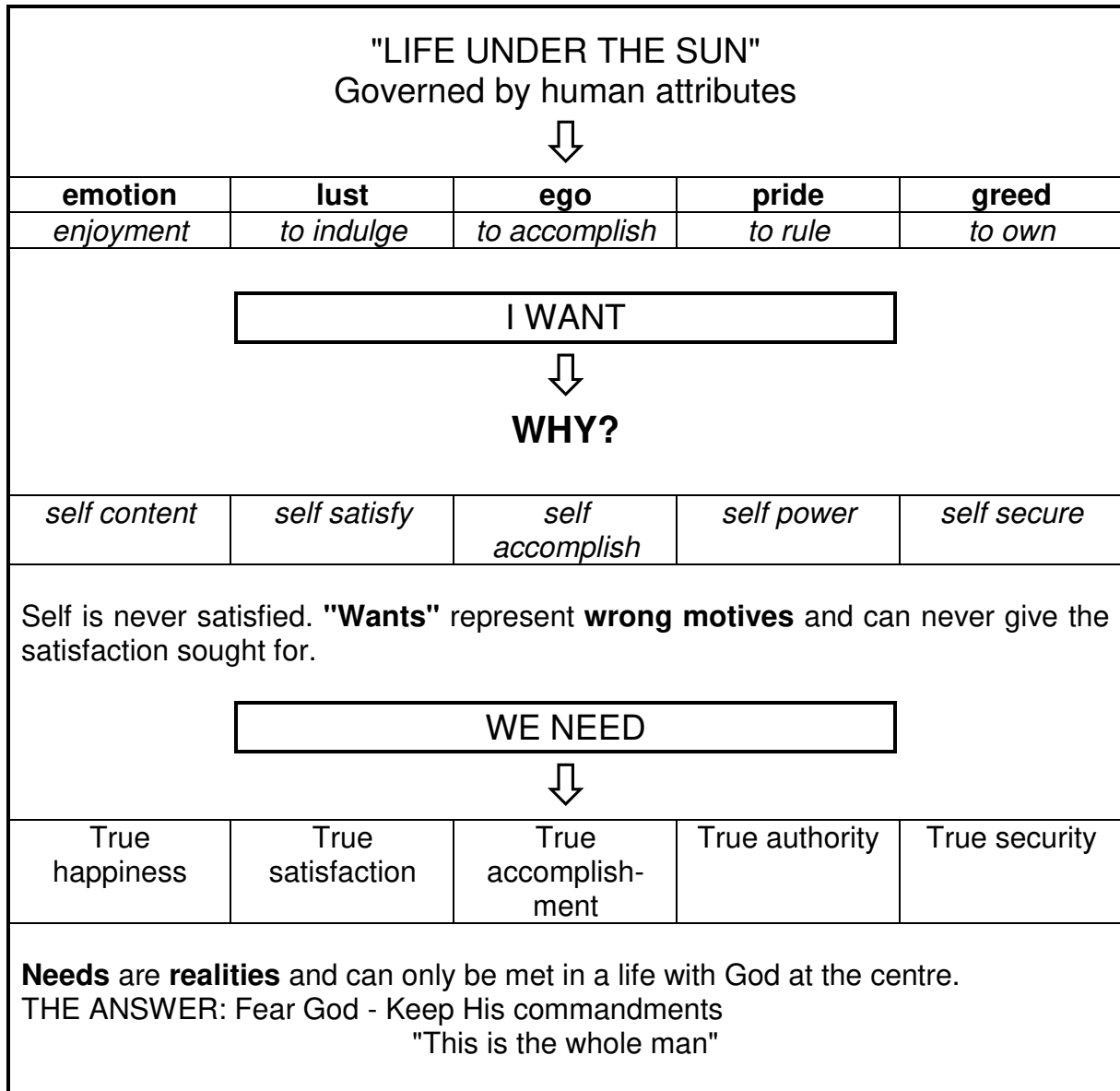
The sun, the wind and the water cycle while used to represent the vanity of human life "under the sun" are also used in scripture of the higher ways of God. The sun as a symbol for the "sun of righteousness" (Mal.4:2; Ps.19:5); the wind as a symbol for the Spirit of God (Ecc.11:5; John 3:8); and the rain which symbolises the Word of God (Deut.32:1-2; Isa.55:10-13) all represent in their higher aspect a far better way. The problem of man "under the sun" is that he is reluctant to learn from the experiences of others because he fails to lift his eyes to "behold the sun" and to see beyond it to its Maker.

Vv.8-11 - The Futility of Invention

Having observed the futility of human labour so aptly represented by the endless cycles of nature, Solomon now explores the futility of the pursuit of new endeavours and invention. To this man invariably turns to counter the frustrations and disappointments of life, hoping to find the elusive happiness and satisfaction which he craves. The relevance of this to our generation is obvious. We live in times of ever increasing knowledge which has produced an explosion of inventions of every conceivable type. Daily we are barraged with advertising designed to convince us that we must have all the latest inventions of man and experience all the pleasures of modern life if we are to have happiness. Careful observation and a little experience shows that Solomon's findings are just as true today as they always were.

V.8 - "All things are full of labour, man cannot utter it" - Literally, "All things are wearisome" and man cannot fully understand why. This is a key idea of the book. The answer lies in Paul's exposition of this section of scripture in Rom.8:18-25. God had a purpose in subjecting fallen man to a life of repetitive toil and vanity. It was to force him to ask why, so that he might be induced to seek a better way. Thus God subjected the creation to vanity in order that some among men would discover the hope of eternal life and develop an earnest expectation for the manifestation of the sons of God.

"the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing" - The wearisomeness of human pursuits is illustrated by experience. The human eye is never "satisfied" (Heb. saba - fill to satisfaction) with seeing, nor the ear with hearing. Something new, exciting or fresh is always required, yet attainment does not end the appetite for new experience.



V.9 - "The thing that has been, it is that which shall be" - Solomon's comparison of the cycles of nature with human experience has brought him to this point. The difference and excitement of invention and new things is an illusion. Nothing in human life "under the sun" is any different to what has been done before. Each generation repeats the cycle of vanity. Men experience the emotions of love, hate, envy, joy, and engage in war and peace; but because experience cannot be passed on except by advice, the next generation imagines that its experiences of life are entirely new and unique.

"and there is no new thing under the sun" - Men do not believe this; especially in these days of incredible technological advances. Modern life is completely governed and regulated by inventions and new experiences. The idea that man can find the answers to all his problems if given sufficient time and resources to develop them is widely held among men today. The challenge for us is to accept without question (which we do by our way of life) the absolute truth of this statement. The endless cycle of human frustration and emptiness goes on despite the smokescreen of modern life with all its distractions from reality. What has happened before will happen again. The wise will understand and look up to "behold the sun".

V.10 - "Is there anything whereof it may be said, See, this is new" - The most advanced of man's achievements have failed to address his greatest need. How to stop the endless cycle of birth and death, and to capture lasting happiness and satisfaction. Man's relentless pursuit of the new and novel only serve to emphasize the utter hopelessness of his state in the absence of God and His purpose.

V.11 - "There is no remembrance of former things" - Youngs Literal translates the verse: "there is not a remembrance of former generations and also of the latter that are (now) there is no remembrance of them with those that are the last." The present generation is not mindful of previous

generations, and those to come will repeat the mistake and forget the present generation. This is a tragedy because the whole point of God subjecting man to vanity was to engender a longing for better and higher things (Rom.8:18-25).

GOD'S PURPOSE IN SUBJECTING MAN TO VANITY

**"For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason of him who subjected it, in hope
That the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God."**

Rom.8:20-21 (RV)

Vv.12-18 - The Futility of Human Wisdom

Solomon's astute observations of the vanity of human labour, and the futility of novelty and invention in pursuit of the supreme good might have been sufficient in themselves if were not so sadly true that successive generations simply do not learn from their predecessors. This fact brings him to a very personal explanation of his determined search for the supreme good that finally led him to the conclusion that "all is vanity" under the sun. He explains that he was uniquely qualified for this task. None before or after him could ever test the value of human life lived purely for itself from the perspective and position he brought to the examination. His challenge to us is: Why should we try? Why not just accept his conclusions without the frustration of experimentation from a vastly inferior starting position.

V.12 - "was king over Israel" - Solomon ruled in splendour and peace at the height of Israel's glory as a nation. There was nothing to distract him from pursuing whatever interest he had. Furthermore he was wise above all men on the earth in his day (1 Kings 4:29-34) and was blessed by God with boundless wisdom. No other man could ever test life from a superior perspective.

V.13 - "And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom" - To the Hebrew the heart was the organ of mental capacity or mind. Solomon's unique intellect given by God in answer to his request (2 Chron.1:10-12) and David's prayer (1 Chron.29:19) was now employed in the most intense search into the meaning of life. He uses the words "seek" (darash - tread or frequent) and "search out" (tuwr - meander; with the idea of investigation).

Solomon had two vital qualifications for this search. The first was that he entered heartily and fully into the experience; and the second was that he retained his divinely bestowed wisdom in the process, so that he could pass a genuine judgement upon it.

It is important to understand that wisdom may be of two types. There is divine wisdom that comes only from God's Word, and there is secular wisdom that comes from observation and the application of the lessons learnt from experience (cp. the serpent - Gen.3:1). Ungodly men may possess the latter, but will be unaware that the truths they have learnt the hard way are actually found in God's Word.

"concerning all things done under heaven" - This phrase is the equivalent of "under the sun" (see notes on V.3) and sets the limits of the enquiry to human experience. His intention was to live life as an end in itself to see if he could discover satisfaction, meaning and purpose.

"this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith" - The words imply a bitter and irritating experience resulting in frustration, yet most men seem to have to discover that "all is vanity" by being "exercised therewith" (anah - depressed; Int. Bible - "afflicted"). But the wise know that divine wisdom is the principal thing (Proverbs chps.1-4) and set their heart on things which are above (Col.3:1-2).

V.14 - "I have seen all the works that are done under the sun" - Solomon did not cut short his enquiry. No matter how far he looked into human experience, the result was always the same. All experiences common to man and all human labour is empty.

"and behold all is vanity and vexation of spirit" - See notes V.2. The phrase "vexation of spirit" means literally "feeding upon wind (ruach)". The word "vexation" (re'uwth) signifies a feeding upon; a

grasping after, and its root is used of feeding a flock. The Interlinear Bible translates - "striving after wind". The wind has enormous power and freedom of movement, but if it is contained all its force and energy disappears. So it is with all the aspirations and labour of man. What promises to satisfy in life loses all its value once gained.

V.15 - "That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered" - The word for "crooked" is avath - to wrest. Solomon laments the innumerable problems of human life that man has no power to correct. Not the least of these is his crooked nature with its bias to sin. It is this inward perversion that impels men to strive after the wind to their ultimate destruction. Man cannot find completion in this life because the number of things lacking in human life are countless. Only God the great Redeemer has the answers to man's predicament.

V.16 - "I communed with my own heart" - Int. Bib. "I spoke with my heart". Solomon carefully assessed his credentials to determine whether he was capable of bringing his analysis of life to a successful conclusion. His conclusion was that he was better equipped than anyone before him.

"my heart had great experience of wisdom" - Lit. "has seen abundance of wisdom". This is a key issue. Solomon's pursuit of what life could offer was not in the absence of wisdom like the bulk of humanity. He was able to see beyond the vanity to something better. Most men cannot for they are lacking in the wisdom that comes from above. And yet men can acquire a wisdom that comes by experience and observation. It is what might be called secular wisdom and by itself it can only increase man's sense of frustration with the vanities of life.

V.17 - "And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly" - Solomon's enquiry embraced opposites in order that it might be all-inclusive. To examine madness and folly would surely make wisdom more fully known. But no, the result was still "feeding on wind" (see notes V.14).

V.18 - "For in much wisdom is much grief" - The effect of the acquisition of wisdom (i.e. secular wisdom) and knowledge was to add to the pains of life, for it only sharpened the perception of the vanity of the human condition. It served only to expose man's true state and to increase frustration and the sense of futility. Multiplying knowledge only increased his awareness of the number of things that are "crooked" in life. Solomon felt this intensely, but not as intensely as Christ who was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" as he shared the burdens of humanity (Isa.53:3-4).

"What Are Life's True Values?"

He asked strength, that he might do greater things,
But he was given infirmity, that he might do better things.

He asked for riches, that he might be happy,
He was given poverty, that he might be wise.

He asked for power, that he might have the praise of men,
He was given weakness that he might feel the need of God.

He asked for all things, that he might enjoy life,
He was given life, that he might enjoy all things.

He received nothing that he asked for,
He gained more than he hoped for.

Man Subject to Vanity for a Purpose

The observations of Solomon as seen by the Apostle Paul

KOHELETH		PAUL
	<i>Under the Sun</i>	
<p>CREATION Bondage with a fruitless toil</p> <p>Ecclesiastes</p> <p>Monotonous Repetition 1:4-7</p> <p>Endless toil 1:6</p> <p>Weariness of all things 1:13</p> <p>Nothing new 1:9</p> <p>Incomplete 1:15</p> <p>All is vanity 1:2</p> <p>'Nothing fulfilled' 1:3</p>		<p>CREATION Gestation with a glorious future <i>"Beholding the sun"</i></p> <p>Romans 8:20-21 Groaning & travailing until now Made subject to vanity Shall be delivered Subjected in hope</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 10px 0;"> <p>Notice Paul's emphasis "Today" is part of a larger purpose of God</p> </div> <p>'All things subdued in Jesus Christ' 1 Cor.15:28</p>
"So that a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast" 3:19		"The liberty of the glory of the sons of God" Rom.8:21

Chapter 2

THE TEST OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Vv.1-3 - The Test of Pleasure and Frivolity

Solomon's supreme intellectual faculties have failed to yield the satisfaction he sought, so now he turns to experience to the full the 'pleasures' of life. In his search for the supreme good Solomon explored every avenue of human experience. He did this while retaining his wisdom and came to the conclusion that there is no ultimate or final good in life as it is now constituted; no enduring satisfaction; no earthly goal worth striving for.

V.1 - "I said in mine heart" - See note Chp.1:16. Solomon opted for this course deliberately and with clear objectives. His enquiry could not be complete without testing the whole range of human activity.

"I will prove thee with mirth" - simchah - gladness, rejoicing; indicating harmless amusement. Perhaps amusement would provide the answer to the frustration experienced as a result of Solomon's fruitless search in chapter 1. Wisdom and sobriety had only increased the sense of vanity.

"therefore enjoy pleasure" - Lit. "to look upon good". Solomon was determined to experience personally all the delights of the senses in his quest for 'good'.

"and, behold, this also is vanity" - Only emptiness came from this experiment. The challenge for us is to accept Solomon's judgement, for the world is full of a vast array of distracting amusements.

V.2 - "I said of laughter, it is mad" - Lit. "it is madness". The laughter referred to here is the unrestrained and inane laughter of fools who appear to an onlooker as madmen. Ordinary laughter in which Solomon would have normally indulged has its place (Ecc.3:4). He experimented with delirious laughter only to find it totally empty.

"and of mirth, What doeth it?" - Lit. "What does it do?" The pursuit of amusement produced no lasting gain or joy. It served no useful purpose in the final analysis for it could not remove the sense of emptiness and frustration (Prov.14:13).

V.3 - "I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine" - Int. Bib. "I sought in my heart how to drag my flesh with wine". Solomon sought to test the pleasures of wine without losing self control. He decided to stimulate his flesh with wine up to a certain point so that he would be capable of assessing its true value.

"yet acquainting my heart with wisdom" - The RV renders: "mine heart yet guiding me". The Hebrew for "acquainting" is nahag a primary root meaning to drive forth; i.e. lead. Solomon is very cautious not to be corrupted by his experiment. He is determined to apply wisdom in his search so that its outcome is beyond challenge or dispute. It is this fact that makes his experience so valuable to us. Solomon tried wine with discretion: he found it like all other human pursuits - empty. On the other hand wine taken without discretion is deceitful, dangerous and destructive (Prov.23:29-35).

"to lay hold on folly" - The word for "folly" is sikluwth - silliness; from a root meaning to be silly. Solomon indulged in the full range of light-hearted and harmless pursuits in order to test every avenue of human amusement. Yet as one writer has correctly said of him: he was "no armchair doctrinaire dilettante" (i.e. one who takes a shallow interest out of a desire for comfort). He maintained his awareness of the purpose of what he was doing so that he might accurately assess "what was that good for the sons of men" in this life.

Vv.4-7 - The Test of Possessions and Power

Solomon now turns to list all the projects he undertook to fully explore what was "good" in this life. Note the frequent use of the personal pronouns "I", "me", and "my" between verses 4 and 11. He sets out to create his own little world of substantial things to see if it could provide more satisfaction than the pursuit of amusement, and to see if it was possible to "profit" from labour (1:3).

V.4 - "I made me great works" - Solomon was a prolific builder. He was given peace and prosperity so that there was no impediment to constructive activity. This resulted in the building of palaces for himself and his wife (Pharaoh's daughter), the Temple and many other structures in Jerusalem and throughout the land (1 Kings 7:1; 9:10-24; 10:18; 2 Chron.8:16). Archaeological evidence abounds of the grandeur and extent of these "works".

V.5 - "I made me gardens and orchards" - Every conceivable horticultural and agricultural pursuit was undertaken by Solomon on a grand scale. The word for "orchards" here is *pardesim* from the Persian *pairideaza* from which we derive our English word "Paradise". He set out to create his own Garden of Eden but it did not reverse the curse that sin in the original garden had brought upon man. Solomon was to speak of higher things in relation to the garden in Song 4:12-16.

V.6 - "I made me pools of water" - The word for "pools" is *berekah* - a reservoir. Massive horticultural enterprise demanded a ready and constant water supply. To this day Solomon's reservoirs are still to be seen in the land (Neh.2:14; 3:15; John 9:7).

V.7 - "I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house" - Numerous projects and great works require many labourers, not just to build, but to maintain. Solomon's slaves were numerous, many being born of slave parents in his service. Solomon's reign was marked by the multiplication of labourers levied by the state for service to the king (2 Chron.2:17-18; 1 Kings 12:4). Thus Solomon had the unusual experience of achieving great things without being restricted by the need to personally labour, and being able to enjoy his works without physical exhaustion.

Vv.8-10 - The Test of Splendour, Luxury and Wealth

V.8 - "silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings" - Wealth unsurpassed characterised Solomon's reign (1 Kings 10:14-23). It came from the tribute money of conquered nations (1 Kings 4:6,21; 2 Chron.8:7-8), and taxes from large provinces. The stipulation of the Law of the King laid down in Deut.17:14-20 not to amass silver and gold was ignored by Solomon to his peril and he found it only vain and empty anyway.

"I gat me men singers and women singers" - Royal choirs were the hallmark of royalty in eastern lands (2 Sam.19:35).

"the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts" - This may refer to an orchestra, but there are several translations which indicate that it may in fact refer to the "delights" of marriage. Rotherham translates: "and the delights of the sons of men, a wife and wives". The Interlinear Bible translates: "...a concubine and concubines". The word *shiddah* occurs twice in the text and signifies a wife (as mistress of the house). The word for "delight" is *ta'anugah* indicating luxury. This 'luxury' is said to be of the sons of Adam.

If in fact wives are referred to here, then Solomon has mentioned the three things that were forbidden the king of Israel that his heart might not be turned from his God. Horses are probably included in the "cattle" of verse 7 (certainly Solomon's stables at Megiddo are well known). Silver and gold and wives multiplied abundantly completed the failure to obey Deut.17:14-20.

V.9 - "also my wisdom remained with me" - Int. Bible: "also my wisdom stood by me". The number of times this fact is mentioned emphasises its importance in this enquiry. Most men lose their head in boundless prosperity, luxury and pleasure, but not Solomon. For this reason we can have complete trust in his final assessment of the value of all human pursuits.

Vv.10-11 - The Tests Summarised and Scrutinised

V.10 - "And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them" - Solomon summarises his approach to the tests of human experience. Nothing was withheld from his eyes, i.e. his desires. He entered fully into the experiment sparing no expense.

"I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour" - No possible avenue of providing pleasure for his heart was turned down; every enterprise that attracted him was pursued with enthusiasm and commitment.

"and this was my portion of all my labour" - There was some pleasure in achievement, but it was shortlived, lasting only as long as the project was current. This lesson was to assume greater importance once Solomon's experiment concluded (verse 24).

V.11 - "Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought" - Int. Bible: "Then I faced on all my works". The time had come for close scrutiny of the results of the tests of experience.

"and behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun" - These words hark back to chap.1:3,14. Solomon had discovered by unique experience that his observations of the emptiness of human labour were exactly right. His capacity for enjoyment and achieving satisfaction were unsurpassed, but his experience was as empty as the lowest of men. This only increased his sense of utter frustration. All men, however great, only feed upon the wind.

Vv.12-26 - Assessment by Wisdom of what is Best in Human Life

Having experienced all that human life could offer and finding it to be vanity and vexation of spirit, Solomon now turns to consider the anomaly of wisdom and folly and looks back over the road of experience to assess what is best in human life "under the sun".

V.12 - "And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly" - These three embrace the full spectrum of human behaviour. Solomon retained his wisdom, but had entered into "madness" (howleluwth - folly; from the root halal - to make a show, to boast; hence to be clamorously foolish), and folly (silliness V.3) so that he now knew by experience all that human life could offer. He now turns to ponder his conclusions.

"for what can the man do that cometh after the king?" - His situation was unique. Who could extend the tests beyond his experience? The king that came after him? No, any attempt to exceed Solomon's experience would only repeat history. This is one of the vital lessons of Ecclesiastes. Only fools will ignore this fact by entering into the wasteful and empty pursuit of wealth, pleasure and amusement thinking they will find the greater good in life.

V.13 - "that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness" - Int. Bible: "Then I saw that there is advantage to wisdom above folly, even as light has advantage over darkness". Light is the scriptural symbol for knowledge and wisdom (Isa.50:10; Ps.36:9; John 8:12) while darkness is a synonym for folly and ignorance (Job 12:25; 27:19; Prov.4:19). His conclusion was that despite the emptiness of all human experience, wisdom has enormous advantages over folly in this life, though both the wise and the fool end up in death together (V.14-17). Wisdom gives man the opportunity to look at his environment and see beyond its transitoriness and emptiness to better things.

V.14 - "The wise man's eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness" - This is a curious statement made to emphasise a simple truth - the wise man's eyes are open so that he sees the way before him. His eyes behold the sun (Ecc.11:7). But the fool goes through life with his eyes closed, refusing the light of instruction and guidance (John 3:19-21).

"and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all" - The value of wisdom in the natural man's life is only temporary because death inevitably claims the wise and the fool (Ps.49:10; Job 21:23-26). This anomaly sorely exercised Solomon's mind. Twice in the next verse he says: "Then I said in my heart".

V.15 - "why was I then more wise" - What advantage has the wise over the fool? If death is the great leveller of all men, why devote oneself to wisdom? A man's wisdom cannot prevent death, but it can prevent oblivion (Job 19:25-27). Solomon is reaching towards this conclusion through a painful and frustrating examination of the vanity of the human condition.

V.16 - "For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever" - This is true of life and death "under the sun" (V.17). The wise man is not remembered any more than the fool by those who come after him. If God is excluded from the equation (Ps.112:6), death shuts out both the wise and the fool forever.

"seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten" - Int. Bible: "in that already the days to come will be forgotten". So entrenched is this fact among men that even things yet future are condemned to be forgotten.

"and how dieth the wise man as the fool" - It is as though Solomon is asking: "What encouragement has a man to choose wisdom given these facts?"

Man on his own is incomplete, and life is empty when lived for itself. At the best, man loses all in the oblivion of death. But the man who lives for God is joined in a union which completes his manhood; he becomes a whole by knowing himself to be only a part; he is a full man in a sense that the other can never be. And living for God he lives to God; he lives in the sight of Him who is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live unto Him.

Bro. L.G. Sargent

V.17 - "Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me" - The effect on Solomon is to bring a disgust with life and a sense of irksomeness in its labours, since all is subject to this futility. His sense of justice is outraged by the inequality of wise and fool sharing a common end and this drove home the utter vanity of life "under the sun". It is important to remember that this is the arena of enquiry. If there were nothing beyond this (and Solomon knows there is) human life would be hateful in the extreme to wise men, yet Solomon knows that a living dog is better than a dead lion (Ecc.9:4). While there is life there is hope!

V.18 - "because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me" - His disgust with life develops into disgust with the works from which he had derived some satisfaction (V.10) for these would be left to the man who succeeded him as king who would not have to labour for them. This only increased his brooding sense of frustration.

