

# *The Book of Ecclesiastes*

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**(2004 Study)**

The following notes on the Book of Ecclesiastes were compiled from a Bible study led by Bro. Frank Shallieu in 2004. They should be utilized with the following understanding:

1. Each paragraph preceded by “**Comment**” or “**Q**” (an abbreviation for “**Question**”) was introduced by someone other than Bro. Frank.
2. The original study did not follow a prepared text but was extemporaneous in nature.
3. Although the transcriber tried to faithfully, with the Lord’s help, set forth the thoughts that were presented in the study, the notes are not a verbatim rendering and, therefore, should be considered in that context.
4. Finally, Bro. Frank did not review the notes for possible errors that may have inadvertently entered the text.

With this disclaimer in mind, may the notes be a blessing as a useful study guide.

# BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

(Study led by Bro. Frank Shallieu in 2004)

In 65 years in present truth, I have never led a study on the Book of Ecclesiastes, nor have I even heard of a class that has studied this book verse by verse. Most of us have read the book at one time or another because we are to live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God, but the fact it is included in the Bible means that it is instructional for God's people.

The title of this book is "Ecclesiastes" or, as the subcaption states, "The Preacher." In 1 Kings 4:32 is the statement that Solomon authored 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs, or psalms. If we counted correctly, the Book of Proverbs, which is just before Ecclesiastes in the Bible, contains 915 verses in its 31 chapters. The Book of Ecclesiastes has 12 chapters, but each chapter consists of many proverbs. Therefore, if we just take a simple hypothetical average as to how many proverbs are buried in one particular chapter and then multiply that number by the number of chapters, the overall total would easily amount to 3,000 proverbs in these two books.

To study Ecclesiastes verse by verse is a novel, or different, approach because, from the human standpoint, it is supposedly written by one of the wisest men who has ever lived on this planet. While we are interested in spiritual food for the spiritual man, the Apostle Paul reasoned many times along the lines of 1 Corinthians 11:14, "Doth not even nature itself teach you...?" In other words, "Doesn't common sense tell you such and such?" Therefore, while Paul spoke in elevated spiritual language, which only the Holy Spirit can interpret, he sometimes set forth his teachings this way in order to impress them upon us.

**Eccles. 1:1 The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.**

Many, many years ago in working for the Bureau of Statistics for the City of New York, I had the following experience. At lunchtime the man who sat at the desk next to me would sometimes soliloquize. One day while I was there eating, he was in a talking mode, and what did he do? Evidently, he was quoting from memory a book that mentioned the computer age. It said that pretty soon technology would be so developed that the computer would do the questioning and a person would talk to the computer. The man, the coworker, went into other areas as well. One particular quotation of his, which is helpful as an introduction to the study of Ecclesiastes, is paraphrased as follows. "The traffic lights were working in perfect order. There was no problem. The cars were running smoothly." Then he told about different things; for example, "The waste cans are in order, so there is no litter on the streets." He continued on and on in that vein from memory. Then he closed with the clause "Climax: and no people were there. Yes, there were computers but no humans." In a sense, this soliloquy is what the first chapter of Ecclesiastes is doing. In reading what others have written about this book, I think they got off on the wrong slant because they did not realize what Solomon was doing.

All of the remarks thus far are preparatory for studying Ecclesiastes, but they help us to understand the book in the manner in which it should be considered; namely, King Solomon wrote this book as a form of *repentance* for his wasteful life. In later life, he realized that he had botched up his life through the very fact of his *wisdom*. Indeed wisdom had led him astray. Although he did not state the fact in these words, he did it in a way that is different and on a higher level of thinking. For instance, we hear of "British humor," meaning that a person tells a joke, but it takes us several seconds to realize that it is a joke. Then we laugh because we got the gist of what was said, but the telling of the joke was done in a laconic manner with no expression of humor, sadness, or seriousness. This example is a rough way of trying to show the slant in which the Book of Ecclesiastes is conveyed.