V.19 - "Who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool" - Given the universal habit of men to forget both the wise and fool who precede them, this is a pertinent question. Solomon's son was of course a fool who lost portion of his father's kingdom (1 Kings 12:8). The wisdom that Solomon taught Rehoboam (e.g. Proverbs) went unheeded. The knowledge that this was the likely outcome deeply frustrated Solomon.

"wherein I have shewed myself wise under the sun" - The crowning vanity of human life is for all the labours of the wise man to be squandered by the fool who succeeds him, especially if he is his own son. Solomon like all truly wise men "groan and travail in pain until now" (Rom.8:22) waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God who are described as the wise of the earth. Only then will this vanity of man be reversed (Dan.12:3).

"This is a great evil"

One of the greatest evils in life is to see a man applying himself to gaining wisdom, knowledge and equity (i.e. advantage or success), knowing that finally he has to pass the benefits of this on to one who has not applied himself in this sphere. The latter cannot therefore really appreciate the greatness of his heritage nor the benefits associated with it. This can happen within an ecclesia when one generation, applying itself to the Word of God and building up the ecclesia, can be followed by another generation that takes it all for granted and does not pursue wisdom and knowledge and equity. The latter therefore never comes to understand the sacrifices involved and may not fully appreciate the worth of the heritage. This has led many ecclesias to make shipwreck of the faith.

Bro. B. O'Grady

V.20 - "Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labour which I took under the sun" - Int. Bible: "And I turned to make my heart despair". The word is used of a traveller turning to survey the road just traversed. The word "despair" is ya'ash - to desist; i.e. to be despondent. It conveys the idea of one who is so depressed with the way that he turns about in despair and looks back on all the way he has come as wasted effort, for he cannot go on. Solomon has returned to the ideas of chap.1:3-11 - the utter emptiness of human labour for its own sake. His search for the greatest good in the human sphere has culminated in the conclusion that all human endeavour is hopeless and without profit.

V.21 - "For there is a man whose labour is in wisdom" - Solomon was such a man. All he had done was performed with wisdom, yet it was vain because he would leave it to another who would not appreciate it. Who could better his efforts after him and prove any more conclusively the vanity of human endeavour?

V.22 - "the vexation of his heart" - The word for "vexation" is ra'yown signifying desire; from the root meaning a feeding upon; i.e. grasping after. Labour "under the sun" is full of unrealised desire and grasping after the wind.

V.23 - "For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief" - "Sorrows" is mak'obah - anguish. It is translated as "pains" by Int. Bible and others. The word for "travail" is inyan - employment; and is rendered "task" by Int. Bible. Pain and suffering attend all human labour.

"yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night" - Man becomes so preoccupied by daily toil, its pain and grief and endless frustrations, until he is even robbed of sleep when he most needs it. This restless spirit robs him of the enjoyment of the few pleasures God has given man in this life.

V.24 - "There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour" - This statement may at first seem contradictory to all Solomon has so far said about human labour. It may be that he has in mind the simple labours of the common man in contrast to the massive and complex enterprises of the king, but even so he has reached the conclusion that, given the vanity of all human labour, and the fact that it is inescapable, it is best to extract from life the most enjoyment possible from simple things; such as daily work, companionship, eating and drinking, etc. But to do this requires a correct perspective on life and the right attitude of mind. This Solomon recognises is a work of God.

"This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God" - Paul explained that God has deliberately made human life, in the wake of sin, a vain and frustrating experience. Man would not have chosen this state for himself. God's purpose was to impose conditions that would cause men to look for something better and hope for it (Rom.8:18-25). It is only when this attitude is created in men that they are able to derive pleasure from the simple things that pertain to this life. They will not seek for great things because they know satisfaction is unobtainable in them. So the hand of God is able to give to men at least some enjoyment from the daily round of human vanity when the disposition is adjusted to accept the limited attainments God has given man.

V.25 - "For who can eat, or who else can hasten hereunto, more than I" - The word for "hasten" is translated "enjoyment" by the RV and "enjoy" by the Int. Bible. Solomon is saying his scope for enjoyment was unique. No one could surpass his ability to prove this point. The only enjoyment he had experienced in his enquiry was his sense of achievement while his labours were in progress (V.10). It was shortlived but it gave some pleasure to him. So he recognises that the best man can hope for in this life is to seize the opportunity to enjoy the simple (though short-lived) pleasures of each passing day without expectation of lasting satisfaction in this life.

V.26 - "For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy" - "God" is in italics and is not in the text, but God (Elohim) is clearly implied by this parenthetical verse which is building on the last sentence of V.24 - "it was from the hand of God". Yahweh laid down laws in Eden that will continue to work themselves out until mortality is finally abolished. To the "good" who realise the reason for vanity and seek better things he gives wisdom to understand their way, knowledge to extract the best from life, and joy out of the simple things of life. But to the sinner the divine laws produce unremitting travail and vexation.

"to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and heap up" - Int. Bible: "But to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and collecting". This harks back to his thoughts in V.18 but with this difference; where God is involved, the sinner (and this implies the habitual, confirmed sinner) often leaves the benefit of his labours for those God approves.

"This also is vanity and vexation of spirit" - This part of the verse is not in parenthesis and is designed to summarise Solomon's findings from V.18. Int. Bible translates: "This also is vanity and striving after wind". It is the man who strives for the unattainable and the sinner he has in mind here, not him that is 'good' before God for whom there is at least some mitigation of vanity (V.24). This is why the words apply to Solomon, for he was still in the process of his enquiry. For him to pause now and revert to the simple things of life before his quest was complete would be to deny the objective he sought to achieve - full manhood and completion. He perceived it was unattainable, but could not at this stage simply abandon the inquiry without turning back on the self-development it was designed to bring about. Furthermore, the divinely implanted urge to understanding which had prompted his search could not be suppressed until it had reached the end of its quest. On this point Bro. Sargent makes a very interesting comment:

An essential part of the discovery portrayed in Ecclesiastes is that man has a capacity of mind which reaches out for a satisfaction it cannot find within the limits of life as he knows it. That capacity may remain undeveloped, it may be diverted or frustrated. Often it happens that in youth men reach out towards the unattainable, little knowing what they want. Later, when they have had to come to some kind of terms with the mere needs of living, they look back on the sufferings of their brash adolescence with an amused tolerance. They think they have come to common sense in having repressed the crude early expressions of the inward urge, when really they have lost a part of their manhood. Koheleth never lost his restlessness because he never lost his wisdom: his heart was pained, and could not be at rest till it found a rest which things "under the sun" could not give.

Chapter 3

THE NATURAL LIMITS OF MAN'S WORLD

In his vast attainments and his relentless pursuit of the "highest good" in this life Solomon was forced to conclude that none would provide the lasting joy and satisfaction he sought. He found by experience that pleasure, prosperity, possessions and power could provide no real satisfaction. They were "vanity and vexation of spirit".

Perhaps this conclusion led him to widen his enquiry and to explore what place "time" plays in the experience of human beings. He discovered that all things "under the sun" are governed by time. Man is bound throughout his whole life and in every pursuit by time over which he has no control. In 28 propositions set in fourteen antitheses Solomon reviews the whole range of human activity. In this enquiry he is led to conclude again that "all is vanity", and yet he sees the "hand of God" at work in this process.

Solomon's consideration in this chapter may be summarised as follows:

V.1	INTRODUCTION - all facets of life governed by fitting times
Vv.2-8	28 PROPOSITIONS - set in opposites
Vv.9-10	TRAVAIL and DESPAIR - Yes! But not without higher objectives
V.11	GOD - a perfect character
Vv.12-13	SIMPLE ENJOYMENT - intended by God
Vv.14-15	GOD: THE AUTHOR OF TIME - cannot be limited by it
V.16	MAN'S PURPOSES - violated by man
V.17	A TIME IS PROVIDED to fulfil every purpose of God
Vv.18-21	GOD INTENDS EVERY MAN TO SEE that he is but a BEAST
V.22	MAN UNDER THE SUN DOES NOT KNOW THE FUTURE - his one real value in life is to enjoy his works

Vv.1-8 - A Season for Every Purpose

Solomon reviews the kaleidoscope of human experience and observes that each activity is limited and bounded by time and season.


V.1 - "To everything there is a season" - Int. Bible: "To all there is an appointed time". The word here for "season" is zeman - an appointed occasion. Solomon's first observation is that everything is controlled by God. Yahweh has set the bounds of human activity, and while man acts with free will, everything ultimately works together to fulfil His purpose on earth.

"and a time to every purpose under the heaven" - Roth. "a time for every pursuit". The word "time" is eth and signifies an occurrence; i.e. a short space of time. This emphasises the transitoriness of incidents relating to human experience. Every man is governed by time. He cannot add one cubit to his span of life (Matt.6:27); his only recourse is to "redeem the time" by using his limited opportunities wisely (Eph.5:16). Most men do not do this but squander precious time on profitless pursuits.

V.2 - "A time to be born, and a time to die" - In the Hebrew there is a poetic structure to the way the 28 propositions are set in antithesis. This serves to bring home just how bound man is by appointed times. The phrase "to be born" literally should be rendered "to bear". Human reproduction is bounded by time; conception, gestation and finally birth. Once the process is started birth is inevitable. Once a man is born however, death is also inevitable at its appointed time. Man cannot change that fact. All he can do is act wisely in the interim.

"a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted" - A farmer does not choose the time for planting his crop. That is determined by the seasons, and if he ignores the appropriate time, failure is inevitable. It is important to note this fact, because Solomon is not saying that man has freedom of choice to govern life according to his own dictates. Man is bound by God's times, not his own. There is a time to plant (governed by season, rains, etc.), and inevitably in life circumstances out of man's control will demand rooting up what has been planted (Luke 13:6-9).

In verse 3 there is the first of several inversions of the order of positive and negative propositions. The structure is illustrated in the following chart:

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8			An appropriate time for....
Positives ↓ To be born	Note the switches from positive to negative and back again		Negatives ↓ To die
To heal	←		To Kill
To build up	←		To break down
To laugh	←		To weep
To dance	←		To mourn
To gather stones	←		To cast away stones
↓	INVERSION ←		
To embrace	⇒		To refrain from embracing
To love	⇒		To hate
	INVERSION ⇒		↓
For peace	←		For war
<i>"Whatsoever God doeth, it shall be forever" V.14</i>			

V.3 - "A time to kill, and a time to heal" - The Hebrew for "kill" is harogh signifying to smite with deadly intent and is used to express judicial destruction, murder, etc. It indicates very severe judgement which comes when tolerance reaches its limit, such as in the history of God's dealing with Israel (Ps.78:30-31; Jer.12:3). But equally there is a time for healing and reconciliation in the divine economy (Deut.32:39; Hos.6:1-3; Isa.57:19). All of this is governed by principles of action established by God. Man is bound by these. He can make a choice to act in a certain way, but it is the circumstances that compel those choices that are beyond his control. What is appropriate today may be the opposite of what is required tomorrow.

"a time to break down, and a time to build" - Int. Bible: "a time to tear down, and a time to build up". Tearing down is a negative activity but is sometimes required in the circumstances of life. God himself

has been forced to tear down and scatter (Luke 19:43-44). But just as surely there is an appropriate time to build up (Ps.102:13-16; Isa.58:12; 61:4).

V.4 - "A time to weep, and a time to laugh" - Very few men in a lifetime do not experience periods of weeping and laughing. These are outpourings of feeling at the opposite ends of the emotional scale. They can be adduced by family circumstances or matters relating to the promises of God, such as in the experience of the Patriarchs. The appropriateness of either is governed by "appointed times" often beyond man's control.

"a time to mourn, and a time to dance" - The word for "mourn" is caphad meaning to tear the hair and beat the breasts (as orientals do in grief); gen. to lament; by imp. to wail. It is perhaps seen in its most common form as grief among family members at the death of a loved one. It was also seen at times of intense frustration, disappointment and sorrow (Ezra 9:3). But life also brings times of great rejoicing in which emotions can only be fully expressed by physical movement. The Hebrew for "dance" is raqad signifying to stamp; i.e. to spring about (for joy). Abraham "fell on his face, and laughed" (Gen.17:17) when God made promise concerning Isaac; and of him Christ later said "he saw my day and rejoiced" (a word meaning to jump for joy; to dance - John 8:56).

V.5 - "A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together" - Israel's history revealed these two opposite extremes of action. They were once commanded to cast stones into the fields of the Moabites in judgement (2 Kings 3:19,25); though normally as tillers of the soil they would gather together stones (Isa.5:2). So these incidents would occur for different reasons; each appropriate to its time.

It should be noted that an inversion of order, from negative to positive now occurs and switches back again in verse 7.

"a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing" - Life demonstrates how true this is. The intimacy of marriage sees man and wife in passionate embrace (cp. Gen.26:8; Prov.5:18-20), but there are times when embracing, even by husband and wife, is totally out of place (see Zech.12:11-14). Man can choose to do both at any time, but it is the "appointed times" of God that govern much of human activity.

V.6 - "A time to get, and a time to lose" - Int. Bible: "A time to seek, and a time to give up as lost". The word for "lose" is abad - to wander away; i.e. lose oneself; by imp. to perish. Here the idea is to let perish. Again these are absolute opposites. Yet life is bounded by times when each is appropriate to its time.

"a time to keep, and a time to cast away" - Int. Bible: "a time to keep, and a time to throw away". The word "keep" is shamar - to hedge about, guard, protect, attend to. Life's experiences teach us that what is protected at one stage of life as precious (it may be some particular possession) is at a later stage thrown away as worthless. We could not have conceived this at the time we guarded the possession with great care, but the day comes! Man is bound by appropriate times.

V.7 - "A time to rend, and a time to sew" - Int. Bible: "A time to tear, and a time to sew together". This rending could be to demonstrate grief (Gen.37:29; 44:13; Judges 11:35; 2 Kings 19:1; 2 Sam.1:11) or to simply destroy a useless garment. Either way the garment was destroyed. But there are other times when repair and restoration by sewing together is clearly the best course. Again man may choose to rend or sew, but it is not in his power to always dictate the appropriate time.

"a time to keep silence, and a time to speak" - Sometimes words are inappropriate (Isa.53:7; Job 2:13), but sometimes it is impossible to refrain from speaking (Matt.26:62-64); it may even be a solemn responsibility to speak (2 Tim.4:2; Rom.10:14). These times are governed by circumstances which may only be partly in man's control. A man may choose to be silent but God may decree otherwise by use of circumstances (cp. Ps.39:1-3; Jer.20:9). Again there is always an appropriate time for both.

V.8 - "A time to love, and a time to hate" - An inversion of order occurs twice in this verse in order that Solomon's antithetical poem should end on a positive theme. Solomon had observed that almost inevitably in life the warmest feelings of love and affection were counterbalanced at some stage by bitter feelings of hatred and detestation. The object of love and hatred may be different but circumstances adduce either one or the other in their time.

"a time of war, and a time of peace" - "War" is milchamah - a battle; i.e. the engagement; warfare. This is the antithesis of unity and harmony. War is necessary in its time (Gen.3:15; Ex.17:16). Man may choose to enter into war, but often it is circumstances beyond his control that bring it about. On the other hand "peace" (here the word is shalom - unity; peace) is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal.5:22) and is the result of the active pursuit of righteousness through peace (James 3:18; Matt.5:9). It has the supreme place and is the last word of the poem for that reason.

Time

Riches, health, talents, and opportunities are not equally divided among men, but the gift of time is the same to all. The most powerful man on earth cannot be granted an extra hour in the day.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

God who gives the tree a season for growth, blossom, fruit and rest, gives to man sufficient time for every purpose.

Time cannot be purchased, sold, stored up, nor cast away.

It may bring glory; it may bring shame. But in the end, it will serve God's purpose.

Vv.9-15 - The Wisdom of Submitting to God's Appointed Times

Since man's life is lived within a restrictive framework, what gain is there in it for him? He cannot reach beyond time and come away with a profit for he is bound within it. He is faced with the difficulty of choosing the correct time, in which no man will always be right, and with the limits time imposes on desire and ambition. So Solomon is brought back to his commendation of the simple life: it is best to accept this ordering of times and season and enjoy the good it brings as a gift from God. Inevitably he is brought to the wisdom of trusting that all is in the hand of God and whatsoever He doeth is for ever. God is above time and is not imprisoned like man within its restrictive framework.

V.9 - "What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth?" - There are echoes here from Solomon's first question which sparked this whole enquiry (Ecc.1:3) and of his words in Chap.1:13. Locked within the framework of time man is unable to reach beyond it to secure a lasting profit from the transaction of life. Every experience is balanced by an opposite and at the end nothing is left over. And yet Solomon saw hope in the fact that God was in control and had a purpose in binding man to time.

V.10 - "I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it." - The word "travail" is inyan meaning employment or an affair. Int. Bible translates "the task". For the phrase "to be exercised in it" the Int. Bible translates: "to be humbled by it". This is the essential idea of these words. God has a purpose in locking man up in vanity and restrictive times. It is to humble him and force him to look for better and more enduring things (Rom.8:18-25) which are not to be found "under the sun".

V.11 - "He hath made every thing beautiful in his time" - For the last phrase the Int. Bible has "in its time". This is correct, for the beauty Solomon observed was in the appropriateness of everything to its time. So in verse 10 he has dropped the word "sore" from the phrase "sore travail" (Ecc.1:13) because he has come to appreciate that what is evil from man's point of view cannot simply be evil when it is related to God. In this restrictive framework of time there was clearly discernible a divine structure and a corresponding order and fitness. There is purpose in everything God does.

"also he hath set the world in their heart" - The word "world" is olahm - concealed; the hidden period; (practically) eternity. It is translated by RSV, Int. Bible and others as "eternity" and this is accepted by Bro Sargent as a satisfactory translation. What does it mean? How has God set eternity in man's heart? The answer lies in the creative work of God. He made man in His own image and likeness and gave him dominion over all carnal things (Gen.1:26-28). Sin marred that likeness and introduced carnality into man's thinking so that "the heart (of man) is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" (Jer.17:9). And yet sin did not erase the likeness completely. Man has the potential to aspire to higher things, to become like his God, and to seek that timelessness which is God's. There is in man an inherent tendency to strive after something better, more permanent, and more satisfying than his natural experience. This the animals do not do. They know and feel nothing

higher than the carnality which is natural to them and are content with this. Not so man who has "eternity" in his heart and aspires to timelessness. Rotherham's translation varies a little but is an interesting alternative: "also *intelligence* hath he put in their heart, without which men could not find the work which God hath wrought".

"so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end" - Int. Bible: "without which man cannot find out the work that God makes from the beginning and to the end". See also Youngs Literal and Rotherham. Man is not above a beast in anything except in his capacity to absorb and understand moral and spiritual ideas (V.21). Most men never rise above the animal, but the potential is there to understand the timeless work of God if the mind is exercised on higher things.

V.12 - "I know that there is no good in them" - The "them" here speaks of the labour and activities of men bounded by time (Vv.1-10). Rotherham translates: "I know that there is no blessedness in them".

"but for a man to rejoice, and do good in his life" - Roth.: "...to do well with one's life", i.e. to get good from life. Solomon is certain he has now proved that the wisest course for all men under the present constitution of things is to trust implicitly in God's appointments, and to enjoy the simple and "good" things of life whilst cheerfully submitting to its limitations. No good can come from fretting and chafing against divinely appointed vanity and times.

V.13 - "And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God" - Int. Bible: "And also every man that eats and drinks, and sees good in his labour, it is the gift of God". This is simply a statement of how the "good" of V.12 is experienced. God has provided good in the simple things such as eating and drinking, and some sense of achievement from labour which man can enjoy. To be sure, it is shortlived, but it is all that human life can offer of itself.

V.14 - "I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it" - Roth.: "...whatsoever God doeth the same shall be age-abiding, unto it there is nothing to add, and from it there is nothing to take away". "For ever" is *olahm* (cp. V.11). This statement is an amplification of verse 11. Man seeks in vain to change or be free in this life from God's appointed cycles and times. Everything God has done in ordering man's environment is "beautiful" and has an eternal purpose if only man would see the reasons for it and respond to the vanity He has imposed in the right way (Rom.8:18-25).

"and God doeth it, that men should fear before him" - Here is the purpose of vanity and the totally ordered environment which hems man in. It is that they might recognise with awe the sovereign majesty of their Creator and reach for something better and higher, and more enduring than this life (Ps.90:9-12). It is only from this perspective that a measure of well-being can be extracted from this life.

V.15 - "That which hath been is now, and that which is to be hath already been" - This statement underscores Solomon's basic theme - the repetitive nature of human experience. Man is locked securely within the framework of time from birth to death; but not so God who has appointed man's times.

"and God requireth that which is past" - Roth.: "but God seeketh that which hath been chased away". Int. Bible: "And God seeks what has gone by". God is above the limits of time. He is able to recall and require what has passed by. This clearly implies that Solomon is moving towards the conclusion that later emerges clearly in this book - "but know thou that for all these things God will bring thee into judgement" (Ecc.11:9). The endless cycles of human life which are "vanity and vexation of spirit" are not to be regarded as a prison from which there is no escape so that the life is lived purely for itself. A day of judgement will come and the wise will prepare themselves for that day when God will recall "what has gone by".

Vv.16-22 - Man Not Superior to the Beasts which Perish

Solomon now laments another evil which exacerbates the vanity of human experience. This thought flows from his consideration of the "travail" of men (V.10); for even the limited enjoyment of life (V.13) is sometimes frustrated by injustice and wickedness in places where justice and righteousness ought to be found. So frustrating was this observation that Solomon concluded that man was not superior in his state to the beasts of the field.

V.16 - "And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgement, that wickedness was there" -

For the phrase "the place of judgement", Rotherham translates: "the place of justice". He refers here to the authorities of civil administration; in his day primarily the monarchy. Here he observed "wickedness" (resha - a wrong) for which Rotherham translates: "lawlessness". Perversion of justice by rulers increases the bitterness of man's experience and emphasises the vanity of human life lived within its brief and repetitive time cycles.

"and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there" - He now turns to the religious authorities. Even here among the priestly class where righteousness ought to be upheld there was often perversity (Mic.3:11; 1 Sam.2:12-17). In the Hebrew the word "iniquity" is the same as "wickedness". This only increased the sense of frustration he felt.

V.17 - "I said in mine heart" - This is a way of expressing the rise of a strong but spontaneous thought flowing from his observations of perversity in judgement.

"God shall judge the righteous and the wicked" - Because it is God who "requireth that which is past" (V.15) the matter of judgement is in His hands. Man can do nothing to correct the abuses of power that embitter his experience, except to hope for a better day.

"for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work" - The emphatic word in this phrase is "there" (see Roth.). It refers to the place and time of God's unerring judgement, in contrast to man's place of judgement which is often perverse (V.16). The true character of every "pursuit" (Roth.) and every work can be tested by God who is not bound by the framework of time.

V.18 - "concerning the estate of the sons of men" - Int. Bible: "...the issue (dabar) of the sons of men (adam)". Solomon is again spontaneously urged to conclude that because injustice and perversity rob men of the little enjoyment that life has to offer their position is no better than the beasts of the field who have no control over their own destiny.

"that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts" - Int. Bible: "that God may test them and see that they by themselves are beasts". Roth.: "That God was minded to prove them, - and that they might see that they were beasts of themselves". God had deliberately locked man within the frustrating cycles of time and human perversity in order that men might conclude that of themselves they have no higher destiny than beasts. Their experience and destiny is essentially the same. If convinced of this fact, wise men will seek a better way and a more enduring destiny. There is at least in man the ability to reach higher (see "eternity in the heart" V.11) than beasts.

V.19 - "For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts" - The word for "befalleth" is miqreh - something met with; an accident or fortune. Roth. translates: "For as regardeth the destiny of the sons of men and the destiny of beasts". It is destiny Solomon has in mind for he adds: "as one dieth, so dieth the other". He refers to the end of life.

"they have all one breath" - The word for "breath" is ruach - breath; a sensible exhalation. It occurs 23 times in the book, the last being in chap.12:7 - "and the spirit (ruach) shall return unto God who gave it". It refers to the natural life that is common to man and beast.

"so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity" - The word "preeminence" is mowthar - lit. gain; superiority. Int. Bible: "advantage". Men and animals share a common end. Life lived for its own sake is bounded by "appointed times" and the frustration imposed by wickedness so that its quality and its destiny is not superior to that of the animals. It is empty and purposeless.

V.20 - "All go unto one place" - "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" was the curse placed not only upon man, but also on the beasts (Gen.3:14-19). Man may aspire to be superior to animals but in fact his actions betray him, and in the end he shares their destiny.

V.21 - "Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?" - The word "spirit" in this verse is ruach (see note V.19). Bro. Thomas translated the opening phrase of the verse this way: Who knoweth "the spirit of the sons of Adam that (exalts to the highest)". As Solomon brings this line of thought to a climax he asks an ironical question designed to emphasise his conclusion that man, though he aspires to greater things than animals, has no inherent difference of destiny to them. In the end, what is the difference between high-minded man

and earth-inclined beast? They both end up under the ground! God has set "eternity" in man's heart (V.11) but if he chooses to live like the beasts, he will receive the same destiny.

V.22 - "there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion" - Solomon's view of things is restricted here to the limitations of human life as it is now lived. He does not bring into view at this point resurrection and judgement, and a life to come. Taken by itself in the absence of considerations concerning the future, and given the animal like state of man, the only benefit man can have in this life is to derive some enjoyment from his labours. That is the only "portion" given to mortal man.

"for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?" - Roth.: "for who can bring him in to look upon that which shall be after him?" Man is strictly bound by limits - there is a time to be born, and a time to die. Only God can take man beyond those limits. But Solomon is not thinking about resurrection at this point - only the value of life lived for itself. From that perspective there is only one conclusion - it is better to accept the framework of time and derive some benefit from simple labour than to chafe constantly in vain aspirations that end only in sharing the company of beasts.

TIME

Abstract - Yet reality

It sets a subtle environment: **Intangible yet Irresistible**

DEFINITION: Time is the existence of a continuous succession of states.

MAN Measures time by mentally comprehending the consistency with which natural cycles repeat themselves.

KOHELETH Describes time in terms of human experience (i.e. in practical terms, not metaphysical).

TO HIM there is an appropriate time for all the acts and events of life.

"A time for every purpose under heaven" Ecclesiastes 3:1

HOW HAST THOU SPENT THY TIME

I stood far from the Judgement Seat, head bowed in bitter shame,
Within my brain words echoed long, for I had myself to blame.
I had seen the King standing there, beheld His glorious face,
And just aside in joy supreme, my friend-saints, saved by grace.

Engulfed in grief, alone, afraid, my pleadings all in vain;
The words re-echoed louder now and burned within my brain.
Come now! and so I went before the one I'd longed to see
Said angels standing near the throne: the Master calleth thee.

To give account of what I had done, one reason I was asked
Why I neglected things of God, and hurrying by them passed.
I then recalled how oft I'd said, O dear there is no time:
I'll do it well another day, that had been my crime.

I answered not, dumb, full of guilt, but Jesus knew and said:
No time to do the things of God. No time to bow thine head,
No time to kneel in daily prayer or wait 'till Him you heard,
No time to pause or meditate upon the riches of His word.

No time to visit poor and sick, no time to smile and give
The stranger in your gates a word of hope that he might live;
No time to weep with those who weep, no time to joy with one
Whose victory over human sin was well and truly won.

But you had time for menial tasks and time for exercise,
Your mental powers and common things, your home to supervise;
You found the time to read and talk of things that mattered not
But things that mattered most to God you spurned and just forgot.

That was enough, I heard no more, those words continued long;
My talents lay neglected there to Him they did belong.
But I had forgotten they were His and cast them on one side
And now before the throne they lay, I then my face did hide.

The saints remained there on the right, safe in the saviour's cleft;
But I was thrust among the ones on the Judge's left.
Those words which burned within my brain were verdict on guilty crime
No place, no hope to righteous crown, for you I had no time.

A dream you say, but oh how real; and what relief to wake, to find
I still had unspent time, 'ere the judgement morning break.
For me the Saviour scourged and scorned up Calvary Hill did climb
What shall I say when He shall ask "**How hast thou spent thy time?**"

Chapter 4

LESSONS FROM LIFE

Solomon has been considering factors in man's environment which are beyond his control. Starting with the framework of time, he moves on to view conditions of government and society which can rob life of its value. He is appalled by man's ruthless oppression of man and concludes that the dead have the advantage over the living. He finds that though man suffers from the pressure of society and its oppressions, there is value and comfort in the companionship of fellow man. And following that theme he goes on to show that material aims without friendship are futile toil. The superiority of wisdom over folly is clearly demonstrated in scenes from life as Solomon had observed it. The following table summarises the content of chapter 4:

Summary - Ecclesiastes 4	
Finding the path of joy in the anomalies of life.	
Vv.1-3	Enjoyment in life can be destroyed by oppressive government
Vv.4-5	How to avoid futility in labour (a) Success by some produces envy in others - Joy is changed to frustration (b) The lazy fool destroys himself
V.6	The GREAT Principle of MODERATION - The way to the greatest good.
Vv.7-8	Seeking wealth is futile - Much always wants more
Vv.9-12	Companionship gives life substance. SOLITUDE BRINGS DESOLATION.
Vv.13-16	POWER gives FALSE SECURITY. Popularity lacks substance.
LIFE IS EMPTY APART FROM FELLOW MAN	

Vv.1-3 - Oppression Makes Life Worthless

V.1 - "So I returned" - The echoes here are of Solomon's words in chap.3:16. He began there to consider the injustice and wickedness that robs life of its limited good. Now he brings that line of thought to a conclusion with a survey of oppression and its effect on human experience.

"all the oppressions that are done under the sun" - Tyranny and oppression blight the record of human history and have left a trail of human suffering and misery. Solomon laments the lack of pity and compassion among men "under the sun" where life is a crushing and merciless competition for advantage.

"and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter" - The helpless state of the oppressed who could find no justice (3:16) or support in their affliction exasperated Solomon. He is moved to repeat the words "they had no comforter" in the verse. Life "under the sun" is a callous affair because man acts like the beasts that perish (3:21).

"and on the side of their oppressors there is power" - Int. Bible: "And at the hand of those who oppressed them was power". Abuse of power is common among men (Neh.5:1-5; Prov.14:31; Amos 3:9-10; Job 35:9-12) and will be one of the many ills of this world that Christ will cure at his return (Ps.72).

V.2 - "Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive" - Roth.: "So I pronounced happy the dead". At first this statement seems particularly morbid. But when it is remembered that Solomon's review of human life is confined to things "under the sun" where there is no comfort for the oppressed, it can be seen why death is the only way of escape from suffering and misery.

V.3 - "Yea, better is he than both they, which hath not yet been" - Int. Bible: "Yea, better than both is he who has not yet been". Solomon applauds the advantage of those who have never been born over both the living who are oppressed, and those who have lived and died under oppression. They at least know nothing of the bitterness of oppression (Job 3:13-22; Ecc.6:3-5).

Vv.4-6 - Success Brings Envy, but Moderation Quietness

Turning from the inhumanity and tyranny of man, Solomon now examines another phenomena of human experience. Even when a man may be free from oppression in high places his very success can be a source of envy to his neighbour that robs him of the full enjoyment of his labours. Solomon concludes that moderation and quietness is the wisest course.

V.4 - "Again, I considered all travail and every right work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbour" - Roth.: "Then saw I all the toil and all the skill of the work". The reference here is to the evident skill and success of a man's labours. This very success attracts the attention of his neighbour who has not measured up to this standard. Envy and jealousy, and sometimes competition intervenes to rob the man of the full enjoyment of his labour. So enterprises which attract attention are only "vanity and vexation of spirit" too. If the oppression does not come from above, it comes in another form from neighbours!

V.5 - "The fool foldeth his hands together, and eateth his own flesh" - The word for "fool" is kesil signifying stupid fellow, dullard, sluggard. To fold the hands is to do nothing. The fool does not labour at all. As a consequence he 'consumes his own flesh' because his substance is diminished and not replaced by the rewards of labour. This is the opposite extreme to the man with grandiose works who evokes the envy of his neighbour.

V.6 - "Better is a handful with quietness, than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit" - Int. Bible: "Better is a palm filled with rest, than two fists with labour and striving after wind". Evident success and obvious folly both lead to futility. Therefore the best in life is found in a moderation and contentment which avoids both extremes. A man is much happier if he simply gains sufficient for his needs through quiet, steady toil rather than seeking to accumulate much by restless and fierce competition.

Vv.7-8 - The Futility of Wealth as an End in Itself

As a natural progression Solomon moves on to consider the folly of avarice for its own sake. He wants to emphasise the vanity of doing the opposite to his counsel in verse 6.

V.7 - "Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun" - Roth.: "Then again I looked at a vain thing under the sun" - This observation flows from Solomon's conclusion in V.6. There he commended moderation and simplicity, but men are not inclined that way. Rivalry and envy produce avarice and pursuit of wealth, and in the worst cases becomes the sole preoccupation to the exclusion of all other considerations. It is important to note that the scope of Solomon's enquiry is restricted to the life of natural man "under the sun".

V.8 - "There is one alone, and there is not a second" - Roth.: "Here is one without a second". That is, this man is absolutely alone; he has no offspring and no friends because his whole life is consumed with the pursuit of wealth which he desires not to share with anyone.

"yea, he hath neither child nor brother" - Roth.: "even son or brother, he hath none". This emphasises his solitary state deliberately contrived to preserve his wealth. To have no son indicates

no marriage, while the absence of brother would indicate that he had deliberately distanced himself from natural family.

"yet is there no end of all his labour; neither is his eye satisfied with riches" - The miser's hunger for wealth is insatiable. Avarice feeds upon itself and will not let him rest in the headlong pursuit for more. Each milestone in the acquisition of wealth soon fades away as the relentless pursuit and insatiable appetite drive him on in continuous labour. The eye is a symbol of intelligence in scripture, but this man's eye has been blinded by avarice.

"neither saith he, For whom do I labour, and bereave my soul of good?" - Roth.: "neither saith he, For whom am I toiling and letting my soul want good?". A little careful thought would demonstrate that no-one benefits from his pursuit, not even himself. This is the antithesis to the contentment that Solomon counsels in verse 6. This man toils ceaselessly and is unable to rest or enjoy the fruits of his labour, and when he dies there is no-one to whom he may leave his wealth. This is a great vanity.

"yea, it is a sore travail" - Roth.: "yea, a vexatious employment it was". Int. Bible: "Yes, it is an evil task". The word "travail" refers to the labour of this man. It is vain and empty for it has no present benefit and no useful end.

Vv.9-12 - Companionship is Better than Solitude

In this section Solomon builds on the lesson of the miser who isolates himself from humanity that he might have undivided enjoyment of his wealth. In fact he has deprived himself of the best joys and comforts this life can offer. Companionship and fellowship with others has many benefits and joys that are denied to selfish and solitary men. Solomon illustrates this fact by drawing on various incidents from life in his day.

V.9 - "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour" - Two working as a team have a distinct advantage over the solitary labourer. They are able to support and assist each other to accomplish difficult tasks; give encouragement and advice when required; and apply two minds to working through difficult times. The Lord sent disciples out to preach two by two (Luke 10:1), and Paul was always accompanied by another faithful disciple (Barnabas or Silas) on his missionary journeys.

V.10 - "For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow" - All labour is fraught with danger, and accidents will occur. The man who has a companion can call for help, but as Solomon says: "woe to him that is alone when he falleth: for he hath not another to help him up". This was the position the miser of verse 8 had got himself into. The principle holds good in every aspect of life, whether in daily life or ecclesial life.

V.11 - "Again if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone?" - Sometimes labour or the demands of a journey require spending a night in the open. This can be a severe and testing experience if alone and having to endure the cold of the night and its dangers without companionship. Body warmth can be preserved and communicated by two lying together (1 Kings 1:1-2). The true value of companionship is felt in the lonely hours of a cold night in which it is difficult to sleep. Again this principle can have application to daily life and ecclesial life.

V.12 - "And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him" - Companionship can be critical when danger lurks and life is threatened by robbers and bandits in the way. There is a degree of safety in numbers when travelling, and help when being attacked could mean the difference between life and death. So it is in our struggle against the power of sin which seeks to destroy us in the way towards the Kingdom. The companionship and support of brethren is very important and can sometimes be crucial. The ultimate example of this support is Christ himself (Luke 10:30-35).

"and a threefold cord is not easily broken" - Int. Bible: "a threefold cord is not quickly torn apart". In some circumstances three are better than one. When being attacked by an enemy this is certainly true. It is also true that where a husband and wife have a threefold relationship, with God at the pinnacle of the triangle, then success and happiness is much more likely. Whatever other applications may be made though, the fellowship of a man with God and Christ is the ultimate "threefold cord" which is not easily broken (1 John 1:5-9).

Vv.13-16 - The Delusion of Power and Popularity

Having shown the advantages of companionship and fellowship, Solomon now studies the transient nature of popularity. He illustrates this by the endless cycles of the rise and fall of men in positions of power. His point is that those who make the pursuit of power and popularity their chief aim in life will be disappointed, for there is neither rest nor satisfaction to be found. This section is necessary to demonstrate that even the highest in the social order, though perhaps free from oppression (Vv.1-3), wealthy beyond counting (Vv.7-8), and surrounded by companions (Vv.9-12), are nevertheless subject to vanity.

V.13 - "Better is a poor and wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished" - The old king represents a class who exercise power and authority over others (sometimes by oppression) for so long that they begin to imagine themselves to be infallible, and to rule by inalienable right. They are actually self-deluded, obstinate and set in their ways so that they will not accept advice or rebuke.(Prov.29:1). In this state they gradually alienate themselves from their support, and public opinion turns against them. The Int. Bible translates: "old and stupid king, who does not know (how) to be warned any more". It is for this reason that someone else is able to rise and usurp the throne. Rehoboam was 42 when he came to the throne but his folly was an echo of these words (1 Kings 12). Some think in fact that these verse are a foreshadowing of the division of Solomon's kingdom through Solomon's failure in old age, the rise of Jeroboam, and the folly of Rehoboam.

V.14 - "For out of prison he cometh to reign" - Joseph is an example of a poor and wise child who rose to power out of prison (Gen.41:39-44). Here Solomon demonstrates the continuing cycles that see the rise and fall of men from positions of power. History is full of examples of powerful and popular men being overthrown and replaced by men of obscurity. One such was Jeroboam, a young and obscure Ephraimite, who finally came to rule over ten tribes of Israel after a period of banishment in Egypt (1 Kings 11:26-40; 12:2-3).

"whereas also he that is born in his kingdom becometh poor" - This phrase is translated by Int. Bible: "although in his kingdom he was born poor". The reference seems to be to the origins of the poor wise child who ascends the throne. Born poor and in obscurity he rises to supreme power because he is wiser than the old and stubborn king he replaces.

V.15 - "I considered all the living which walk under the sun, with the second child that shall stand up in his stead" - Roth.: "I saw all the living, who were going hither and thither under the sun, that they were with the boy who was to be the second, who was to stand in the other's place". Solomon observed the fickle multitude, having abandoned their once popular old king, supporting the rise of their new leader. While there is some ambiguity in this passage as to who "the second child" might be, the principal lesson is clear. Popular esteem and public acclaim is very often shortlived and is certainly unpredictable. Cheers quickly turn into jeers when the tide of popularity turns for whatever reason (Acts 14:18-19; Mark 11:9-10; 15:12-13, 24-25).

V.16 - "There is no end of all the people, even of all that have been before them" - These words seem to be a reference to the vast multitude who support and endorse the rise of their king. His support is universal and he comes to power on a wave of fervour.

"they also that come after shall not rejoice in him" - Roth.: "yet they who should come later would not rejoice in him". In the story, time passes and the king grows old. His popularity wanes and he loses support among the people. Those who were children, or were not born at the time of his accession to power do not have the same feelings toward him, and refuse allegiance. So the cycle goes on.

"Surely this also is vanity and vexation of spirit" - Roth.: "surely even this was vanity, and a feeding on wind". Consistent with his findings that all man's pursuits are empty of any lasting value, Solomon has found that power and popularity are no different.

Ecclesiastes 5

LIVING WITH GOD

Chapter 5 marks a significant development in the thought and character of the book. Solomon's enquiry has brought him to certain convincing conclusions. Men are bound by time and are subject to vanity by divine appointment. It is certain that man does not exist apart from God, and no true examination of life can exclude God. So, very fittingly, he introduces at this point thoughts on approach to God in worship. For the first time Solomon directly addresses the reader and varies his previously abstract line of inquiry by passages of direct exhortation.

The reason for this change in approach is that Solomon has repeatedly arrived at the conclusion that all that man does is vanity and striving after the wind. But this being a divinely imposed state (Rom.8:18-25) means that God is in control and is able to use vanity to turn men to a recognition of, and desire for, higher things. When men recognise the real purpose of vanity in life, an entirely new perspective opens to their view. God is working for their salvation. His providence is employed through the ordinary circumstances of man's repetitive and vain life to achieve the greatest good.

In the balance of the chapter Solomon turns to view certain anomalies which demonstrate the futility of desire and the virtue of accepting and enjoying what God has given.

Chapter 5 can be summarised in the following way:

SECTION 1		
Vv.1-7		THE THREE MAIN PRINCIPLES OF WORSHIP
V.1	1	SENSITIVITY IN WORSHIP - A Pure Sacrifice
Vv.2-3	2	SENSITIVITY IN PRAYER - From the heart - Not the mouth
Vv.4-7	3	SENSITIVITY IN MAKING VOWS - Avoiding Hypocrisy - A sin which says "I will" but "does not"
SECTION 2		
Vv.8-20		VIEWING ANOMALIES
(a)	Vv.8-9	Corruption in government - The abuse of power
(b)	Vv.10-12	THE FUTILITY OF DESIRE
(c)	Vv.13-20	VIRTUE found in "occupation" - not in "gain"

V.1 - Sensitivity in Worship

V.1 - "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God" - In the Hebrew Bible this verse is attached to chapter 4 thus showing the very close link with what has gone before. The word for "keep" is shamar meaning to hedge about; to guard, protect. Also "foot" is to be understood as "feet". So the Int. Bible translates: "Guard your feet when you go to the house of God". This speaks of a sensitivity borne of reverence and an actual perception of the presence of Elohim (Gen.28:16-17; 48:15-16; Ps.34:7). Formalism deadens that sensitivity, and familiarity breeds contempt. Israel were frequently guilty of this in their worship in God's house. The man who recognises the hand of God in his life has good cause to approach with reverence and awe. Sincerity and respect are the hallmarks of true worship. The house of God which refers here to the Temple represents the Ecclesia in all ages (1 Tim.3:15).

"be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools" - "Hear" is shama - to hear intelligently. RSV: "draw near to listen". The word can express the idea of hearing that leads to obedience. A desire

to intelligently listen and obey far exceeds ritual sacrifice (1 Sam.15:22; Hos.6:6), because it is from the heart. The sacrifice of "fools" (kesilim - fat: by imp. stupid or silly) is an abomination to God (Prov.21:27).

"for they consider not that they do evil" - Roth.: "for they make no acknowledgment of doing wrong". Self deception is one of man's greatest problems (Jer.17:9). Fools lightly enter God's house with sacrifices, the meaning of which is totally unrelated to their real intentions, and yet they deceive themselves into believing they have fulfilled their duty.

Vv.2-3 - Sensitivity in Prayer

Solomon has stated that the man who walks with God will "guard his feet" in God's house. It is a natural progression to move on to consider approach to prayer in worship.

V.2 - **"Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God"**

- The word "rash" is bahal - to tremble inwardly; i.e. be suddenly alarmed or agitated; by imp. to hasten anxiously. Int. Bible: "hasty". Words can be poured forth in emotion or in haste without much thought being given to what is said. There is grave danger if this is done in prayer. The heart (mind) needs to be 'engaged' before the mouth is opened. And even then careful thought should be given to what is said in the presence of God. Int. Bible: "do not let your heart hurry to bring forth a word before God". Notice the warning about bringing forth just one word without thought (see margin). Bro. Sargent makes the following comment on this passage:

True prayer is not a rush of words or a flush of feeling. Like sacrifice, it is the product of a dedicated life held in awe by the Divine Majesty.

"for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few" - The obvious is stated to emphasise man's insignificance and dependence. But Solomon is really driving home his earlier findings that man's realm of vanity is "under the sun". Recognition of this state of things must produce a sense of humility in man. And this in turn produces a sense of awe and reverence for the supremacy of God. So the words spoken before God will be few and carefully chosen. Yet Israel's history indicates how easy it is for men to elevate self in the act of worship and end up berating God with vain repetitions (Matt.6:7).

V.3 - **"For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by the multitude of words"**

- Dreams are the brain's way of releasing the mental tensions and pressures of the day. They are essentially a jumble of thoughts and pictures with no real design. So it is with the prayer of the fool. The Int. Bible translates: "For the dream comes through the greatness of the task"; thus implying that where life is deliberately filled with diverse distractions and pressures the mind will be so muddled as to make sensible prayer very difficult. The fool recognises the need for prayer, but is in no state of mind to properly deliver. The result is a multitude of meaningless and confused words.

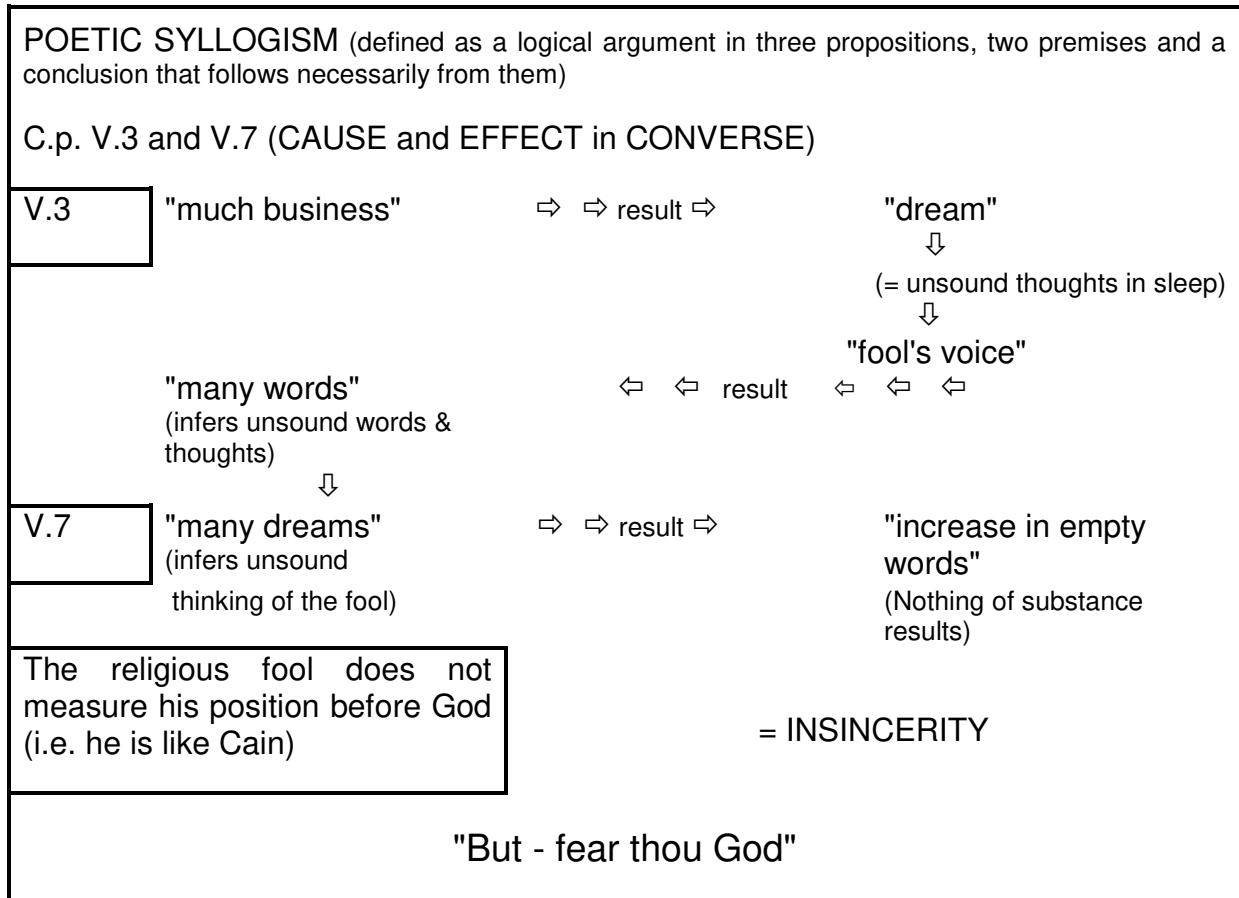
Vv.4-7 - Sensitivity in Making Vows

Flowing from the subject of offering acceptable prayer comes the subject of the content of prayer. Prayers in which solemn undertakings are made by the worshipper are now considered.

V.4 - "When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it" - The word "vow" is nadar and simply means a promise. However, God treats promises far more seriously than do men. In fact, they are regarded by Him as irrevocable, especially when associated with an oath that involves His name. Solomon is quoting Deut.23:21 which emphasises that God will require payment of vows. Hence, Solomon adds the words "defer not to pay it". The Int. Bible translates this phrase: "do not wait to fulfil it". Reluctance to pay is the most likely outcome of a hastily made vow.

"for he hath no pleasure in fools" - The word "pleasure" is chephets and is translated "purpose" in its two previous occurrences in the book (3:1,17). God has neither pleasure or purpose with the rash and foolish who promise and then refuse to fulfil.

"pay that which thou hast vowed" - Roth.: "what thou vowest, pay". There is no room here for mistakes, half-heartedness or insincerity. Careful thought must precede the making of solemn promises before God and deliberate and determined action must be exerted to fulfil them.



V.5 - "Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay" - The righteousness of God is denied when vows are broken and terrible consequences follow (see 2 Sam.21:1-9). This statement is similar to Peter's words in 2 Peter 2:21.

V.6 - "Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin" - Int. Bible: "Do not allow your mouth to cause your flesh to sin". The mouth used rashly to pour forth before God promises that cannot be kept is actually pronouncing a death sentence upon self, for that is the final effect in the day of judgement. The principle is expressed in James 4:17 - "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin". Commitments made must be fulfilled, for God will not forget, and will exact them in due time.

"neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error" - Whether "the angel" here is a priest or the angel involved in our judgement makes little difference to the power of the warning. The priest represented God and judged Israel on His behalf (Ex.22:8-9). The angels who overshadow each saint will have a role in the day of judgement (Matt.25:31; Mark 8:38). It will be no good saying in that day "that it was a mistake" (Roth.), or even a sin of ignorance. Vows should not be made unless they will be kept.

"wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands" - To make an excuse or to simply say, "It was a mistake", emphasises the contempt shown towards God. A promise made so lightly indicates that there was no real intention to produce "works". So God is justified in destroying the work of that man's hands. It is a chilling thought, but true nevertheless, that God hears every word that falls from our mouth.

V.7 - "For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities" - Roth.: "For (it was done) amidst a multitude of dreams and vanities, and many words". Int. Bible: "For in the multitude of dreams, both words and vanities abound". The translations vary, but whichever is adopted, the obvious point being made in this verse is that "the multitude of business" (V.3) is the root cause of vanity in worship. There is a real danger in crowding our days with 'business' and the affairs of this life. The pressures compound and can be so distracting as to make sensible prayer and wholesome worship almost an impossibility. Even worse, the mental pressures can force the mind into paths of unreality ("dreams") in which God is virtually excluded and man's worship becomes an

expression of self-centredness. It is in this state of mind that men can sometimes make rash promises which there is not the resolution or mental strength to fulfil. Worship then becomes not only empty and useless, but dangerous.

"but fear thou God" - Roth.: "but towards God be thou reverent". The word for "fear" is yare - to fear; revere. Those who have a strong consciousness of God will not clutter their lives with a multitude of distractions that will captivate and divert the mind. They will hold Him in reverential awe, and their worship will be characterised by the brevity and sincerity of their prayers.

Ecclesiastes 5:7

The converse lesson from the fool who is all talk (Vv.1-7)

"But fear thou God"

(i.e. hold God in awe as the supreme reality)

What does this "fear" of God do?

1. Takes anxiety out of business - V.3
2. Gives sound sleep to the man of God - V.3
3. Enables him to speak less words but with more thought (sincerity) - V.2
4. His "vows" now represent the strength of purpose in the heart required to fulfil them - V.4

This "fear" of God only comes because this man is more ready to "hear" than "give" - V.1

Vv.8-9 - Corruption in Government - The Abuse of Power

Solomon now abruptly turns to consider some anomalies which are sure to be a source of frustration and pain to godly men and women. The connection with the previous section on worship is not immediately obvious, as it seems Solomon returns to the subject which had occupied his mind in chapter 4:1-3. There may be a connection however between the rash, self-centred worshipper of Vv.1-7 whose mind is given over to "a multitude of business", and the avaricious behaviour of those who abuse power. The love of money is covetousness, which Paul describes as idolatry (Eph.5:5; Col.3:5). As such it is a form of 'worship', but the god is Mammon, not Yahweh. And because "the love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Tim.6:10), oppression and corruption are a natural consequence.

V.8 - "If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgement and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter" -

Exploitation of the poor and perverting of justice is common among men. Solomon had witnessed "the removing of justice and righteousness in a province" among officials who took advantage of their position to oppress the weak. He knew the effect such activities had on the principled and godly mind of the man that "feared God" (V.7). So he counsels: "Do not be astonished over the matter" (Roth.). Such behaviour is perfectly consistent with man's nature, but it too is a vanity leading to no real satisfaction. The only real course is to "fear God".

"for he that is higher than highest regardeth; and there be higher than they" -

Int. Bible: "For a high one over a high one is watching; and the high ones are over them". This does not appear to be a reference to Yahweh as the supreme God, but rather to the high officials who ruled over the corrupt officials of the province. There are echelons of power among men leading to the king. When corruption is allowed to prosper it permeates the entire hierarchy. Corrupt lower officials buy their protection from corrupt higher officials, who in turn buy their protection from the next level above, and so on. Each is there to exact as much from the weak and poor as they can, while they have the power to do so (Prov.22:22-23; 23:10-11; Ps..94:1-11). God indeed knows what man does, but He chooses not to openly intervene in the present dispensation. Thus the test for His servants is to maintain their integrity in the midst of an environment of corruption.

V.9 - "Moreover the profit of the earth is for all: the king himself is served by the field" - All do not share the "profit" of the earth for Solomon has just said that some are sorely oppressed by corrupt officials. Bro. Sargent quotes a commentator, Lukyn Williams, who renders the verse: "And the profit of (the) land is among the whole (of them, i.e. the grasping officials of verse 8) - even the wild land when cultivated has a king." No sooner is land placed under cultivation than taxation in some form is imposed on it. Thus the king is served by the field. While this interpretation seems terribly negative, it is consistent with Solomon's advice in V.8 - "do not be astonished".

Ecclesiastes Chp.5:10 - 6:12		
1.	The more a man gets, the more he wants	Chp.5:10
2.	The more he gets, the more burdens he has	V.11
3.	Wealth cannot be assured as a possession - either for self or heir	Vv.13-14
4.	He may be deprived of enjoyment by an early death	Chp.6:2
5.	He may live long and yet still not enjoy	V.3
6.	"Desire" has no end - therefore labour is vain anyhow	V.9
7.	Besides all this - death is a conqueror	V.10
<p>The limitations of mortality seem to make it almost impossible to experience good in any practical and lasting way.</p>		

Vv.10-12 - The Futility of Desire

Having spoken of the pervasive lust for money and the abuse of power in government, Solomon considers the utter vanity of the pursuit of wealth, and then contrasts the contentment of the honest labouring man.

V.10 - "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity" - This is such a simple statement that is self-evidently true, and yet most men fall into the trap of believing that satisfaction can be found in accumulating wealth and possessions. It is this desire for wealth that corrupts men and they end up oppressing others in order to achieve their goal. But it can never be reached, for the rich are never content, their insatiable hunger for money is never satisfied. Solomon saw this as a "vanity" - empty in the end.

V.11 - "When goods increase, they are increased that eat them" - Int. Bible: "When the good multiplies, those who eat it multiply." Roth.: "When blessings are increased, increased are the eaters thereof." This expresses a very simple fact of human experience. When wealth grows, so do the avenues of expenditure. Most know by experience that invariably spending rises to meet the level of income. So there is really no point in the pursuit of wealth.

"what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes" - The only satisfaction for the rich is to gloat over his wealth with "the sight of his eyes" (Roth.). This may provide some fleeting satisfaction to the carnal propensities but it is a lonely and barren occupation, for at last death claims the rich man along with the poor. There is nothing in this to satisfy man's capacity for higher things.

V.12 - "The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much; but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep" - The man who toils for a living, whether that be abundant or

barely sufficient, at least has one distinct advantage over the avaricious man. He is able to sleep soundly because of his toil. On the other hand, the rich man continually worries about his wealth and is often robbed of sleep. His mind is constantly preoccupied with preserving his riches and the amassing of even greater wealth. Solomon's judgement is that the labouring man is far better off in the long run. There are few however who readily accept the truth of this conclusion.

Vv.13-17 - The Limitations of Riches

Solomon has shown that human desires are subject to all kinds of frustration both in the attainment and in the enjoyment when attained, and now he emphasises the limitations of riches and the common end in death of rich and poor.

V.13 - "There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt" - Roth.: "Here was an incurable evil, I had seen under the sun, riches kept by the owner thereof to his hurt". Solomon's point is that the rich man is actually impoverished by his wealth! His best interests were not served by his abundance, for not only is he blinded to higher things, but the worry and loss of tranquillity that he experiences endanger his health and longevity (cp. Luke 12:16-21; 1 Sam.25:36-38). And yet few seem able to learn this lesson by observation of others (Ps.49:10-13).

V.14 - "But those riches perish by evil travail" - Roth.: "But those riches perish by being ill employed". Poor judgements and bad investments can destroy a fortune overnight (1 Tim.6:17; Prov.23:5).

"he begetteth a son, and there is nothing in his hand" - The ambition of a rich man to father an heir and to pass on to him the family fortune is ruined by the loss of his fortune.

V.15 - "As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand" - Without his riches the avaricious man has absolutely nothing at all. He has gained nothing from his labour or from his life that can be carried away. At death he returns to the dust as naked as he was when he was born (Job 1:21; 1 Tim.6:7).

V.16 - "what profit hath he that laboreth for the wind" - Solomon returns to his basic theme - "all is vanity and vexation of spirit" i.e. feeding on wind (cp.Ecc.1:3,14).

V.17 - "All his days also he eateth in darkness, and he hath much sorrow and wrath with his sickness" - Roth.: "Even all his days are spent in darkness and mourning - and he is very morose and is sad and angry". This is a picture of misery. His avariciousness is a disease, eating him away. He is unable to be happy, because by the very nature of his ambitions, moroseness, brooding and anger are every day occurrences. This man never emerges from the darkness.

Vv.18-20 - The Power of Enjoyment

Solomon returns to emphasise the virtues of the simple life of the labouring man (V.12). The utter futility and vanity of the endless pursuit of riches only served to demonstrate the value of deriving enjoyment from simple labour viewed within the framework of God's appointments. When the reason for vanity is properly understood there is power to enjoy God's gifts, whether men are rich or poor.

V.18 - "Behold, that which I have seen" - Roth.: "Lo! what I myself have seen". Solomon is convinced of the soundness of his findings. All his personal experience and observations led inexorably to this conclusion.

"it is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun" - The word for "comely" is yapheh signifying something beautiful. It is rendered that way in chap.3:11 and occurs only twice in the book. Just as God "has made everything beautiful in his time", so he has appointed for man only one source of enjoyment from his labours under the sun. That is, the tranquillity that comes from understanding the limitations of mortal life and deriving the greatest enjoyment from the simple and ordinary things that God gives a man as a reward for his labour (Deut.12:7).

"which God giveth him, for it is his portion" - Roth.: "in that God hath given it him, for that is his portion". The man who happily accepts the portion that God has given him will never know the

frustration and unhappiness of the avaricious man, for he is content with such things that he has (1 Tim.6:6-8).

V.19 - "Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof" - The "every man" class refers to those in whose lives God is at work. Unlike the man who eats in darkness (V.17), this man may not only be blessed by God with wealth, but has a far greater gift: the "power" (Heb. shalat - to dominate; i.e. to govern; by imp. to permit) to derive enjoyment from his labours. This power is in a state of mind - a proper perspective of the limitations of mortal life and the purpose of vanity.

"and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God" - Roth.: "to find gladness in his toil". Enjoyment can be derived from all forms of labour, temporal or spiritual when the perspective on life is right. This is truly a great gift from God.

V.20 - "For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answereth him in the joy of his heart" - Roth.: "Though it be not much let him remember the days of his life, for God beareth witness by the gladness of his heart". Youngs Lit.: "For he doth not remember the days of his life for God is answering through the joy of his heart". RSV: "for God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart". There are a number of ways this passage has been interpreted depending on the translation adopted. Some consider the structure of the Hebrew suggests the "days of his life" to be remembered are the days yet to come in his life, and not those already past. The key issue here is that the only enjoyment that man can derive from this life which ameliorates its vanity is that which God gives - the power to enjoy because of a proper perspective of the purpose of the vanity to which man is subject. It therefore comes from God that man is happily occupied.

Chapter 6

THE FUTILITY OF HUMAN DESIRE

Continuing his theme of the futility of human desire when not rightly directed, Solomon now considers the vanity of riches when there is not the ability to enjoy them. He contrasts the man of chap.5:19 to whom God had given riches and wealth, and power to enjoy them, with the man who is not given that power. His observations emphasise the vanity of life lived for its own sake, and as an end in itself.

Vv.1-6 - Man's Failure to Enjoy his Blessing

V.1 - "There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men" - Roth.: "Here was an evil, I had seen under the sun". Solomon now deals with the contrast to chap.5:19-20. God's gift to some to have power to enjoy their abundance is not shared by the vast majority of men. The opposite is "common among men" (Int. Bible: "and it is great among men") for there is vanity in living life for its own sake. It is only when men see the purpose of vanity "under the sun" that they are able to derive some enjoyment from life. That is God's gift.

V.2 - "yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it" - Roth.: "a man unknown eateth it". This might refer to the rich man dying without an heir and leaving his wealth to someone he did not know. Or, because the word "stranger" is nokhri - alien, it may refer to the rich man's wealth being taken by a foreign invader. Whatever his end, the result is the same. Someone else receives the benefit of his abundance.

Ecclesiastes 6:2,3	
Two MEN who do not have the "Power to Enjoy". Both rich, with honour, lacking nothing.	
1.	2.
+ Young (no heir) + Early decease + A stranger enjoys his portion	+ Old (100 children) + No burial (long life) + Cannot enjoy his portion (soul not filled with good)
This is vanity - a sore affliction (V.2) - Yet common among men (V.1)	
<u>Psalm 58:3-8</u> DAVID'S THOUGHTS - SOLOMON'S BASIS	
The wicked - estranged from the womb (V.3); Let them melt away (Vv.7-8); Like the untimely birth "that they may not see the sun" (V.8).	
THE ULTIMATE JUDGEMENT: To be deprived of instruction in righteousness	

"this is a vanity, and it is an evil disease" - Roth.: "this was vanity, and an incurable evil it was". The word "evil" is ra - from ra'a, to spoil by breaking to pieces. It occurs 31 times in Ecclesiastes and is used in a natural and moral sense depending on context. Here it is used of an evil circumstance which is "common among men". When the word "sore" or "disease" is used with the word "evil" it extends the meaning to include the end result of the evil. The word "disease" is chalah signifying to be worn, weak, sick, afflicted. Solomon lamented the mental anguish which wears men out in a vain pursuit to find satisfaction in riches and wealth (1 Tim.6:9-10).

V.3 - "If a man beget an hundred children, and live many years" - A hundred is used here as an ultimate number suggesting limitless progeny. This man is set in contrast to the rich man who dies prematurely (V.2). He has many heirs to whom he may pass on his wealth.

"and his soul be not filled with good" - Like the man of V.2 he is denied enjoyment of his abundance. This may be due to sickness, disability, mental incapacity or other reasons which preclude full enjoyment of life.

"and also that he have no burial" - For emphasis Solomon postulates that this man lives for an extraordinarily long time: for he has no burial! But if life affords no enjoyment, what is its value even for a brief time, leave alone for a great length of time?

"I say, that an untimely birth is better than he" - Int. Bible: "I say, a miscarriage is better than he". The stillborn child is better off than the man in this position. At least it never knows any of the burdens and vanities of life "under the sun".

Ecclesiastes 6:3-6	
"An untimely birth is better than he" - WHY?	
THE STILLBORN	THE RICH MAN
<p>V.4 - Vanity to darkness (one step)</p> <p>No name (no experiences to be remembered by)</p> <p>V.5 - Not seen the sun. Not known anything (literally)</p> <p>V.5 - More rest than the other (C.p. Job 3:16-22; 10:18-19)</p> <p>No life (literally)</p>	<p>V.3 - Live many years</p> <p>100 children</p> <p>Soul not filled with good (no real knowledge - spiritually)</p> <p>V.2 - No power to eat (a life full of anxiety)</p> <p>V.6 - No life (no meaning in life) seen no good - Though he live a thousand years twice</p>
V.6 - ALL GO TO ONE PLACE	

V.4 - "For he cometh in with vanity, and he departeth in darkness, and his name shall be covered with darkness" - This is a picture of utter emptiness which is the lot of the stillborn child. They never savour any of the experiences of life, nor leave any impression upon the memory of any other than close relatives. Name and identity are obscured. And yet such are better off than the rich man who cannot derive enjoyment from his abundance and spends his life in unhappiness.

V.5 - "Moreover he hath not seen the sun, nor known anything: this hath more rest than the other" - Not seeing the sun implies no responsibility (cp. Ecc.7:11; 11:7-8). To see the sun in Solomon's terms means to understand the issues of life and appreciate God's purpose in subjecting man to vanity. The stillborn child who has known nothing is in a better position than the man who cannot even derive some enjoyment from the pursuit of earthly advantage. Life lived purely for itself is utterly vain and frustrating.

V.6 - "Yea, though he live a thousand years twice told, yet hath he seen no good: do not all go to one place?" - To see "good" in this context is to derive some enjoyment from life (Ecc.5:18). A man may live twice as long as Methuselah, but eventually he will die and join the stillborn child. If he has spent that time in unhappiness, his life is utter vanity. It would be better to never have been born.

Vv.7-9 - Human Desire is Insatiable

Having demonstrated the futility of life without happiness and enjoyment, Solomon now emphasises the vanity of life lived for its own sake. Basic human desires are incapable of satisfaction, so that the man who lives to satisfy his desires is on an endless treadmill - until he dies.

V.7 - "All the labour of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled" - The word for "appetite" is *nepesh* signifying a breathing creature; life. Here it is used of the natural cravings of man's body. All man's labour is to satisfy his hunger, yet the appetite is never satisfied, and the cravings return as forceful as they ever were. Solomon's point is that it is impossible to satisfy the carnal cravings of man's body - so life lived for this purpose can never bring lasting satisfaction.

V.8 - "For what hath the wise more than the fool" - Roth.: "For what profit hath the wise man over the dullard". Because appetite is never satisfied, both wise and fool are on equal footing. Where life is lived for itself both are pursuing what cannot be attained.

"what hath the poor, that knoweth to walk before the living?" - Int. Bible: "What gain to the poor who knows how to walk before the living?" Even the poor man who through the hardships of life has learnt how to deal prudently with life's contingencies and has adjusted his desires accordingly, is no better off, for the end is the same. All men die and go to the one place, their natural desires never having been fully satisfied. So the wise, the fool, and the prudent poor man are all ultimately in no better position than the stillborn child.

V.9 - "Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire" - Roth.: "Better what the eyes behold than the wandering of desire". Solomon concludes that despite the vanity that attends all attempts to satisfy human desire, there is one lesson to be learnt. It is better to make the best of what is to hand than to allow the desire to wander after the unattainable. The poor man had at least applied this principle.

"this is also vanity and vexation of spirit" - Roth.: "even this was vanity, and a feeding on wind".

Vv.10-12 - Man's Failure to Discover Good

Over everything in man's life there is one limiting fact which is a divine appointment and belonging to his very nature. Solomon now shows that death is the final victor over the unfulfilled desires of man. Discovery of what is good eludes most men and they never come to know what is better in the divine scheme of things.

V.10 - "That which hath been is named already, and it is known that it is man" - Roth.: "Whatsoever one may be, long ago was he called by his name, and it is known that it is - Son of Earth". The word "named" is *shem* - an appellation, as a mark or memorial of individuality (through the idea of definite and conspicuous position). The conspicuous name given was Adam (the word here for "man"), signifying ruddy or rosy; i.e. like the earth, from the root *adamah* - the dust of the ground. Because of sin man was condemned to return to the dust of the ground. Death is the common and uncompromising enemy of all men.

"neither may he contend with him that is mightier than he" - Roth.: "he cannot therefore contend with one stronger than he". It seems likely that the "one stronger" is death with whom no 'Adam' can successfully contend. Death is always the final victor over the wandering desires of man. Howbeit, death is a law of God established by decree in Eden, and to this extent Solomon has in mind the ultimate power with whom man cannot contend.

V.11 - "Seeing there be many things that increase vanity, what is man the better?" - Roth.: "Seeing there are things in abundance which make vanity abound, what profit hath man". The word "things" is *dabar* which can signify words or things. The word "better" is *yowther* - over and above. Men who only know life "under the sun" pursue many things and speak many words (some against their Maker), but in this there is no profit for they cannot see any lasting purpose in their strivings. What is "better" or more advantageous for man is completely concealed from their view.

V.12 - "For who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow" - Because life is lived as a passing shadow and is full of "vanity" (*hebel* - emptiness; transitory), and because man never ceases to pursue the wind of wandering desire, he is

consequently unable to come to know what is "good" in this life. Life has passed most men by before there is any realisation that there must be something "better".

"for who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun" - Men who live solely for the present are unable to discern the meaning of life and find the "good", leave alone have any knowledge of what may happen in the future after death has claimed them.

Thus Koheleth brings to a climax the essay in which he has shown that (a) the more a man gets the more he wants; (b) the more he gets the more his burdens increase; (c) he has no assurance of retaining wealth either for himself or his heir; (d) he may be deprived of enjoyment by early death; (e) he may live long and still not enjoy the benefit; (f) since there is no end to desire his labour is in vain anyhow; (g) in any case Death is the conqueror, and the limitations of mortality make it impossible to know even what is practically good.

Bro. L.G. Sargent

10 GREAT VANITIES OF LIFE

THE VANITY OF HUMAN.....

1	WISDOM	2:15,16	Same catastrophe engulfs the fool and the wise alike
2	LABOUR	2:17-23	The worker gets no more benefit than the shirker
3	PURPOSE	3:1-19	Man proposes, but God finally disposes
4	RIVALRY	4:4	Success results in envy, rather than in joy
5	AVARICE	4:8	Much always wants more
6	FAME	4:16	Brief and uncertain - only soon to be forgotten
7	INSATIATY	5:10	Money does not fill desire, nor does it satisfy
8	COVETING	6:9	Gain does not realise the enjoyment it imagines
9	FRIVOLITY	7:6	Without substance it hides a sad end
10	REWARD	8:10-14	The bad often rewarded and the good overlooked

BUT

"Godliness with contentment is great gain"

Chapter 7

THE THINGS THAT ARE BETTER

In a series of aphorisms (a concise statement of principle) Solomon offers advice for happier living for those who live under the shadow of death. Solomon's quest for "good" is a search for practical good, not that which is abstract or idealistic. Good is that which proves to be so in the experience of life. And though the tone of his essay on desire in the previous chapter is negative and pessimistic, his question in chapter 6:12, "For who knoweth what is good for man in this life?" suggests that there is scope to raise the idea of good to a new plane. Solomon shows that by facing realities there is a deepening of man's character which brings a new poise and stability in life that is not only good but glad. Despite the vanity that attends all human labour and the emptiness of unsatisfied desire, there are some things that are better. The flow of Solomon's thought can be illustrated as follows:

Things that are better under God (not under the sun)	
V.1	A GOOD NAME - Life has substance
V.2	A sober view of life is better than to laugh life away
V.3-4	Suffering instructs and improves the heart
V.5-7	Frivolity is without substance - It hides a sad end
V.8	PATIENCE is a virtue:
V.9	(a) It assesses all the facts
V.10	(b) It resists premature anger
	(c) It seeks out opportunity now
V.11-12	A CONCLUSION Wisdom adds to life as it is lived now and provides the way to future reward
V.13-14	God's work is unalterable
V.15-18	God's way - amid dangerous extremes
V.19-22	Wisdom - A STRONGHOLD
V.23-24	Ultimate wisdom unfathomable
V.25-29	Wisdom reveals wickedness in its true character

V.1 - Honour is Better than Luxury

In the Hebrew the word "good" (towb) is the first word of verses 1,2,3,5,8 and 11. In the English it takes the form "better", but the use of this word clearly establishes the link with chap.6:12. The first thing that is "good" in Solomon's view is a good name.

"A good name is better than precious ointment" - Roth.: "Better a name than precious ointment". Both the word "good" and "precious" are the same in the Hebrew (towb). The word for "name" is shem and the word "ointment" is shemen (oil). The proximity of these words in the Hebrew dictionary makes it evident that Solomon used a form of poetry in compiling this verse (and indeed the following verses, where the same play on words is found). Precious ointment is costly and rare (John 12:3; Ps.45:7-8) and suggests riches and luxury. Solomon's point is that a good name or reputation is much better than luxury, especially if the latter is associated with an evil reputation. Good repute has a far more pervasive and permanent effect than the costliest perfume (cp. the deed of Mary - Mark 14:3-9).

"and the day of death than the day of one's birth" - This second part of the couplet that forms the verse seems at first unrelated to the first. It must be interpreted strictly in conjunction with the first. Only when life is complete can reputation be truly assessed, and then it is seen whether the name is fragrant. Until then the possibility of soiling the reputation remains (Ecc.10:1). This of course requires a consistency throughout life to achieve that "good name". Solomon is here showing that even a life of suffering has its worth if judged by the genuine repute which it gains. This in part counterbalances the pessimism of chap.6:3-5.

Vv.2-7 - Soberness is Better than Laughter

In the East both funeral mourning and wedding celebrations lasted seven days. Solomon argues that it is better to attend the funeral, or to choose sorrow over laughter, and accept rebuke rather than praise, for hereby a man is induced to take seriously the realities of life. Only then is he in a position to see any "good" in this life.

V.2 - "It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting" - The word "better" is towb and again commences the verse as in V.1 (see also Vv.3,5,8,11). Solomon compares the value of attending a funeral to mourn with the value of attendance at a wedding celebration. Naturally, men would have no difficulty in choosing the exuberance of celebration in preference to mourning, but in so doing they deny themselves a critical element in the discovery of good. There is nothing quite like confronting the reality of death to galvanise the mind on what is truly important and valuable in life (Ps.90:9-12). Normally however, men indulge in merriment with a view to escaping the grim realities of life.

"for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart" - Roth.: "and the living should take it to his heart". The visit to the graveside delivers a salutary lesson, and wise men will not ignore its meaning for themselves. While they have life, they have opportunity.

V.3 - "Sorrow is better than laughter; for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better" - The word for "sorrow" is ka'as and signifies vexation, from the root to trouble. It is rendered "anger", and "grieved" elsewhere. The emotions of sorrow and anger arise from vexation. Solomon is contrasting a soberness of mind with vacant hilarity. Men automatically accept that laughter and dancing are better than sorrow and weeping. But it is not so. Pleasure seekers more often than not are trying to cover over their fears and hide from the realities of life. The explosion of entertainments and hilarity in the modern world has grown at a rate proportionate to man's growing concern about the evils of the present and his fears for the future. Solomon is not suggesting that a sad face is required all the time, for there is a time for laughter too (Ecc.3:4). His point is that sorrow (facing realities) is better because it makes the heart better.

V.4 - "The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth" - Solomon makes the point that the quality of character is testified by the places where men choose to focus their heart. Wisdom sees value in associating with the reminders of the brevity of life, while folly pursues every form of light-hearted escapism.

V.5 - "It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools" - No one enjoys rebuke, but it has a real and enduring value (Heb.12:5-11). In fact, men who harden themselves against rebuke perish (Prov.12:1; 29:1). The admonition of the wise is to be sought after for its everlasting value in correcting a man from serious faults (Ps.141:5; Prov.9:8). On the other hand, the praise of fools is empty and of no lasting value. How empty anyway is the praise of men.

V.6 - "For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool" - The noisy laughter and backslapping jollity of the fool is like the dry thorns gathered and placed on the fire under the cauldron. They flash into flame and crackle with loud bangs, but are consumed in a few moments leaving the pot unboiled. All that remains are a few ashes to memorialise the disillusionment. Vacuous hilarity and raucous laughter can offer no lasting benefit, whereas sorrow and soberness of mind add real value to the development of character and a proper perspective on life.

V.7 - "Surely oppression maketh a wise man mad" - Roth.: "For oppression maddeneth the wise". This verse begins with the word "For" in the Hebrew, and like verse 6 is a commentary on the superiority of rebuke over praise (V.5). The word "oppression" is osheq - injury. The word "mad" is halal - to be clear; to shine; hence to make a show, to boast, and thus by extension the word can mean to be foolish. Some think this phrase means that rebuke (an injury) gives a wise man's character

a lustre and makes him shine. Others think it should be interpreted in harmony with the balance of the verse and therefore refers to the effect of falling victim to the shallow praise of foolish men.

"and a gift destroyeth the heart" - Roth.: "and a bribe destroyeth the understanding". This is a well documented fact (Ex.23:8; Deut.16:19). Once the praise of men takes hold of the heart even wise men can be morally corrupted. Solomon has arrived at the point where he has fully illustrated the value of sorrow over laughter.

Vv.8-10 - Patience is Better than Rashness

Having shown that even the wise may act rashly and be corrupted by bribes, Solomon now extols the value of patience and mature judgement across the whole range of human experience.

V.8 - "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof" - Roth.: "Better the latter end of a thing than the beginning thereof". The word "thing" is *dabar* and can mean a word or thing. Whether "word" or "thing" is adopted here does not change the sense a great deal. The point Solomon makes is that it is always better to see a matter through to the end, and in the judgement of issues it is always better to hear the whole matter through to the end before drawing conclusions. Proper evaluation is impossible when entered into prematurely.

"and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit" - Roth.: "Better a patient spirit, than a haughty spirit". This statement is the parallel of the first phrase of the verse. It shows Solomon's subject is self control, patience and equanimity. To be stable and even-tempered allows one to take a largeness of view of things: to see the end of the matter. But rashness of spirit is a sign of pride and lack of self control (Prov.14:29).

V.9 - "Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools" - The word for "angry" is *ka'ac* - to trouble; to grieve, rage, be indignant, while the word for "anger" is *ka'as* which being derived from *ka'ac* means vexation. The type of anger Solomon has in mind is the short tempered, irascible spirit of the impatient man who is quick to react and judge. His life is characterised by instability and lack of self control like that of the fool (Prov.22:24-25).

V.10 - "Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not enquire wisely concerning this" - Roth.: "Do not say, What hath happened, that the former days were better than these?" Though an illusion, it is common among men to remember the past with affection as being much better than the present. Hastiness of spirit may be a problem for the young, but this problem is more likely to afflict older people who hanker after bygone days. Much damage has been done through this spirit in the past (Ezra 3:12-13; Num.11:5-6). It is never wise to live in the past for it can be a real hindrance to progress (Phil.3:13-15).

Vv.11-12 - Wisdom as a Preserver of Life

As a climax to the series on the things that are better Solomon turns to wisdom as the preserver of the life of him who has it.

V.11 - "Wisdom is good with an inheritance" - The translations differ on this phrase. The Interlinear Bible, Rotherham, RSV and others follow the AV. However, the RV renders the phrase: "Wisdom is as good as an inheritance" (although there is a marginal note providing the AV alternative). The Jerusalem Bible translates: "Wisdom is a precious legacy". It is clear though that the weight of opinion favours the AV. What sort of inheritance does Solomon have in mind? Verse 12 would suggest that he has in view "money". It is true that wisdom may be better with an inheritance that provides scope for its practical expression in the temporal sphere, but as Solomon goes on to show in verse 12, wisdom is the principal thing, because it alone can bring men to eternal life (the greatest of all inheritances).

"and by it there is profit to them that see the sun" - Roth.: "and a profit to such as see the sun". To 'see the sun' is not the universal experience of men "under the sun". Only some have this experience. It is those who have wisdom to see the purpose of vanity in human life and who look up to see divine light who have profit. Solomon has shown there is no profit in any human activity "under the sun". As he states again in chapter 11:7: "Truly light is sweet and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun". Knowledge of truth and of God as the source of light with all the blessings it brings cannot be compared with an earthly inheritance that passes away.

V.12 - "For wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence" - The word "defence" is tsel - shade. Roth. translates "a protection". Men find protection in money from privation, want and trouble, but this is only a temporary benefit related to the present life. Wisdom, on the other hand, has benefit as a protection in this life as well as leading those who possess it ultimately to eternal life (Prov.3:13-18).

"but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it" - Roth.: "but the advantage of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to the possessors thereof". The word for "excellency" is yithrown signifying preeminence, gain. It has been used seven times previously in Ecclesiastes, perhaps most significantly in chapter 1:3 and 2:11. There Solomon had commenced his enquiry with the words: "What *profit* hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?", and then concluded that all human labour was vanity and without *profit*. Now he shows that there is profit in knowledge and wisdom when men "see the sun". Wisdom can confer eternal life, something money or an earthly inheritance are powerless to do.

Vv.13-14 - Resignation is Better than Indignation

Solomon has shown that adversity is not necessarily evil, but in fact can be productive of good. The good includes the development of character. Character developed by adversity may deliver some benefit in the present, but clearly its major object is preparation for a future beyond the vanity of natural human life. This is why it is crucial for men to understand the work of God and to cooperate with Him. So Solomon turns to consider God's work, and concludes that it is unalterable. Only those who resign themselves to this fact will profit eternally from the experiences of life.

V.13 - "Consider the work of God" - The word "consider" is ra'ah meaning, to see. It is vital to perceive the working of God (Elohim = mighty ones; i.e. the angels) in our life. Jacob came to recognise how important Elohim had been throughout his life in which prosperity mingled with adversity (Gen.48:15-16). It is only when we see the hand of God and happily submit to it that real progress in eternal things can be made (1 Pet.5:6-7; Heb.1:14; 13:5-6).

"for who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked?" - Roth.: "for who can straighten what he hath bent?" By "crooked" or "bent", Solomon is not referring to moral things, for God is not able to be crooked. His theme is the mingling of prosperity and adversity in life. Life is not stable. Things do not always run smoothly (or straight), for sometimes things go wrong (crooked or bent). There is no point in fretting against the vicissitudes and trials of life. Acceptance of the good and the bad together in the sure knowledge that "all things work together for good to them that love God" is the only sensible and profitable course. However, it is not in man's natural make up to calmly resign himself to adversity. Only the wise who "see the sun" will adopt this way.

V.14 - "In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider" - We cannot change the conditions under which we live. All man can do is accept what God gives, and be thankful and joyful when it is peace and prosperity. But if it is otherwise there is cause to consider God's unfailing goodness to the sons of men, and the purpose of the adversity that has come our way. Job's example of resignation in the face of adversity demonstrates the principle in operation (Job 1:20-22; 2:10). Adversity is a necessary experience in the lives of the saints. It is designed to prepare them for eternal life through the development of character (Heb.12:1-11; James 1:2-4).

"God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him" - Roth.: "even the one equally with the other hath God made, to the end man might find out - after him - nothing". God mixes good and evil days together. Man may be perplexed, frustrated and confused by the complex twists and turns of daily life, but where "God's work" is involved there is an order and purpose in this mixture of good and evil designed to lead men to eternal life. When this is realised, and men cooperate with God, and accept His work in their lives they "find out" that "after (i.e. above or beyond) Him (i.e. God)" there is "nothing". God fills the view of the man who "sees the sun", understands the purpose of vanity, and considers the work of God in his life.

Vv.15-22 - Moderation is Better than Intemperance

Sparked by an anomaly which has exercised his mind, Solomon now launches into a reconsideration of the value of wisdom. He shows by various illustrations that wisdom and moderation are far better than intemperance and folly which characterise man's normal behaviour.

V.15 - "All things have I seen in the days of my vanity" - This is Solomon's way of introducing a new line of thought (cp. 3:16; 4:7; 5:13; 6:1; 8:9-10). The experience of life had driven home to

Solomon a simple but distressing fact - life is full of anomalies. He now turns to consider one anomaly which had oppressed his mind, as it had previously that of Job and the psalmist.

"there is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his wickedness" - The word "perisheth" is abad - to wander away; i.e. lose oneself; by imp. to perish. The word is not used in a moral sense of perishing from God's memory forever, for this is not true of the righteous. It merely sets forth the contrast to the wicked who sometimes "prolongeth his life". This anomaly has frequently exercised the minds of righteous men who have witnessed the righteous die prematurely (Ps.102:23-24; Ecc.8:14) and the wicked prosper in longevity (Ps.73:3-12; 37:35; Job 21:7-13; Isa.65:20).

V.16 - "Be not righteous over much" - Roth.: "Do not become so very righteous". The warning is against religious fanaticism in which equilibrium is lost. Israel's history is littered with examples of zeal for God which was not according to knowledge (Rom.10:2-3). Hypocrisy is the inevitable by-product of this overwrought 'righteousness'.

"neither make thyself overwise" - Roth.: "neither count thyself wise beyond measure". Delusion of superior wisdom is a sure sign of spiritual blindness (John 9:26-34). The truly wise man knows the plague of his own heart (1 Kings 8:38) and is teachable (Ps.25:4-9).

"why shouldst thou destroy thyself" - The word for "destroy" is shamem - to stun; devastate or stupefy. It is rendered "desolate" in Ps.143:4 and other places. The desolation referred to is the stunning emptiness felt by one, who imagining himself to be righteous and wise, is rejected at the Judgement Seat (Matt.7:21-23).

V.17 - "Be not overmuch wicked, neither be thou foolish" - Roth.: "Do not be so very lawless". This is the antithesis of V.16 and is a corrective to those who perceiving hypocrisy masked by religious mania in some decide that they will go in the opposite direction to escape it. This reasoning, which is often an excuse to evade spiritual responsibility for which they have no liking, will not stand in the day of judgement any more than hypocritical self-righteousness. Lawlessness and folly lead to certain destruction.

"why shouldst thou die before thy time" - "Time" here is eth signifying proper or fitting time. There are some who have met premature death because of wickedness and folly (Num.16:31-33; Acts 5:3-10).

Bro. Sargent usefully comments on verses 16 and 17 as follows:

Can any man be too righteous? Experience of human nature suggests both an answer and an explanation. There is such a thing as a morbid scrupulosity which can lead on the one hand to self-righteousness, or on the other to a sin-obsession which throws the mind out of balance. To men it may appear righteousness, but it is in fact a spiritual disease and may develop into a mental one. Its root is in the human ego which seeks to outshine others in a chosen field of endeavour. That egotism may lead to the downright hypocrisy of the men denounced by the Lord Jesus who tried to get the best of both worlds by ostentatious alms, prayer and fasting, and - if only they knew it - had received in this world their only reward. But men without deliberate insincerity (and women certainly no less) may be driven by a disguised egotism to compete in piety. Or it may be fear - the fear that "hath torment" - which drives to an excess of zeal or a busy censoriousness as a cover for something within on which the heart scarcely dares to look. Such religiosity is an expression of the "I" within us, and is self-destructive - always spiritually, sometimes mentally, and occasionally even physically.

V.18 - "It is good that thou shouldst take hold of this; yea, also from this withdraw not thine hand" - Roth.: "It is well that thou shouldst lay fast hold of this, but even from the other do not withdraw thy hand". The issues of verses 16 and 17 are too important to be ignored or lightly treated. The danger of self-righteousness and self-will is ever present in human experience. There is a need to be vigilant in self examination to ensure motives are pure. This is the approach that Solomon encourages here.

"for he that feareth God shall come forth of them all" - Roth.: "for he that revereth God shall come forth out of them all". The truly righteous who revere God, and appreciate his work in their lives (V.13) will avoid the pitfalls of religious fanaticism on the one hand, and lawlessness on the other. The "them all" class are those on either side of the spectrum for whom destruction is the only possible outcome.

To "come forth" must be a reference to the ultimate outcome and obtaining eternal life as a reward for righteousness.

Bro. Sargent again comments succinctly on this point:

He does not recommend a safe and moderate mixture of righteousness and wickedness: there is no such thing. The model he holds up is the man who can steer his course in the world through all the contrary perversions of human nature and come out uncorrupted, and that can be achieved on one principle: "he that feareth God shall come forth of them all". The foundation for spiritual and mental health is that godly awe which is the first principle of wisdom, and the righteousness of which there can be too much is not the righteousness of faith.

V.19 - "Wisdom strengtheneth the wise more than ten mighty men which are in the city" - The words "mighty men" is the one Hebrew word shalliyt signifying potent; a prince or warrior. Int. Bible: "Wisdom makes the wise stronger than ten rulers who are in the city". This principle is illustrated in the history of Israel (2 Sam.20:16-22; Ecc.9:15). Just one man or woman with wisdom is better than ten (ordinal perfection = all) rulers who may attempt to defend a city without wisdom. Similarly, spiritual wisdom strongly fortifies those who have it against the incursions of wickedness.

V.20 - "For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not" - This is a commentary on V.19, and is a corrective to the possible thought that the wise may be able to overcome in their own strength. No "man" (adam) is "righteous" (Roth.) of himself, nor is it possible for him to be sinless (1 Kings 8:46; Rom.3:23). Thus self-confidence is undermined so that confidence may be placed in God alone.

V.21 - "Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee" - Roth.: "reviling thee". This is the second reason advanced to avoid over confidence in our own strength. All men have weaknesses and these are readily seen by others. And though not all words spoken are either wise or true, we need to be cognisant that others will talk negatively about our real or imagined inconsistencies and failures. If this fact is remembered it will curb over-confidence in our own ability and wisdom.

V.22 - "For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others" - The word for "curse" here and in verse 21 is qalal signifying, to be light, lit. swift, small, sharp. It is widely used and seems to have the idea here of making light of someone, even perhaps without animosity. Solomon observed in others, and experienced in himself, this human failing. Men are prone to pulling down others by gossip or unwarranted criticism. Others have done this to us, and we have done it to others, even if only in our heart. To acknowledge this is a corrective to pride and self-confidence of the kind that produces the "righteous over much" characteristics of verse 16.

Vv.23-24 - Ultimate Wisdom Unfathomable

All that Solomon had observed he had put to the test that he might understand it in a practical sense, but as he pursued wisdom in these matters, he discovered the limitations of human nature. Clearly frustrated, he now laments the finite, limited ability given to man to perceive the true depths of wisdom.

V.23 - "All this have I proved by wisdom: I said, I will be wise; but it was far from me" - Solomon's quest for the ultimate good had led him to practically test every avenue of human experience. The aim was to increase his already superior wisdom, but this result eluded him. When he went on to seek to fathom the ultimate nature of events he was baffled. Solomon came face to face with the limitations of human perception to cope with the boundless wisdom and works of God (Job 28:21; Deut.29:29).

V.24 - "That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out?" - Roth.: "Far away is that which hath been, - and deep, deep, who can find it out?" Divine knowledge and wisdom is beyond the capacity of man to fathom (Ps.139:6; Rom.11:32-34). Solomon found ultimate wisdom totally eluded him. There were many complexities and anomalies in life too deep to fathom; and if he could not understand them, who can? All this leads back to his counsel in verses 13-14. It is far better to quietly accept the work of God and cooperate with Him, for there is nothing beyond Him.

Vv.25-29 - Wisdom Reveals the True Nature of Wickedness

Since the depths of wisdom cannot be plumbed by man's diligent enquiry or speculation, Solomon turns to an examination of the practical application of wisdom. By applying wisdom in a practical way the true folly and wickedness of man's nature is revealed.

V.25 - "I applied mine heart to know, and to search out, and to seek out wisdom, and the reason of things" - Roth.: "Resolved I in my heart to know and search out, and to seek wisdom and a conclusion". Solomon has seen the pointlessness and impossibility of discerning that which is inscrutable and exceedingly deep, but he sought to come to a verdict on the operation of human nature in the practical sphere.

"and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness" - Roth.: "and to know lawlessness to be stupidity, and folly to be madness". This translation gives the sense. The application of practical wisdom which Solomon has used to test the whole range of human behaviour has shown conclusively that a lawless way of life is utter stupidity, and folly is madness. He had seen human behaviour in its true character.

V.26 - "And I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands" - A particular class of woman is in view here. The similarity in both ideas and wording to the Strange Woman of Proverbs 5:3-6 and 7:5-17 is unmistakable. Solomon was to experience in life the bitterness of being ensnared by such women (1 Kings 11:3). The bitterness worse than death lies in the fact that once entangled a man cannot escape their influence (as Solomon found), whereas at least in death a man finds rest from contention and temptation.

"whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her" - Roth.: "whoso is pleasing God shall escape from her, but he that sinneth shall be captured by her". To please God requires faith (Heb.11:6), which produces obedience to His law. Possessors of this faith are able to avoid this type of woman who typifies all the fleshly attractions of the world that appeal to man's baser instincts (Prov.5:7-8; 4:14-15), but "the simple pass on and are punished" (Prov.9:13-18; 22:3).

V.27 - "Behold, this have I found, saith the preacher, counting one by one, to find out the account" - Roth.: "See! this have I found, saith the Proclaimer counting one by one to find a conclusion". One by one Solomon sifted through the issues of life, building one fact upon another and weighing one truth against another, expecting to finally arrive at a firm conclusion. But he did not find it! What he did discover was the evident perversion of human nature and his own real need for redemption through one who would be able to successfully deal with the problems of human nature.

V.28 - "Which yet my soul seeketh, but I find not" - Roth.: "what my soul still sought yet I found not". Int. Bible: "That my soul still seeks". The search was endless and the end unattainable.

"one man among a thousand have I found" - To the Hebrew a thousand represented a family. And because the word "man" is adam, the family referred to here is the family of Adam. Solomon has already observed that "there is not a just man (adam) upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not" (V.20), and he has acknowledged his own failure, especially in the matter of women (V.26). Who then could he have in mind? It seems clear that Solomon looked to the promised seed of David to achieve what no other man could achieve. That one would be the promised redeemer of the family of Adam (Gen.3:15).

"but a woman among all those have I not found" - Returning to his previous theme of women in verse 26, Solomon reveals that his research had shown that the true frailty of womankind was in a greater tendency even than men to be beguiled by self-deception when desire pulls (2 Cor.11:3). He noted the truth that "the woman, being deceived (utterly), was in the transgression" (1 Tim.2:14), and looked beyond to "the childbearing" (i.e. the birth of Christ) as mankind's only hope (1 Tim.2:15).

V.29 - "Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions" - Like Eve who was deceived by the prospect of grasping equality with the Elohim only to meet failure and shame, Solomon's quest to search out things too deep for him (V.24) has brought him to the acknowledgement of failure to find the good which he sought. God did indeed make man 'upright' in His own image and likeness (Gen.1:26), but men have sought out numerous contrivances and "devices" (Roth.) for their own pleasure. God could not be blamed for Solomon's failure. No one has ever sought out as many devices as Solomon had done in his quest, only to prove that all is vanity and vexation of spirit.

Ecclesiastes 7
WISDOM'S QUALITIES

V.1	WISDOM	does "good" things - not just talk
V.4	"	faces life's problems with "reason"
V.5	"	is able to suffer rebuke
V.7	"	is not bribed by the false release provided by mirth
V.9	"	does not corrupt sound judgement by premature anger
V.10	"	looks to the future and does not mourn the past (is an opportunist)
V.13-14	"	will accept prosperity joyfully with contentment, and equally accepts adversity thoughtfully, without despair or regret
V.15	"	is not self righteous
V.18	"	fears God
V.20	"	acknowledges sin
V.22	"	is honest to oneself (self effacing) - Yet is merciful to others

Chapter 8

THE TEST AND VALUE OF WISDOM

Continuing to test the value of wisdom, Solomon now turns to consider wisdom when subject to higher powers. The arbitrary power of kings provides a special test for wisdom in its practical manifestation. Similarly, the moral governance of God calls for reverence and humble submission, for the righteous are in the hand of God. Inexorably, as Solomon proceeds he is drawn to include more and more into his considerations the supremacy and righteousness of God; a trend which has already been evident in chapter 7. His study of the vanity of life and the value of wisdom is compelling him towards his final conclusion: "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole man" (Ecc.12:13).

The contents of the chapter can be summarised as follows:

Ecclesiastes 8	
THE TEST OF ONE WHO BEHOLDS THE SUN (7:11)	
V.1	Wisdom can be seen in the physical countenance
V.2-8	Wisdom: circumspect under authority
V.9-13	Know that God is the final arbiter of moral qualities
V.14	Don't wrestle with anomalies
V.15	Mirth (gladness) is better than anxiety
V.16 - 9:1	The final analysis reveals a real advantage for the wise - They are in the hand of God.
= PROVIDENCE	

Vv.1-8 - Wisdom Under Authority

Probably verse 1 of this chapter sits more comfortably with the themes of chapter 7, but it forms the bridge to the theme which follows in chapter 8 - wisdom tested under authority; i.e. the wisdom shown by one who beholds the sun (7:11).

V.1 - "Who is as the wise man? and who knoweth the interpretation of a thing?" - Roth.: "Who is really a wise man?" The question seeks to emphasise the value of wisdom. Solomon is asking, Who can be compared to the wise man? Who can excel him? However, he does not have himself in mind here, for he has already declared his own failure to "interpret" the deep things (7:23-24). Ultimately, he has in view the "one among a thousand" of chapter 7:28 - the Lord Jesus Christ. There is a sense however in which what follows is applicable to the wise in every generation "who behold the sun" (7:11).

"a man's wisdom maketh his face to shine" - For the face to shine requires reflection of divine light. A literal example of this was Moses whose face shone through conversing face to face with the angel of Yahweh's presence (Ex.34:29-35; Isa.63:9; 2 Cor.3:7). The real shining of divine light though, is in the display of Yahweh's character by a way of life (2 Cor.4:6-7; John 1:14). Wisdom is displayed in action, so as a man grows in wisdom and his life increasingly reflects divine attributes, it can be said his face (identity/character) shines.

"and the boldness of his face shall be changed" - The word "boldness" is rendered as "hardness" by Youngs Literal and "strength" by Int. Bible. The idea is of the coarseness and hardness of man's natural thinking and outlook. Wisdom, as it increases, softens and begins to change the hardness of man's outlook. Even in the physical realm the harsh facial appearance of unregenerate man (often

seen in its most pronounced form in the incorrigibly wicked) seems to be ameliorated by the effect of divine wisdom.

V.2 - "I counsel thee to keep the king's commandment, and that in regard of the oath of God" -

The wisdom to which Solomon has referred in verse 1 reveals itself in subjection to appointed authority, for it understands the true character of human nature, and avoids the folly of rebellion against divinely constituted authority (Rom.13:1-2). But in Israel there was special reason to submit to the king, for they were appointed by Yahweh (at least initially) to rule His people. The oath of God was involved, and this could not be lightly regarded.

V.3 - "Be not hasty to go out of his sight" - Roth.: "Not rashly from his presence shouldst thou go".

Quiet resignation to the will of the king is the only wise course for the servant. Solomon has advised this course in regard to God (7:13-14). The practical test of whether men would submit to God was seen in their attitude towards God's appointed ruler. To chafe with resentment against authority is an act of rebellion tantamount to seeking to be free from the overshadowing authority of God that we might go our own way.

"stand not in an evil thing; for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him" - Roth.: "do not take thy stand

in a vexatious thing, - for whatsoever he pleaseth he will do". It is useless to oppose the will of the king, for absolute power resides with him. Nothing but harm can come from this folly (Rom.13:2-3). This of course is not to ignore those cases where resistance to kingly authority was justified; e.g. Dan.3:16-18 (Acts 5:29).

V.4 - "Where the word of a king is, there is power: and who may say unto him, What doest thou?" -

This amplifies verse 3 and brings home the sovereign power of the king. Unquestioning submission to the king (except where it conflicts with the law of God) is the characteristic of those who know their position before God and humbly submit to Him (1 Pet.5:5-6). The humble attitude of servants is required of those who are heirs to kingship (Gal.4:1).

V.5 - "Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing" - Roth.: "He that observeth the

commandment will not notice a vexatious thing". The word "keepeth" is shamar - to guard, hedge about. "Feel" is yada - to know by experience. Solomon is not suggesting that no evil thing ever crosses the path of the righteous. His point in the context is that submission to the king's commandment will evoke no punishment from the king who "doeth whatsoever pleaseth him". Obedience to authority will bring peace (Rom.13:1-8).

"and a wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgement" - Roth.: "and of time and manner

will the heart of the wise take note". In dealing with authority the wise man manifests a sense of timing and of acceptable manner. He is cautious to do nothing that would occasion the wrath or displeasure of the king. And yet it is impossible, because of the nature of man, to get everything right all the time, as Solomon now shows.

V.6 - "Because to every purpose there is time and judgement, therefore the misery of man is great upon him" -

Roth.: "For to every pursuit there is a time and a manner, when the vexation of man is great concerning it". In every pursuit there is the question of "time" and the need for judgement as to the right way to approach a matter. Because man will not always be right and cannot always choose the right time to act, "misery" (ra - evil) will be the outcome.

V.7 - "For he knoweth not that which shall be: for who can tell him when it shall be?" - Man's

limitations in making right judgements about the way to approach issues, centre around his inability to know what shall be in the future. God alone has the power to foresee the future. In matters relating to His purpose He has revealed the future through the prophets (Amos 3:7), but in matters pertaining to man's personal life generally He does not choose, except in some unique cases, to reveal the future.

V.8 - "There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death" -

Roth.: "...and none have power over the day of death". The word "spirit" is ruach - breath; life. There is one thing in which a man can certainly not foretell, and that is the day of his death. When that day comes according to God's "times" concerning him, he has no power to delay or prevent his demise.

"and there is no discharge in that war" - The word for "discharge" is mishlachath signifying, release.

Rotherham renders it "furlough" (or leave - cp. Deut.20:1-8). The word for "war" is milchamah - battle. There is no release from man's battle with death. It is man's constant and ever present enemy, and

there is never a moment in mortal life when he is free from the contentions of sin and death (Gen.3:17-19; Rom.7:14-24).

"neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it" - Bringing his consideration of wisdom manifested under earthly authority to a climax, Solomon shows that even the tyrant will come to his end by death sooner or later, and so the wise man will bide his time and not try and force events by rebellion. No amount of power on earth can keep a man from capitulating to his greatest enemy - death.

Vv.9-13 - God is the Final Arbiter of Morality

Typical of Solomon's approach in this book, as soon as he makes a statement that death can relieve the wise from the machinations of the wicked, he provides his own response to show that this is not always the outcome. Often one wicked ruler is replaced by another, and as he has shown previously, life is full of perplexing anomalies that no man can fully understand. It is these things that have brought Solomon to the conclusion that all is vanity. But in all this, and as great as the anomalies of life are, Solomon sees shining through, three fundamental and related truths: (1) that God is moral Governor in the world; (2) that there is a judgement to come; and (3) that there will be a future for the righteous.

V.9 - "All this have I seen, and applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun" - Solomon's enquiry was not limited or selective. He had tested all avenues of human experience and closely observed every facet of human behaviour. His conclusions are therefore undeniably sound.

"there is a time wherein one man ruleth over another to his own hurt" - RSV: "while man (adam) lords it over man (adam) to his hurt". Tyranny of rulers is a universal and perpetual evil among men. Wisdom will submit to authority even when it is corrupt, but is sorely tested when the hoped for relief that it is anticipated on the death of the tyrant fails to materialise because he is replaced by another corrupt ruler.

V.10 - "And so I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done" - There is considerable variation in the way this verse is translated. Rotherham renders it: "And thereupon I considered the lawless when buried when they had entered (their graves) that from the place of the Holy One they used to go and boast in the city that they had so done". Bro. Sargent quotes Ibn Ezra whose reading of the passage is as follows: "I saw the wicked who rule over their fellow-men, and tyrannize over them, die without anguish, and they came into the world a second time (i.e. their children succeed in their places and perpetuate them); whilst those who departed from the holy place (i.e. the holy ones) die without issue, and are forgotten in the city where they were, and these are they who executed justice". Whichever reading is followed, the point being made in this verse is that anomalies do exist. The wicked seem to prosper, and they and their posterity seem to enjoy longevity, while the righteous sometimes die prematurely without heirs. Furthermore, the wicked are often praised in death and receive an honourable burial. Because of this anomaly, wicked men are hardened in their way.

V.11 - "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" - Roth.: "Because sentence against a wicked work is not executed speedily - on this account the heart of the sons of men is fully set within them to commit wickedness". Man's carnal thinking with its animal like and amoral qualities fears only one thing - punishment. When this is withheld or delayed, the heart is fixed in an evil course. This is a severe test for the righteous (Ps.73).

V.12 - "Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him" - Roth.: "Though a sinner be committing wickedness a hundred times and continuing long in his own way yet I surely know that it shall be well to them who revere God, who stand in awe before him". A hundred times implies unceasingly. It matters not how long wickedness is perpetuated, God has ultimate control and will judge righteously. Death and oblivion finally claim the long-lived sinner, but however brief the days of the God-fearer, his life has substance because God has regard for him. Solomon's words convey complete confidence in God's moral governance over human affairs. It matters not what anomalies exist, the only wise course is to stand in awe of God and wait for His judgement. The strong implication of Solomon's words is that this will be at the resurrection of the dead.

Ecclesiastes 8:12-13

V.12 Though a ¹sinner seem to prolong *his* days and does evil an hundred times, I know it shall be **well** with ²them that fear God (i.e. their life will be prolonged), **because they fear before him**.

V.13 but it will not be well with the ¹wicked, neither will *he* prolong his days like a shadow because *he* feareth **not** God.

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| 1. THE WICKED | - his life is only a shadow however long he prolong it (= nothingness) |
| 2. THE GOD-FEARER | - however brief his life it has substance since God regards him |

V.13 - "But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God" - This verse provides the balance to verse 12. The life of the wicked is really only a brief shadow in the passage of time, and then it is gone (Ps.90:1-10; 37:9-10). The key issue here is Solomon's teaching that perpetuation of life beyond its brief mortal state is contingent on 'fearing God'.

Vv.14-15 - The Futility of Wrestling with Anomalies

Solomon's mind has been exercised by inexplicable anomalies which have only served to increase his sense of the vanity of life. However, shining through the gloom has been a certainty that all is in the hand of God, and that He will resolve all the issues in due time. The only worthwhile course for man is to submit to present evils in the fear of God and with the full assurance that it shall be well with him that does so. This leads Solomon to summarise his findings and to conclude that a man is best served by making the most of the blessings God has given him to enjoy, bound as it is, within the limited confines of mortal life with all its anomalies.

V.14 - "there be just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked" - Righteousness is not always rewarded in this life. In fact, the righteous often suffer in the way that a sinner might expect to be punished (Job 9:22).

"again, there be wicked men, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous" - Wickedness is not always punished in this life. In fact, the wicked seem to enjoy blessings that most would presume belong to the righteous (Job 21:7-18 RV; Ps.73:3; Jer.12:1). This anomaly has been a source of grievance to many of God's faithful servants, but it exists and is allowed to exist for the purpose of perfecting the righteous. If men are able to quietly trust in God, in faith that it shall be well with them that fear Him, they will be perfected through trial and chastisement that they might be His sons (Heb.12:1-11; 2:9-18; 2 Cor.12:7-10). Christ was the supreme example of this process (Isa.53). The reason the wicked sometimes do not suffer for their sins is that God has no purpose with them. Therefore the wicked are subject to time and chance. They may prosper; they may suffer: nothing eternal is achieved by either state.

V.15 - "Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry" - Roth.: "Then extolled I gladness, in that there was nothing better for a man under the sun, than to eat and to drink and to be glad". "Mirth" here is simchah and has the idea of gladness or blithesomeness; i.e. a happy contentment. Solomon returns to the conclusion he has reached several times previously in the book that enjoying the simple things of life is the greatest good that can be derived from this life (Ecc.2:24; 3:22; 5:18).

"for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun" - Roth.: "since that should tarry with him in his toil". There is nothing permanent in this life; nor can man secure eternally those things he acquires by his enterprise and schemes during mortal life. Only one thing tarries with him for a brief while, and that is a sense of gladness and contentment that God has given him the simple things of life to enjoy as a result of his labour. But only those who know that this is all that can be expected from human life will be content with such an outcome.

Theme - That which is "GOOD" in human life	
2:24	"nothing better - enjoy good in his labour" - " <u>under the sun</u> " (V.22)
3:13	"every man should eat and drink and receive the good of all his labour" - " <u>under the sun</u> " (V.16)
3:22	"nothing better - a man should rejoice in his own works for that is his portion"
5:18-20	"it is good and comely to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh" - " <u>under the sun</u> "
8:15	"no better thing <u>under the sun</u> than to eat and drink and be merry"

Vv.16-17 - The Inscrutability of the Work of God

Having arrived once again at the conclusion that it is best to avoid frustration over anomalies and simply extract the enjoyment that labour offers in the simple things of life, Solomon now concludes again that it is beyond man to comprehend all the work of God. The man is deluded who thinks he has unravelled God's workings.

V.16 - "When I applied mine heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth" - This Solomon had done with an interest and intensity few have ever brought to the enquiry before or since. He was no mere spectator of human behaviour, but a full participant in all the experiences of human life. His conclusion can be absolutely relied upon.

"(for also there is that neither day nor night seeth sleep with his eyes)" - Roth.: "then surely by day and by night there was one who suffered not his eyes to sleep". The strong implication is that this one was Solomon himself. His diligent study of these perplexing issues robbed him of sleep because he was determined to unravel the issues.

V.17 - "Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun" - God's ways are too deep for any finite mortal mind to fully grasp (Job 5:9-14; 11:6-9; Ps.139:6; Rom.11:33-34). Though Solomon had laboured long and hard, he had to admit defeat - God's wisdom and workings among men were too deep for him (Ecc.7:23-24).

"though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it" - None was wiser than Solomon (1 Kings 4:29-34). If he was unable to fathom God's workings by diligent enquiry, what chance does any other man have. His real point is that it is much better to accept the realities as they are, and to quietly trust in God to work in those that fear Him. He will justify them in due time. "Wisdom is justified of her children" (Matt.11:19).

Chapter 9

THE RIGHTEOUS IN THE HAND OF GOD

Chapter 9 to verse 16 is essentially part of the same argument which has occupied Solomon's mind since he began his reconsideration of wisdom in chapter 7:15. Diligently he has picked his way through a maze of anomalies and enigmas in life "under the sun", and slowly but surely there is emerging a certainty and assurance that the righteous are in the hand of God, and that, despite all the perplexing anomalies, it shall ultimately be well with them that fear Him.

The contents of this chapter, and its relationship to chapter 8, can be summarised as follows:

Ecclesiastes 9	
V.1	The wise - in the hand of God
V.2	"Time and chance" - A law allowed by God - Its seeming injustice
V.3-10	An aside - Attitudes determine destiny
	(a) The wicked - To perish
	(b) The righteous - Sojourners with an ultimate objective
V.11-12	Ambition brings sure frustration
V.13-16	Wisdom - does not necessarily bring worldly honour

FUNDAMENTAL AND RELATED TRUTHS OF CHP.8 & 9	
1.	God: the moral governor of the world
2.	There is a judgement to come
3.	There is a future for the righteous

Vv.1-3 - Similarity of Events in the Lives of Righteous and Wicked

Faced with the reality that it is impossible to tell from the occurrence of prosperity or affliction whether God's attitude towards men is one of "love" (as for Jacob) or "hatred" (as for Esau), Solomon now comes to the conclusion that like events overtake both righteous and wicked, but with one essential difference: the righteous are in the hand of God.

V.1 - "For all this I considered in my heart even to declare all this" - This conclusion came only after painstaking effort, but once reached, Solomon felt compelled to declare (Int. Bible: "explain") it to others for their eternal well-being.

"that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God" - Having declared the inability of man to comprehend all the intricacies of God's dealings with the human race (8:17), Solomon was nevertheless certain of one great fact; that the righteous who know God's will and perform it, are in His power. Their destiny is in His hands. Though triumph and tragedy might be mingled together in their experience it is all part of God's working in their lives for their ultimate good (Rom.8:28; Phil.2:13). It is for this reason that the wise will commit their way unto Yahweh (Prov.3:6).

"no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them" - RSV: "whether it is love or hate man does not know. Everything before them is vanity". The sense of this statement seems to be that man is unable to tell whether the circumstances that overtake both righteous and wicked men in life are an expression either of love or hatred by God. All the experiences of life testify that all is vanity, and all men are subject to it. We must note that Solomon does not say that the wicked are in the hand

of God: only the righteous. Therefore, though man cannot always tell whether "love" or "hatred" is at work, the righteous alone are able to trust that God's love is manifest towards them in all the circumstances of life.

V.2 - "All things come alike to all" - Roth.: "Every one was like every one else". This is an extension of verse 1, and in particular an expansion of the phrase: "all that is before them". The seeming lack of discrimination in the lives of the righteous and the wicked leads to the conclusion that "all things come alike to all". Solomon observed that life is a mixture of good and bad, regardless of moral or religious distinctions. Finally too, one event is shared by all - death claims all mortal men.

"there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked" - Roth.: "one destiny had the righteous and the lawless". Death is the relentless enemy of men. Whether men are "righteous" or "wicked"; "good" and "clean" or "unclean"; make a practise of sacrificing or never sacrifice; make commitments to God or refrain; there is one end for all "under the sun", and that is death. This fact provides a test for men. In view of this, will they choose righteousness in the sure knowledge that it "shall be well with them that fear God" (8:12), or because there is no immediate retribution of sin (8:11), will they choose lawlessness and "enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (Heb.11:25)? Solomon's observation was that most choose the latter, wittingly or unwittingly.

V.3 - "This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all" - Roth.: "This was a misfortune in all that was done under the sun, that one destiny had they all". To Solomon this was the greatest of all evils he had discovered, that whether righteous or wicked, all experienced one destiny "under the sun". And yet it was this very fact that led him inexorably to "the conclusion of the whole matter" (12:13). The utter vanity of human life is designed to cause men to focus on higher things and seek diligently for what is eternal. But it does not have this effect on most men.

"yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live" - The word "evil" (ra - bad, evil) is rendered "wickedness" by Rotherham. The word "madness" is howlelah signifying folly. For the phrase "while they live", the Interlinear Bible translates, "throughout their lives". The folly of men is manifest by their determined pursuit of wickedness which can never satisfy, and has no abiding future.

"and after that they go to the dead" - This self evident truth needs to be stated, though all men know the truth of it (1 Cor.15:22; Ps.49:7-20). The full acknowledgement of this fact is the first step in men taking the decision to look up and "see the sun" (7:11) and seek redemption where it may be found.

Vv.4-6 - Life Offers Hope and Opportunity

Solomon has brought his argument to the point where the issues of life and death are staring him in the face. He has considered the greatest of all evils under the sun, and observed that most men plunge blindly on through life set on a course of evil which ends in the oblivion of death. The righteous too are claimed by death, but with this essential difference - they are "in the hand of God". Solomon now emphasises the value of using the opportunity of life itself to pursue higher and meaningful things, for death brings an end to all opportunity.

V.4 - "For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion" - The word for "hope" here is bittachown signifying trust. It comes from the root batach - to hie for refuge; to trust, to be confident. One commentator has written of the word: "a strong word in the Hebrew implying a vivid and strong expectation of recovery, etc. It is translated 'confidence' in 2 Kings 18:19; Isa.36:4." Solomon's point is that the very finality of death which claims all without exception reveals one supreme value which the living possess - hope. At least while living men can assess their position, understand their finiteness and mortality, and choose to shape their lives accordingly. But in death there is only oblivion - there is no scope for changing anything. This fact is illustrated by a forceful metaphor. The most powerful of men, now deceased (represented by the dead lion) are no match for the lowliest of living men (represented by the living dog). Life means a continuance of opportunity - death obliterates the grandest human schemes and the most majestic of human pretensions.

V.5 - "For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything" - Knowing that one will die in this context is not merely an academic acknowledgement that all men die. All men know this, but not all respond to the knowledge in any meaningful way. Death is only a reality to them when

they are directly confronted with it, and then it is usually too late. Life provides opportunity and the wise will use this to full advantage. The fool plunges on into oblivion where they cannot know anything.

"neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten" - Men live for "reward" (sakar - payment of contract; compensation, benefit) and to be remembered by their peers and posterity (Ps.49:11,18), but death denies them even this (Ps.41:5; 88:10; 115:17). Experience of life soon shows how quickly the names and memory of once famous men disappear into oblivion.

V.6 - "Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished" - These are the emotions which are the driving force behind man's pursuit of "reward" in this life and notoriety among men. "Love" is ahabah - affection. Man's affections are set where his treasures are found (Matt.6:21). Hatred and envy are works of the flesh which are displayed where men are in competition for things in this life (1 Tim.6:9-11; Titus 3:2-3). These emotions which consume men perish in death. The word "perished" is abad and signifies to wander away; i.e. lose oneself; hence to perish.

"neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun" - Roth.: "and portion had they none any longer unto times age-abiding, in aught that was done under the sun". It is important to note that Solomon is talking here only of the arena of human life - mortality ("under the sun"). That is all the wicked have and they lose their portion when death strikes. And so do the righteous, to all appearances, but in their case the future is in the hand of God. They die in the assurance that "all shall be well for him that feareth God".

How can a man experience "GOOD"?

KEY

2:25, 26

"For apart from God, who can eat and enjoy? (RSV)

The way to experience "GOOD"!

9:7-10

The key to finding the true expressions of life which lead to joy in the living God

Whilst "GOOD" is a practical feasibility, there are so many barriers and turns of chance a man confronts which render it almost beyond worthwhile experience.

Vv.7-10 - Successful Living in the Shadow of Death

Having shown that the living have the advantage over the dead, in that they have opportunity to act wisely and order their lives in relation to eternal things, Solomon now shows that once a proper direction has been established in life, there are some things even in this life of vanity which are given deeper meaning and can provide continuing enjoyment. It all depends on perspective. When the perspective is right there can be contentment with the simple things that God has given man to enjoy.

V.7 - "Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart" - The direct counsel to "go thy way" is not a call for men to pursue their own way, but rather an exhortation to use the opportunities life offers. There is no point in brooding over the unfathomable and unalterable. God has given man certain things to enjoy, and if he has the proper perspective on life he will not seek beyond the simple things for fulfilment in mortal life. Solomon has made this point several times before (2:24; 3:13; 3:22; 5:18-20; 8:15).

"for God now accepteth thy works" - RV - "for God hath already accepted thy works". In the context Solomon has not been addressing the subject of reconciliation with God, but rather man's "reconciliation" with the realities of life. He does not mean here that when a man has made his peace with God, then God will accept his works. His meaning is that because the good things of life have been established as part of the order of nature, God has shown that their use is not unacceptable to Him so long as He is remembered as the Giver (1 Tim.4:3-5).

V.8 - "Let thy garments be always white" - The language here must be taken in a figurative way for Solomon could not be advising men to be always "gorgeously apparelled". White garments are a symbol for moral purity and righteous works (Rev.19:8). He is speaking graphically of an attitude of mind. There is a need to seek enjoyment even in the simple things only within the confines of God's

commandments. For example, a man may eat and drink with great pleasure, but if what he consumes is not from his own labour, but rightly belongs to someone else, then his "garments" are not white.

"and let thy head lack no ointment" - The word for "ointment" is shemen and refers to oil. Again, this is not a recommendation to be constantly anointed with perfumed oil. The figure stands for an attitude of mind formed by the influence of the word of God (oil). Solomon goes on to speak of monogamous marriage in the next verse. A man with the proper attitude of mind will not seek to enjoy the pleasures of marriage outside of that which God has ordained (Prov.6:32).

V.9 - "Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity" - Roth.: "Enjoy life". The word "joyfully" is actually ra'ah which means, to see (note AV margin). To "see" life is to make the most of opportunity (vv.4-7). Properly founded and viewed with the "anointed head" attitude, marriage provides one of the greatest blessings man can enjoy in this life from God (Prov.18:22). But there are some qualifications! Note Solomon says, "whom thou lovest". This implies maintenance of the first love of marriage so that it might mature into a permanent property of the relationship. Without this, enjoyment is unlikely to be maintained "all the days of the life of thy vanity". Here is another qualification which is twice emphasised. "All the days of thy vanity" is a solemn reminder that no experience of human life is permanent. The very best of human relationships are terminated by death. They can only be enjoyed while there is life, and then only properly within the bounds of God's law (V.8).

"for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun" - Labour ceases, and the portion ends when death intervenes (V.6). Wise men will whole-heartedly use the legitimate blessings God has given, recognising that it is all He is able to give in this mortal life of vanity "under the sun".

V.10 - "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest" - The word "device" is cheshbown - contrivance; by imp. intelligence. The root word means to plait; to weave or fabricate. The mind of man which seeks out many inventions is stilled in the grave. There is no communication between brain and hand there! So Solomon's counsel is to use every opportunity to the fullest. A mind "anointed with oil" will direct the hands in diligent and enthusiastic labour, within the bounds of God's law, and while there is life to enjoy the good things God has given.

KOHELETH'S CONCLUSIONS		
LIFE UNDER THE SUN (Anomalies)		LIVING WITH GOD (Unseen security)
Experience reveals anomalies 7:15; 8:10; 14:9; 3:11-16	1	God's moral control assures ultimate results 8:12,13; 9:1
Man's inability to understand God's ways 7:24; 8:16-17; 9:1	2	Man must learn to accept God's benefits 8:15; 9:7-9
Time and chance limit man by... (a) unforeseen events 8:7; 9:11-12 (b) the inevitable end 8:8; 9:2,5,6,10	3	Life provides opportunities to share the providence of God 9:1,7,10
"Time and chance happeneth to them all."		"The righteous and their works are in the hand of God."

Vv.11-12 - A Warning of the Uncertainties of Life

In typical fashion, Solomon, having counselled the diligent use of opportunity, now warns that even a positive and enthusiastic approach to life is sometimes frustrated by events beyond man's control. There are many uncertainties in life which can cut short the ambitions of men.

V.11 - "I returned, and saw under the sun" - This is Solomon's characteristic way of circling back on his conclusions and adding qualifications which, while not negating them, certainly add to the sense of vanity which he felt in life "under the sun". Three times he uses the expression "I returned" for a similar purpose (cp. 4:1,7).

"the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill" - To attain to any objective in life men must develop certain aptitudes and abilities, yet the goal cannot be assured by any amount of physical agility, strength, wisdom, understanding or skill. Solomon's advice to approach all worthy objectives with "might" (V.10) has to be qualified by the observation that outcomes sometimes do not encourage such enthusiasm or diligence. The able and diligent man is sometimes thwarted by circumstances beyond his control, while others with less diligence and purpose seem to prosper.

"but time and chance happeneth to them all" - Int. Bible: "for time and occurrence happen to them all". Roth.: "for time and accident happened to them all". The word "chance" is pega - impact; from the root paga meaning to impinge, by accident or violence. Consistent with his proposition earlier in the chapter (vv.1-3) that "all things come alike to all", Solomon observes that all men "under the sun" are subject to events and occurrences of which they have no warning, and over which they have no control. This must include the righteous who "are in the hand of God" as experience shows. Mortality (or life "under the sun") exposes man to the "one event unto all" (V.3) which may strike suddenly and unpredictably. The essential difference between the righteous and the wicked is that while death means oblivion and a complete end for the wicked, the righteous are in the hand of God and are subject to His will and purpose in their end. They alone can have confidence amidst the vagaries of mortal life "that it shall be well with them that fear God" (8:12), for "he that feareth God shall come forth of them all" (7:18).

This passage raises the whole question of divine providence in the lives of saints. There will inevitably be some difference of opinion as to how exactly "time and chance" work in the lives of saints, especially when accidental or premature death occurs. The following extract from "The Ways of Providence" by Bro. Robert Roberts is worth reading carefully, as indeed is the whole chapter on Providence (pgs.1-7).

TIME AND CHANCE

There is such a thing as chance, as distinct from what God does. The Bible declares this (Ecc.9:11) and the experience of every day teaches it. Every moment teems with the incidents of chance. The whirl of a cloud of dust before the windy gust coming round the corner of the house illustrates the point. God has control of all chance; but all chance is not controlled. It is controlled when His purpose requires it. His purpose does not require Him to decide which shells every or any child on the sea-shore shall pick up and which throw away, unless the incident be a link in the purpose being worked out, and then the hand of the child will be guided. This illustration touches a great fact which it is important to see clearly.

A first idea to be mastered in apprehending the ways of providence is the relation of the universe to God. All things are in Him, and He, though personally located in the highest heaven, is everywhere present by the Spirit, which is His substance in diffusion, so to speak. Nevertheless, God is different from His works. Creation, as organised by Him and in Him has a fixed nature, in virtue of which it has, by His appointment, an independent action, so to speak. Results ensue from certain conditions without His volition participating in the results. For example: you place a strip of paper in the candle flame: ignition follows. The ignition did not require the will of Almighty God to produce it. It resulted from conditions originally established by His will, but now having permitted independence of action. The same thing is illustrated in the million occurrences of everyday experience. It is essential to recognize it. It constitutes the platform of evidence. There could be no such conception as providence if everything were due to direct Divine volition. This conception requires that some things are God's doing, and some are not. All things are of God, as regards the establishment of the conditions and affording the power-basis of their existence; but the play of the conditions is the affair of what is called chance.

V.12 - "For man also knoweth not his time" - Roth.: "For, indeed man could not know his own time". The unpredicability of life does not discriminate. All men are subject to it. It is part of the vanity to which men have been subjected by God for their good (Rom.8:18-25). The righteous "in the hand of God" know that all things (even "time and chance") work together for good to them that love God (Rom.8:28).

"as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time when it falleth suddenly upon them" - That man is a feeble creature, just like the rest of creation, before the great uncertainties is a humbling truth he is prone to forget. The use of adam twice in the verse emphasises the connection of man with the beasts who share his curse (Gen.3). Just as animals are caught in traps, and fish in nets, so man cannot predict when calamity might befall him (James 4:14).

Vv.13-18 - Wisdom is Superior but is Not Always Honoured

After noting the unpredictability of life, even where wisdom is found, Solomon now turns to consider wisdom in operation but bereft of recognition for its true worth.

V.13 - "This wisdom have I seen also under the sun, and it seemed great unto me" - Roth.: "Even this had I seen of wisdom under the sun, - and of great import was the same unto me". Solomon had previously observed that wisdom was not always a guarantee of success, even if combined with strength and skill. What then of wisdom manifested in circumstances of weakness? Would it be given any recognition? This section is his answer and he marvelled at the conclusion. It was a matter of considerable significance to him, so he graphically illustrates it by an example.

V.14 - "There was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it" - History is punctuated with many such scenes of a small town under siege by overwhelming enemy forces. The enemy has resources sufficient to swamp its walls with siege ramps. The "few men" in it have no power to defend it and are doomed along with all they possess.

V.15 - "Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city" - The deliverance of Abel-Beth-Maachah by the counsel of a "wise woman" recorded in 2 Sam.20:15-22 mirrors this scenario, although it is not revealed what the wise man here did to bring deliverance.

"yet no man remembered that same poor man" - Wisdom had not saved this man from poverty, and now wisdom manifested at a time of supreme crisis did not even secure for him notoriety and fame. The superior strength of the invading king proved no match for the wisdom of this man. The desperation of his compatriots who were nearing the end of their lives, or at the very least their freedom, would never be more pronounced than it was at this time. And yet for all this, the poor man whose wisdom delivered them was not remembered! No-one even remembered his name, for it is absent from the details of the story. Solomon was amazed at this result. It is almost inconceivable for this to happen, and yet this scenario has often been repeated in history.

V.16 - "Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength" - Just as no prowess can ensure success, so no wisdom can ensure honour. But Solomon's illustration has shown one thing: wisdom is superior to strength.

"nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard" - It is characteristic of men to glorify, honour and praise the rich and famous, while despising the wise poor man (James 2:1-9; 1 Cor.1:27-31). The insignificance of the poor man shut out his words of wisdom.

V.17 - "The words of wise men are heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools" - Roth.: "The words of the wise in quietness are heard, - beyond the outcry of one who ruleth over dullards". Based as it is on the graphic illustration which has preceded it, this passage begins a section of proverbs which goes from verse 17 to chapter 11:6 revealing the superiority of wisdom. Solomon's aim here is to counterbalance the pessimistic tone of the preceding section in which he continually found negative and frustrating outcomes to his enquiries. Despite his observation of the despised poor man not being heard or remembered, there is a place for the quiet voice of wisdom to make itself heard, and it will carry weight with a certain class above the noisy commands of a king ruling among fools.

V.18 - "Wisdom is better than weapons of war" - The scenario painted in verses 14 and 15 has demonstrated this truth. Furthermore, weapons of war (Int. Bible: "conflict") destroy and maim, while wisdom saves and preserves life (Prov.3:13-18; James 3:17-18; 5:19-20). The call here is to work to save men's lives by wisdom; it is the superior force.

"but one sinner destroyeth much good" - This is the antithesis to the previous statement. Yet instead of "folly" (the antonym for "wisdom") Solomon substitutes "sinner". Sin is undoubtedly the

product of folly, but sin is not the sole preserve of the outright fool. As Solomon goes on the show in chapter 10, a little folly can sometimes mar the life of a wise man. Sin is a great destroyer as Achan proved by his rebellion against God's edict (Josh.7:1-4,24-25). The tragic story of Judges 19 to 21 also demonstrates how much destruction can flow from the sins of a few. What a difference could have been made to so much tragic history if the words of the wise had been quietly heard and followed.

THE FINAL ANSWERS SEEN IN JESUS CHRIST	
1	The anomaly of the "GOOD" suffering, whilst evil triumphs, is balanced by..... The resurrection of Christ, following his cross of suffering and death.
2	Does God care for His people? Jesus assures (Matt.6:26-34) - "Your Heavenly Father knoweth."
3	Is God really conscious of the lives of the righteous? Paul concludes that we are in partnership with God (Phil.2:12,13) - "For it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do his good pleasure."
Hebrews 6:10 "God is not unmindful to forget your work and labour of love.....in that ye have ministered to the saints and do minister."	

Chapter 10

THE EXCELLENCY OF WISDOM

Solomon has commenced a series of proverbs (or aphorisms) in chapter 9:17 which illustrate the superiority of wisdom over folly. These form an appendage to his essay in which wisdom has been reconsidered in the light of experience. The section covers a variety of topics mostly surrounding attitudes of rulers and those ruled by them, and concludes in chapter 11:6.

The section can be summarised as follows:

THE EXCELLENCY OF WISDOM		
1.	9:17 - 10:3	Wisdom's superiority
2.	10:4-9	Folly in high places
3.	10:10-11	Forethought
4.	10:12-15	Contrast of wisdom and folly
5.	10:16-20	Un-wisdom in rule
6.	11:1-6	Spiritual husbandry - "Preach the word; be instant in season and out of season" (2 Timothy 4:2)

Vv.1-3 - The Superiority of Wisdom

Continuing his theme from verses 17 and 18 of the previous chapter Solomon shows the superiority of wisdom over folly. He shows however, that a reputation for wisdom can be quickly lost.

V.1 - "Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour" - RSV: "Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off an evil odour; so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honour" (see also RV). Folly is not always confined to fools. Wise men with a reputation for great sagacity may succumb to an act of folly which destroys a reputation built up over a lifetime (cp. Ahithophel 2 Sam.16:23). Solomon's point is that wisdom is superior but requires consistency of application to be of lasting value. Like the perfumer's ointment which is of great value and usefulness, but is utterly ruined by a few dead flies being carelessly allowed to fall into it, so a reputation for wisdom and its consequent honour is quickly spoiled by rare acts of foolishness. In this way folly outweighs wisdom - the latter being difficult to acquire and maintain, the former easily stumbled into because of the perversity of man's nature.

V.2 - "A wise man's heart is at his right hand; but a fool's heart at his left" - In the human body the heart is set to the left of the chest. This is the natural order. The heart is the intellect or seat of understanding and it is here in the arena of thought that a man's ways are determined. Christ taught that "out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts" (Mark 7:21). When men think naturally or carnally, they think as the fool. Therefore it can be said the fool's heart is at his left. But the wise man's heart is at his right which is not its natural position. Wisdom is not natural to man, it has to be acquired from an external source.

V.3 - "Yea also, when he that is a fool walketh by the way, his wisdom faileth him, and he saith to every one that he is a fool" - Roth.: "Yea even by the way as the foolish man walketh along his sense faileth him - and he telleth everyone that foolish is he". To walk by the way is to be in a public place exposed to view. The fool is set in contrast to the wise man of verse 1 whose reputation is spoiled by private acts of folly (flies falling into ointment) becoming publicly known (stinking odour of ointment). The fool is publicly manifested as such by his every word and action. He hates knowledge (Prov.1:22) and despises correction (Prov.15:5; 18:2).

Vv.4-9 - Folly Manifested in High Places

This next group of proverbs mainly revolve around the folly seen in high places, and how wisdom can be practically manifested under the capricious authority of men.

V.4 - "If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place" - Rulers are notably capricious. Power has a way of corrupting men, and the determination to retain power sometimes breeds suspicions and anger against hitherto faithful servants. Solomon counsels calmness and rational thought, and warns against being driven into impulsive action by a ruler's hot temper. His advice here is similar to that of chapter 8:3.

"for yielding pacieth great offences" - Roth.: "for gentleness pacieth such as have greatly erred". Int. Bible: "for composure quiets great offences". Soft answers turn away wrath (Prov.15:1). The capricious anger of kings cannot be successfully challenged, it is best dealt with by practical wisdom. Yielding is the wisest course and, more often than not, provides an answer of peace.

V.5 - "There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, as an error which proceedeth from the ruler" - Rulers "under the sun" are all too often motivated by capriciousness, greed and abuse of power. From the "face of the ruler" (Int. Bible) come incredibly foolish edicts which can only destabilise his kingdom. Yet because he enjoys total power, he will not listen to the voice of wisdom.

V.6 - "Folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in low place" - Int. Bible: "Folly is set in many high positions, and many rich men sit in low situations". The word "rich" implies nobility and contrasts with "folly". The scene painted is one in which obscure and unworthy men are elevated to power on the whim of a ruler, while noble and qualified men are relegated to the status of servants. Solomon had observed elsewhere the terrible consequences of the exaltation to power of servants (Prov.30:21-22). Human nature is simply unable to cope with such a rapid elevation, and it invariably brings out the worst in men (Esther 3:1-12).

V.7 - "I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth" - Solomon had personally seen such a reversal of roles. Indeed, there are scriptural examples of this occurring (Esther 6:6-10).

V.8 - "He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it" - In the context of the capriciousness of rulers this saying warns that a price must be paid for high-handed action which disregards the welfare of others. A ruler may act with arbitrary power over his subjects, but he may also be digging a pit for himself in the process.

"and whose breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him" - Int. Bible: "and one breaking a wall". Breaking down the dry stone boundary wall of a property exposed one to the danger of snakes which had taken up residence therein. Similarly, for a ruler to impinge upon a man's inheritance exposed him to the judgement of God (Prov.22:28). Ahab did this with Naboth's vineyard and was condemned for it (1 Kings 21).

V.9 - "Whoso removeth stones shall be hurt therewith; and he that cleaveth wood shall be endangered thereby" - Both quarrying and wood cutting are by their very nature hazardous occupations. Those who perform them must anticipate injury at some stage. There are occupational hazards in any job, but those in such vigorous occupations are exposed to far more danger. So it is with rulership. The king who acts high-handedly is a high risk for retaliatory action by those who suffer from his capriciousness.

Vv.10-11 - The Value of Forethought and Alacrity

This next group of sayings may still have in mind rulers, but the issue addressed is the value of forethought before exertion, and to which is appended a warning of the consequences of delay.

V.10 - "If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then he must put to more strength" - Roth.: "If blunt be the iron and himself hath not sharpened the edge then much force must he apply". Everyone knows practically that a sharp instrument makes labour much easier, but not everyone uses this principle in daily life. A little forethought and preparation invariably reduces the amount of effort required for the achievement of certain objectives. Sharpening the mind spiritually will reduce the amount of energy expended in the struggle against sin. Similarly, sharpening the ecclesia spiritually

will minimise the effort sometimes necessary to overcome ecclesial problems caused by spiritual "bluntness".

"but wisdom is profitable to direct" - Int. Bible: "but wisdom is an advantage giving success". Wisdom is likened to the sharp instrument. It reduces mindless and pointless effort and brings success for those who possess it.

V.11 - "Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment; and a babler is no better" - Int. Bible: "If the snake will bite without charming, then there is no advantage to a master of tongue". Roth.: "If a serpent will bite unless he is charmed; then there is nothing better for him that owneth a tongue". The idea here seems to be that unless the snake charmer uses his skill (through the timely use of his voice), then he is likely to be bitten. Delay can be fatal in some situations. So Solomon counterbalances verse 10 with a contrary, although complementary thought. The focussed and alert snake charmer will survive, but the distracted and careless one will die. It is important to use forethought, but too much caution leading to delay may well lead to disaster.

Vv.12-15 - Wisdom and Folly Contrasted

Building on his thought concerning the timely use of the voice in verse 11, Solomon now emphasises the contrast between wisdom and folly, as it is so often revealed in speech.

V.12 - "The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious; but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself" - The word "gracious" is often signifying graciousness; i.e. kindness or favour. Wisdom which is spiritually 'sharpened' is positive and outward looking, always seeking opportunity to help and to build (Prov.22:11; 10:11; 15:23). This graciousness is contrasted with the self-devouring speech of the fool (Prov.18:6-7). Men are destroyed by the improper use of the tongue (Matt.12:37).

V.13 - "The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness: and the end of his talk is mischievous madness" - Roth.: "The beginning of the words of his mouth is folly, but the latter end of his speech is mischievous madness". Int. Bible: "evil madness". Not only does the fool destroy himself by his words, but he also destroys others as well. Beginning with folly in himself, he ends in mischief in the lives of others.

V.14 - "A fool also is full of words" - Roth.: "Yet a foolish man multiplieth words". Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh (Luke 6:45). The heart of the fool is an unstoppable fountain belching out foolish words (Prov.15:3; 12:23).

"a man cannot tell what shall be; and what shall be after him, who can tell him" - Youngs Lit.: "Man knoweth not that which is, And that which is after him, who doth declare to him?" The fool's words cover a multitude of subjects of which he knows nothing, including the future which no man (adam) can tell. His words concerning the present testify to ignorance and stupidity; how then can he speak intelligently of the future, even if he could know it?

V.15 - The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city" - The way to the city is clearly defined by the well-trodden path that leads to the city gate. This is discerned by all but the fool who is so intent on his self-destructive course that he cannot see the obvious. Self-deceit is man's greatest enemy (Jer.17:9-11). It blinds men to reality, and locks them into a vain and wearisome cycle of fruitless toil.

Vv.16-20 - The Effect of Wise and Foolish Rulership

With this next group of sayings there is a shift in the point of view from the ruler and court to the ruled.

V.16 - "Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child" - Roth.: "Alas! for thee O land, when thy king is a boy". The worst period of Israel's national history was when Judah's king was a boy - Manasseh came to power as a twelve year old (cp. Isa.3:5). He was incapable of ruling properly at that age and was corrupted by those who surrounded him. Because of his apostasy Judah was condemned to go into captivity (2 Kings 24:2-4).

"and thy princes eat in the morning!" - Morning was the time for counsel and the conduct of government. Diligent and responsible rulers devote the best time of day when mind and body are fresh to the serious business of government and the leadership of their people. Rulers who self-indulgently

sit down to banquet in the morning reveal a careless and irresponsible decadence (Isa.5:11-12; Luke 12:45-46; Prov.31:3-5).

V.17 - "Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles" - The word "nobles" is chowr signifying, white or pure (from the cleansing or shining power of the fire); hence in a figure, noble (in rank). The word for "son" being ben (builder of the family name), the idea here is of quality of rulership being passed on by education and example. The son follows the high family standards and wisdom and thus builds the family name. Those kings in Judah who followed the example of their forefather David brought blessedness (Roth.: "happy") to God's land and people.

"and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness!" - Roth.: "And thy rulers in due season do eat, For strength and not for debauchery". This is the antithesis of the profligate and self-interested princes of the previous verse. However, such responsible behaviour is not natural to man. Responsibility and selflessness in rulership is developed by soundness of education and the infusion of wisdom. Its product is peace and happiness. For this reason the earth will be blessed in a future time when spiritually wise and selfless men and women will rule with Christ over the earth (Isa.32:1,17).

V.18 - "By much slothfulness the building decayeth; and through idleness of hands the house droppeth through" - Int. Bible: "The framework tumbles through indolence; and through lowering of hands the house leaks". At first glance this passage seems detached from the preceding verses, but when it is realised that the kingdom is represented by a house, then the relationship to kings and rulers is easily seen. Like a house which falls into disrepair through negligence, so a kingdom is brought to ruin by slack rulership. Dissolute rulers who spend their time in self-indulgence and give scant attention to matters of state soon find the very framework of the kingdom crumbling and its defences springing leaks.

V.19 - "A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry; but money answereth all things" - Roth.: "Merrily people make bread, And wine gladdeneth life, - But money answereth all things". The word "feast" is lechem - food; espec. bread. Following his theme of indulgence from verse 16 Solomon shows that concentration on eating and drinking to the exclusion of responsible activity brings ruin. Thrift and moderation afford the means to fulfil desires "in due season" (V.17), whereas constant banqueting and indulgence lead to poverty. Money is a defence (7:12), but its effectiveness is soon eroded by over-indulgence. Corrupt rulers have sometimes thought that money could buy them out of trouble (2 Kings 16:5-9), and found that it provided only a temporary answer to their problems. The real answer lay in sound and wise rulership under God.

V.20 - "Curse not the king, no not in thy thought" - Roth.: "Even in thy thought do not revile the king". The word "thought" is madda - intelligence or consciousness. Living under foolish rulers and maladministration inevitably produces critical thoughts in the subjects of a kingdom and these being strongly felt are likely to find ventilation at some point. Because the mouth is the spokesman of the heart (Luke 6:45) Solomon counsels cutting of the thought at the source so that it does not dominate the thinking and lead to an unwise declaration. Corrupt and capricious rulers are dangerous if crossed.

"and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber" - Even in the most private of places is it unwise to speak negatively of those in power who have the ability to retaliate unjustly. They may be rich by oppression and association with corrupt rulers, but no useful purpose is served by agitation against them. Incautious words may incur a heavy penalty.

"for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter" - Roth.: "For a bird of the heavens might carry the voice, Yea an owner of wings might tell the matter". "A bird of the heavens" is a reference to someone with access to the "heavens" or royal court. As an "owner of wings" he is able to get into the presence of the king and pass on information which he adjudges useful to the king to preserve his power. There are always those prepared to ingratiate themselves with the ruler, however vicious and corrupt he may be. Doeg the Edomite was such a messenger who "owned wings" that took him from Nob to the presence of murderous king Saul at Ramah (1 Sam.21:1-7; 22:9). David learnt bitterly how careful one has to be in such situations (1 Sam.22:22), even though he was not guilty of publicly criticising Saul.

Chapter 11

BEHOLDING THE SUN

The first six verses of chapter 11 are part of the proverbial sayings that Solomon commenced in chapter 9:17. Though there is a wide application in them, the theme of rulership continues to run through Solomon's thoughts. Then Solomon's turns to youth to give his final advice based on the findings of his extensive research. This section is carried through to verse 8 of chapter 12.

Solomon opens the chapter with a farming setting to drive home the vital lesson of the need for faith in God. His approach may be summarised as follows:

Ecclesiastes 11:1-6			
C.p. 2 Tim.4:2			
V.1	Cast your bread (preach)	V.6	In the morning sow your seed
V.2	Give a portion to seven (given to hospitality)	V.6	In the evening with-hold not thy hand
V.2	Thou knowest not what evil (pessimistic)	V.6	Thou knowest not what shall prosper (RSV) - (optimistic)
Future in God's care			
↓			
V.3	Cloud burst - Storm winds - Sudden mishap	"this or that" Circumstances of life	
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">1 Timothy 6:18-19</div>			
Solomon has advanced from pessimism that stifles action, to optimism, which encourages cheerfulness and hospitality.			
V.4	Pessimism stops sowing and will deny reaping	Optimism encourages progress and initiative resulting in harvest	
V.5 God's ways unsearchable (John 3:3-10)			

Vv.1-6 - Sowing in Faith - Reaping in Joy

Using, as he has elsewhere in Ecclesiastes, a series of metaphors wrapped in metaphors, Solomon demonstrates the value of faith and optimism in contrast to tentativeness and pessimism. He has not lost sight of the theme of rulership, for the principles annunciated here apply equally to the ruler as they do to the farmer.

V.1 - "Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days." - Bread here is used to symbolise material substance of any kind. Ygs. Lit. - "Send forth thy bread on the face of the waters". The translation "send forth" is much closer to the original idea and suggests the imagery of sending forth a ship overseas. Though gone for "many days" it returns with precious cargo. So it is with the farmer who must scatter (send forth) precious seed in order to ensure a full harvest (Ps.126:5-6). The principle is that sacrifice, generosity and trust are all essential elements to success. Fear of failure virtually guarantees failure because tentativeness and meanness work against success. The wise man has both vision and trust in God and is therefore generous and confident in the use of the blessings God has already given. He knows that God is in control and will ultimately reward trusting sacrifice. The application is wide in its scope in the spiritual realm. Every genuine act of faith and labour of love is a sowing to the future. And, as we sow, so shall we reap (Gal.6:7-9).

V.2 - "Give a portion to seven and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth" - This Hebrew idiom suggests that generosity should not be limited by narrowing the field of endeavour. "Seven and also to eight" represents an indefinite number above and beyond completeness (seven). One may think that reaching the complete number is sufficient, but the scope

of effort needs to be as wide as possible. So it is with the farmer. Placing all his reliance on one small strip of the field may lead to disaster, for many 'evils' lurk between ploughing and harvesting. The prudent farmer will sow in various parts of the field, perhaps with different crops to ensure that failure in one is counter-balanced by success in another. A positive spirit which acts generously and optimistically despite the knowledge that failure may occasionally strike is what Solomon counsels here.

V.3 - "If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth" - Black clouds will produce rain, even if it is unseasonal and unexpected. Heavy rain may ruin the harvest now and then (1 Sam.12:16-19), but the farmer cannot refuse to sow because disaster may occasionally strike.

"and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be" - Strong winds can topple a tree, especially after rain. Depending on the direction of the wind so the tree will fall. Once it is down it cannot be moved. This sounds very fatalistic but teaches a very important lesson. Solomon has shown in Ecclesiastes that man is subject to time and chance, and to vanity and events he cannot control. The wise man learns to expect random events that bring set-backs and takes these in his stride. He avoids the danger of reacting negatively and becoming over-cautious, tentative and pessimistic. What cannot be changed must be endured and must not be allowed to undermine faithful initiative.

V.4 - "He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap" - Solomon builds upon the figures of wind and rain in verse 3, though here he reverses the order. The time for sowing is in winter when rain softens the ground for ploughing and provides the required moisture for the seed to germinate. Rain is sometimes brought by storms and turbulent winds. The farmer wishing to avoid exposure to the elements will never sow, and consequently will never reap. So it is in life generally, and especially in man's labours for God. Waiting for ideal circumstances and wishing to avoid the buffeting of unkind elements will discourage labour and destroy commitment.

V.5 - "As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all" - The word "spirit" is *ruach* the same word for "wind" in verse 4. Christ likened the operation of the spirit to the wind which cannot be seen but is effective to bring significant changes to man's life (John 3:8). The power of God inherent in the creation is effective in the production of the rain and the development of the child in the womb but cannot be fully explained by man. There are few present at the birth of a child who do not proclaim the event to be a miracle. God's ways are beyond the comprehension of man. So it is in life generally. There are many events which cannot be fully explained. God's working simply has to be accepted in faith, and the work continued with optimism and confidence that it shall be well with them that fear God (Ecc.8:12).

V.6 - "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand" - Solomon's use of farming metaphors clearly reach out to the issues of life generally. They distil the wisdom required for productive activity in the husbandry of life. The very truths which confront a farmer in the field and threaten to discourage positive action are made the ground of an appeal for activity. Opportunities in life are limited by time. There is a 'morning' and an 'evening' and no man can work in the night (John 9:4). The inference concerning the vitality of youth and the restrictions of old age in this phrase mesh with Solomon's reference to embryonic life in the womb (V.5). We cannot understand how life is generated, nor can we fully appreciate the works of God as life unfolds. All we can really do is use the opportunities provided to us to the full.

"for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good" - The venture of life is mingled with success and failure. We cannot predict accurately what will prosper and what will not. If we refuse to "send forth" in this venture (V.1), then nothing will be accomplished, but if we launch forth in full confidence that God is in control we will be able to accept in faith whatever may be the outcome - whether partial success or complete success.

Vv.7-10 - The Final Exhortation to Youth

Solomon has been working his way towards his final exhortation to youth. He has used the imagery of the farmer to illustrate the need for faithful and positive action in life despite the threat of discouraging influences. Interwoven in his metaphorical language has been a message about the very beginnings of life and its inevitable end. He now intends to drive home the lessons of his discoveries to those who still have the fullness and opportunities of life before them - the young.

V.7 - "Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun" - The farming proverbs of the first six verses with their setting in sun and soil, cloud and wind form the background and the starting point of this exhortation to youth. The brightness of sunlight at the dawning of a new day equates to life in its early vitality and strength. There is a pleasure in experiencing the brightness and warmth of the sun in its morning tide, and yet it does not last. The sun reaches its zenith and then gradually fades away until darkness reigns again. This is a parable of life. Man is born and grows to maturity. The vitality of life is a pleasant experience, and may even persist for some time, but the end is inevitable. Strength and vitality wane until the darkness of death leads man to his long home beneath the dust.

There seems to be a deeper thought here as well. There are some who "behold the sun" in a special way. While most men "under the sun" experience the vitality of youth, there are only a few who are able to wisely use it and to fully relish its sweetness. This class have traced the light to its source and "behold the sun". They recognise the hand of God in the beginnings and the outworking of life; they understand the purpose behind subjection to vanity; and they accept that opportunities are limited and must not be squandered or abused.

V.8 - "But if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many" - It is very difficult for the young to appreciate the frailty of old age or the reality of death ("the days of darkness"). The vitality and brightness of youth may seduce them into thinking that it will last forever. However, those who "behold the sun" know that it is consistent in its course. It comes and it shines brightly, and then wanes, until darkness reigns again. So it is in the succession of human life. Man is born, he prospers, and wanes, and dies. Another is born to replace him, but he will not return again except by resurrection in the last day. Unless the vitality of youth is used wisely it is of no avail, and man is only given one chance.

"All that cometh is vanity" - With this phrase Solomon summons up all his previous findings about the vanity of life. Failure to recognise these in the freshness of youth is a sure recipe for disaster.

V.9 - "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes" - Several words are used in this passage for youth to emphasise the vitality of early life. The word for "young man" is the Hebrew *bachur* signifying selected; i.e. a youth. The idea is of being selected because of youthfulness. Interestingly, there are two separate words rendered "youth" in this passage. The first is the word *yalduwth* meaning boyhood (or girlhood). It comes from the root *yeled* signifying something born; hence a lad or offspring. The second word is *bechuwrowth* of which *bachur* is the root. It means simply youth. Ygs. Lit. translates this passage: "Rejoice, O young man, in thy childhood, and let thy heart gladden thee in days of thy youth". Again the analogy of the rising sun can be seen. There is birth, childhood and the vitality of youth with a myriad of awakening opportunities presented for exploration that are new and interesting.

To walk in the "ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes" does not necessarily suggest the choosing of evil. It is a way of describing the scope of youthful venture. Bro. L.G. Sargent describes it this way:

Youth is a time for desire, for venture, for seizing on new experience - so long as the desire is controlled and directed by knowledge of a judgement to come.

"but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgement" - Solomon does not firstly counsel pursuit of selfish pleasure and the indulgence of youthful passions, and then turn and say, "you should know you will be condemned for it". He is encouraging the proper use of youthful vigour and healthy exploration of the opportunities provided by youth. Young people need to recognise that there are boundaries beyond which it is dangerous to venture. If they go beyond the boundaries a state of conflict with God's principles will arise and vexation and unhappiness will spoil their experience of youth.

V.10 - "Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity" - The word "flesh" is *basar* which is used euphemistically of the sexual organs of man. The awakening of sexual desire is an experience of youth and is at the heart of most youthful sin. The remembrance of coming judgement will help purge youthful desires and sensuality from the experience of young people, but is not the only means of avoiding the pitfalls of life. Those who "behold the sun" know the vanities of human life and where they end and will perceive those vanities

even in childhood and youth. The word "childhood" is yalduwth (see note V.9) meaning childhood, while the word for "youth" is shacharuwth signifying a dawning. The dawning of new experience as the child grows towards adulthood is filled with indications of the vanity that will be realised in later years. It is difficult to place a wise head on young shoulders, but the perceptive young person will acknowledge these vanities and frame their life accordingly. This will curb excess in the experiences of youth and avoid the sorrow of heart that comes from guilt.

Ecclesiastes 11:7-10

The Young Man - Beholding the Sun

11:7 The LIGHT is sweet

remember DARKNESS

11:9 REJOICE in thy youth

but know God will JUDGE

11:10 Put away SORROW

remember thy CREATOR

**Govern life by the KNOWLEDGE
of DEATH
of JUDGEMENT
and of the CREATOR**

"Flee youthful lusts" - 2 Tim.2:22

Chapter 12

THE CONCLUSION OF THE WHOLE MATTER

The chapter division artificially breaks the train of thought and should be ignored. Solomon goes on from his counsel to remember darkness and judgement to show that there is a better way than applying merely negative restraint. The best defence against evil is to fill the mind with positive good. So he exhorts young people to remember their Creator in the days of their youth. Solomon then presents a graphic portrayal of the encroachment of old age and death as a warning of the foolishness of wasting the opportunities of youth.

V.1 - "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them" - Connection with the thoughts of chapter 11:7-10 is obvious. The pleasure and delight of youthful vigour, discovery and experience will surely be followed in time by a state of things in which one is compelled to say of the quickly passing days, "I have no pleasure in them". Knowledge that this will come should be converted to energy to seek God while youthful vigour and zeal are present.

The word "remember" is zakar - to mark (so as to be recognised) i.e to remember. It implies a deliberate act of seeking and acknowledging God in our life while we are young. That acknowledgement is of Him as "Creator". Surely this is directing us back to Solomon's earlier statement about the beginning of life (11:5). It is God who has given life in the first place. Without Him there would be no "dawning" (11:9) and "beholding the sun" (11:7). It is this recognition of the power and right of the Creator to be worshipped and obeyed by His creatures that underpins the seeking and 'remembrance' of God. In Heb.11:6 Paul says, "He that cometh to God must believe that He is (i.e. exists), and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him". This is the foundation of the kind of personal relationship that Yahweh seeks to have with His children.

It is important to note that Solomon has added the positive good of developing a personal relationship with God to the negative restraints of death and judgement. The evils of thought and action that are common to the nature of man are best displaced by the development of godly principles in the mind and the diligent practise of those principles (Rom.12:21: Eph.4:21-32).

Vv.2-8 - A Portrait of Decline, Decrepitude and Death

Solomon gathers up the figures he used in chapter 11 and shows that in the continuing cycles of life and human experience there is only one inevitable end. Brought face to face with the reality of our deteriorating nature there is hope that young people will acknowledge the brevity and vanity of life and seek their Creator in the days of their youth. This is the way to become "the whole man" of verse 13. By using the figure of a master and his household in an advanced state of decline the picture of human decline and bodily frailty is graphically illustrated.

V.2 - "While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain" - In chapter 11 Solomon used the sun and light as symbols of life. The time comes when the light fades and the sun disappears. So the strength and vitality of man wanes with the encroachment of old age, and finally the darkness of death strikes. Similarly, clouds after rain obscure the light of the sun which warms the earth and encourages growth and renewal of life. There comes a time in every man's life when decline to death is inevitable and nothing can be done to revive strength. The lesson is once again, to wisely use the opportunities of youth for the pursuit of meaningful and permanent things - "To fear God and keep His commandments" (V.13).

A HOUSEHOLD IN DECLINE

The series of figures which follows builds up the picture of a household in which the man's consciousness is master, while his bodily members are the servants. To appreciate the contrast when it is shown in decline the house may first be visualised in the sunny days of prosperity which reflect the man's prime. Then all about it was bright and bustling. There were active men servants to guard it from thieves or intruders; there were sturdy porters to bear the burdens when the ample household supplies were brought in. Women menials were daily turning the upper millstone on the nether to grind corn for bread. Since there was lavish hospitality and much work for grinders, the doors were thrown open so that neighbours could come in to help, and the house resounded with their chatter. Through

the fretted lattices in the room above, ladies of the harem watched the comings and goings in the street with bright eyes.

Now the master is old and with dwindling means, and quiet has fallen on the house as if a cloud had covered it. With beautiful poetic consistency the decline is suggested by the deprivation of the light which was the symbol of life in 11:7. The household have grown aged along with the master.

Bro. L.G. Sargent

V.3 - "In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble" - This refers to the arms once muscular and strong but now frail and trembling. A man's arms are like the servants of the household employed for their strength and ability to accomplish the work of the house.

"and the strong men shall bow themselves" - The legs of a man strong, straight and muscular in youth become weak and bowed in old age. The word "bow" is avath meaning to wrest (with the idea of being crooked).

"and the grinders cease because they are few" - Like the women who grind at the mill to provide food for the house, the teeth perform an important function in a man's body. But in old age there are few of them left, and their work is diminished because of failing appetite and sense of taste (2 Sam.19:35).

"and those that look out of the windows be darkened" - The bright eyes that once peered through the lattice are now old and dim. Their lustre and beauty is gone. Failing sight is a mark of old age.

V.4 - "And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low" - The activities of this house have been curtailed. No longer is there the bustling movement of guests and labourers, hence the doors are shut. This seems to indicate a loss of interest in daily affairs and the consequent inactivity. The communication that was once a delight in youth is now difficult because of failing health and poor hearing.

"and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird" - The imagery is of the light sleeper who is easily disturbed out of sleep by the sounds of the morning. Insomnia is common in old age.

"and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low" - Like Barzillai who could no longer hear the voices of singing men and women because of his advanced age (2 Sam.19:35) all men will one day be unable to hear and enjoy sounds that once delighted the senses.

V.5 - "Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high" - Frailty of body and limb make heights a terror for the old man. What was once an exciting challenge in youth is a terror in old age.

"and fears shall be in the way" - Roth. "and there be terrors in the way". To venture out among the jostling crowd in the street and the market is now a source of terror for the old man with bowed legs and trembling arms. He feels terribly vulnerable and is at the mercy of the bustling multitude and even perhaps the lurking thief.

"and the almond tree shall flourish" - This seems an apt symbol of advanced age. The white, wispy hair and hoary head of the old man is likened to the winter blossoming of the almond tree. In Jer.1:11-12 the almond is used as a sign of coming events. Normally used in the context of resurrection (for it is "the awakener" - the first of the trees to blossom), it is clearly used here to point to approaching death.

"and the grasshopper shall be a burden" - Roth. "and the grasshopper drag itself along". A grasshopper unable to spring and leap is the most ungainly and handicapped of creatures. As it crawls laboriously through the grass it presents a sad picture of old age as the once sprightly man now slowly picks his way through the crowded street. Youth leaps: age crawls - a burden to itself.

"and desire shall fail" - Bodily impulses such as appetite and other normal desires, taken for granted in youth, gradually fade until in old age there is little or no pleasure to be gained from the most elementary of human activities.

"because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets" - The word "long" here is ohlam signifying the vanishing point; the hidden period. Roth. translates: "For man is going to his age-abiding home". Death stalks this man, and so near is it that the professional mourners loiter in

the street awaiting the news that will begin their noisy trade. The picture is one of utter hopelessness as man finally reaches the point of death.

Ecclesiastes 12:3-5

PORTRAIT OF A DECLINING HOUSE AND AN OLD MAN

V.3

Keepers of the house **tremble**

Arms and hands once strong, now palsied and shaking.

"The strong men" **bow** themselves

Legs - formerly upright, now bent at the knees.

The **grinders cease**

Teeth - fall out and fail to masticate the food.

Those that **look** out of windows darkened

Eyesight deteriorates

V.4

Doors shut in the street

Loss of interest in everyday affairs - **no communication.**

Sound of grinding low

Deafness: causing misunderstanding

Rise up at the voice of a bird

Nervous - bad sleepers (awake to hear the cock crow)

All the daughters of **music** brought low

Cannot sing - **no pleasure.**
Incapacity to enter in.

V.5

Afraid of that which **high**

Fear of height (giddiness)

Fears shall be in the way

Slow reactions. Jostling crowds unsettle

The almond tree shall flourish

Grey headed

Grasshopper **shall drag** itself along

Stiff legged, clumsy

Desire shall fail

Body **impulses** grow **inactive**

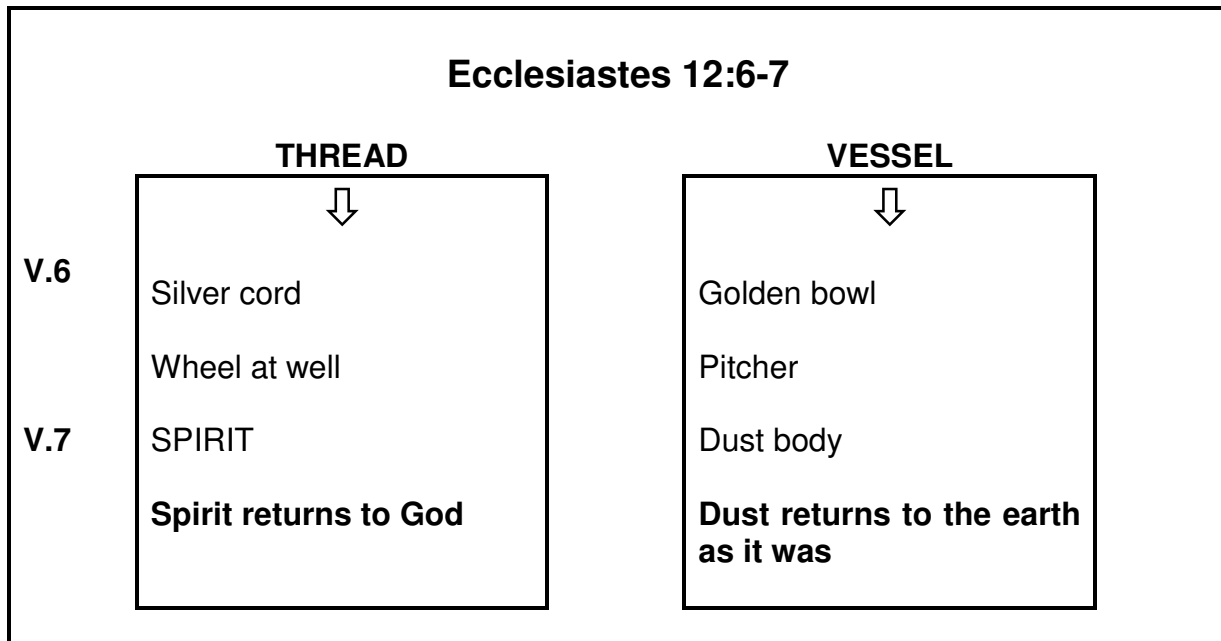
The **mourners** go about the streets

Visible signs of death (physical and psychological)

Everyone can see the end approaching

V.6 - "Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken" - The figures change a little now, but still revolve around the household. The silver cord which holds the suspended lamp to provide light for the house suddenly snaps and the bowl crashes to the floor and is broken. Life which is likened to light in the previous chapter (11:7) is suddenly extinguished after an extended process of decline.

"or the pitcher be broken be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern" - Roth. "or the bucket by the fountain be shivered, or the wheel at the well be broken". Water is a symbol of life (John 7:38) and the means of collecting it is now gone. The wheel or machinery to lower the pitcher has broken and the pitcher has tumbled into the well and smashed. This is a dramatic figure to illustrate the sudden arrival and utter finality of death. The very source of life is now withdrawn.



V.7 - "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it" - Roth. "And the dust return to the earth as it was". This statement follows on from the graphic figures of verse 6 and shows that those figures represent that death has struck the old man. All that awaits him now is dissolution into the dust from which he was made (Gen.2:7). The spirit which animates all life has left his still and cold body which in a matter of a few days will begin corrupting away into the dust (Job 34:14-15). It is the sad but certain end of all mortal life and the wise will take heed of the lesson it drives home (Ps.90:9-12). It is that lesson that Solomon now intends to emphasise as he draws his book to a close.

The structure of the thought both poetically and morally is to be found in the rising scale of the exhortations to "remember" (culminating in "Remember thy Creator...") and the descending scale of the allusions to light (ending in the fallen lamp). It is this contrasting framework which gives the essay its strength and grace. Viewed within this framework, the picture of old age gains an added meaning. The Preacher is doing something more than describing poetically what everyone knows - that human life passes its prime and then travels down the curve to the grave. He is showing the deprivation of light where the Source of light is disregarded, for here the picture of physical decrepitude has as its overtone a spiritual loss: this is the end of men without God. Thus, even more than the telling figurative portrayal of aged feebleness, the play upon the symbol of light conveys the lesson that youth is the time for thankful dedication to the Creator. For what is life but a gift? And what is life for but to remember the Giver? Without that it is truly nothing but a breath.

Bro. L.G. Sargent

V.8 - "Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity" - Having completed the full circuit of human experience Solomon returns to his initial thought (Ecc.1:2). His study of man's life "under the sun" had begun with this statement, and all that he had considered in his pursuit of the greatest good finally ended with the complete confirmation of the truth of his opening remark. Nothing that this life offers is permanent or fully satisfying. Emptiness awaits the man who fails to "behold the sun" in the highest sense of the phrase. There is a way that leads to life and another way that ends only in death and oblivion. Solomon is about to deliver his "conclusion of the whole matter".

Vv.9-12 - Solomon's Wisdom Extended for the Benefit of Others

Some commentators have questioned whether this closing section could be the writing of Solomon given its rather self-centred style. However, close examination shows that it is part of Solomon's narrative and is designed to make his final appeal and exhortation even more powerful and meaningful. Never was there in history a man in such a position to provide unerring counsel on the great issue of this book, i.e. what is the greatest good for man to seek in all his labours "under the sun". Solomon had discovered this by unique experience. He knew he had an enormous responsibility to pass on to others the wisdom born of his experience.

V.9 - "And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge" - RSV "Besides being wise the Preacher also taught the people knowledge". For the phrase, "he still taught" Rotherham translates, "still further taught". This suggests that Solomon increased his instruction of others as a result of his growing wisdom and understanding. When one is deeply impressed with the importance of a simple truth the urge to preach it to others is increased. The more study Solomon undertook of this matter, the more he was impressed with the urgent need for all men appreciate what he now understood so clearly.

"yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs" - RSV "weighing and studying and arranging proverbs with great care". Though Solomon's name is never mentioned in the book this statement almost certainly links its author to the compiler of the Proverbs. Like the Proverbs, Ecclesiastes is full of sayings that have been carefully weighed in the experiences of life and deliberately set down for the benefit and eternal well-being of those who come after.

V.10 - "The preacher sought to find out acceptable words" - Roth. "The Proclaimer sought to find out words giving delight". His words were only "acceptable" to those who would come to the light and accept their wisdom. The bulk of mankind ignore the wisdom of Solomon and endlessly repeat the mistakes of those who have gone before. They never learn from the experiences of others. His words are no "delight" to that class of people.

"and that which was written was upright, even words of truth" - Roth. "and to note down rightly the words of truth". It was very important for Solomon to devote time and care in recording his findings. Truth was paramount, for the eternal salvation of many rested upon the lessons of his research being understood and accepted.

V.11 - "The words of the wise are as goads" - The ox goad was a common sight in ancient times. It was a long stick sharpened at one end and used for prodding the beast into action. The figure here is of stimulus or incentive being given. This surely must be the effect of Solomon's findings if they are accepted. When we understand the vanity of our state and the hopelessness of man without God there must be an incentive to seek for something better and higher.

"and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies" - Roth. "Yea as driven nails their well ordered sayings". While there is some variation in the translations of this phrase the leading idea is of stability brought about by an expert securing a peg or nail on which man's whole life may be securely hung (Isa.22:20-25). This Solomon had done by establishing "words of truth".

"which are given from one shepherd" - Yahweh is the Shepherd of Israel (Gen.48:15; Ezek.33:15; Ps.23:1-2). All words of truth ultimately come from Him. Solomon's deliberations had confirmed for him the truth of all God's words and now he seeks to pass them on to others.

V.12 - "And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh" - Roth. "And besides, from them, my son, be admonished". Solomon is counselling the study of the "words of the wise" which have one source, namely God, the Shepherd of Israel. It is far too easy to be distracted from the words of God by the many books available among men. Men weary themselves in the production of books on all kinds of subjects, none of which are of eternal value. It is native to the flesh to seek after the writings of men which appeal to the shallow thinking of the carnal mind. It is not so easy to get into the good habit of constantly filling the mind with the words of God which admonish and instruct in right ways.

Vv.13-14 - The Conclusion of the Whole Matter

Having reminded the reader of his qualifications and that this writing is not among the "many books" which weary men both in their production and study, Solomon now concludes his book with a pithy statement of conclusion. In a few words he sums up all his findings and homes in on the simple message for all who would be wise and belong to the "whole man" class. This represents one of the simplest yet most profound exhortations in Scripture. The challenge for us is not only to see the rightness of his words, but to choose to do them.

V.13 - "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter" - There is a tone of authority here which challenges our attention. Who better to make this outright assertion of the true values of human life than Solomon? He had everything life can offer, and had systematically tried everything, yet found by experience that there is only one course worth pursuing in life. And that course can be pursued by anyone, whether they are young or old, rich or poor. Everything Solomon had discovered in his research is now focalised in this final summary statement.

"Fear God and keep his commandments" - There is nothing new in these words. They have been the consistent teaching of the Scripture from the very beginning (Deut.6:4-9). Hence the mark of the "one Shepherd" is seen in Solomon's conclusion. All his experiences and study had shown that the greatest good in life is to be derived from a wholesome fear of God and obedience to His commandments. Outside of this lay only vanity, failure, misery and permanent death.

"for this is the whole duty of man" - The word "duty" in italics is not in the text. Ygs. Lit. "for this is the whole of man". Man cannot be complete (or "whole") without God. Solomon had found that when man lives for himself he will be empty and incomplete. It is only when man fears God and observes His commandments that life "under the sun" is given a value that can be appreciated, despite its limitations. When God enters the equation a man's life can be rightly directed so that he derives benefit and pleasure from what other men see as drudgery and vanity. In this way he becomes "the whole man" - he is able, because of his perspective and choice, to extract the very best from vain human life "under the sun" while placing himself in a position related to eternity and unending fullness of life in God's Kingdom. This is a secret few understand.

V.14 - "For God shall bring every work into judgement, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" - Solomon harks back to chapter 11:9 and his warning to youth on the threshold of adult life. It is at that point in life that crucial decisions must be made. It is important to understand that he is only talking about those amenable to divine judgement. The bulk of men live out their vain lives in ignorance only to perish forever. They will never again see light. But those who have seen light will rise again to answer for their actions (Dan.12:2-3; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; Rev.22:12). It is this class to whom the exhortation is directed. Every work, open for public gaze or practised privately, that reveals the fundamental choice we have made in life will come under scrutiny in the day of judgement (1 Tim.5:24-25). The reward will be received bodily according to the choices we have made (2 Cor.5:10). It will then be seen whether we are of the "whole man" class who have chosen to fear God and keep His commandments.