Verses 1-11 are a unit. Notice how the book opens: "The words of the Preacher, the son of

David, king in Jerusalem.” Solomon acknowledged his father and wanted the reader to know that he was the son of King David in Jerusalem. Verse 1 tells us that these proverbs were written while Solomon was on the throne of Israel.

**Eccles. 1:2 Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.**

The words “vanity” and “vanities” are used five times in verse 2. Moreover, in verses 1 and 2, the word “Preacher” is used twice. Why was the book introduced this way? We would understand that when Solomon was making these authoritative statements, he was being self-deprecating; that is, he was humiliating and debasing himself. It is ironic that the very man who was the wisest in the earth and was the king on the throne of Israel—a very privileged and honored position that God had given him—had made a mess of his life in the final analysis.

Solomon was saying, “I am the Preacher.” This statement seems to be out of place, for a “preacher” was supposed to be in the Temple or in a different situation. Solomon continued, saying in effect, “It is ironic that I am on the throne of Israel and preaching and admonishing people as though I were a priest, but I am preaching because I pursued many, many areas that are the natural desires of some people.” These areas included wisdom, wealth, recognition, influence, and appreciation by other people—Solomon had them all. An example of his wisdom is the account in 1 Kings 3:16-28, where each of two women claimed the same child as her own. Solomon commanded that the child be divided in half with a sword, knowing that just the suggestion would cause the real mother to offer the child to the other woman. Thus Solomon determined who was telling the truth and settled the matter truthfully. As a result, all Israel heard of his great wisdom and righteous judgment.

What is the point for the new creature? Wisdom is a gift of God, but in order to make our calling and election sure, our character, heart, thinking, and soul—our very being—have to be directed in the right channel.

All of the foregoing remarks are introductory, but they are necessary to understand the Book of Ecclesiastes. Otherwise, we would be dissecting the book with definitions as if we were going to a dictionary, and no story would be attached to the book.

In our own judgment, we think that David had the same capability of wisdom as Solomon, but David chose the right course. We must not forget that God gave David, who was a great mathematician, all the measurements of the Temple. In time David gave all the information and measurements to Solomon, who was charged with building the Temple and following the dimensions. We use the term “Solomon’s Temple,” but it was really David’s Temple. Solomon was just the contractor, or the one who saw that the building was constructed in the proper fashion.

If we keep the slant in mind that Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes as a form of repentance, the book will become more meaningful. Also, we will have a little empathy for him and an appreciation that writing this book was the best thing he could have done, since he had disobeyed God by multiplying horses, having heathen wives, etc. (Deut. 17:16,17). Solomon’s revealing his mistakes enables us, as Christians, to see what not to do. When we do things in our Christian walk that are wrong, we get valuable corrective experiences. Thus the Book of Ecclesiastes is very profitable for Christians to study.

In summation thus far, Solomon was saying that he was the son of David and that on the whole, life is “vanity of vanities” if one pursues it as he did. However, if life is pursued in the manner of the Holy Spirit, the *high* calling is the best blessing possible. To the faithful child of God, life is not “vanity of vanities.” Jesus said, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). In other words, he will give us the

necessary grace. God, the Author of grace, used Jesus as the channel of communication with us. The first two verses merely create a mode of introduction.

**Eccles. 1:3 What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?**

In the Dark Ages with the feudal system, which occupied almost a thousand years, men and women did laborious work 12 hours a day for a lord who lived in a mansion, or castle. The people could barely eke out a living because the feudal lords took of their labor and gave them just enough sustenance so that they would have the strength to earn a bare living. They labored under the feudal system all their life and did not have the money or the time to travel, experience the pleasures of nature, etc. In time they grew old and infirm and died. The sum total of their lives was like “vanity of vanities.” What profit did such a man have with all the labor that he went through? A man’s days were full of sorrow.

Verse 3 is a broad-brush description of the majority of the human race down through history. Of course the very wealthy prospered and experienced pleasures, but they were minuscule in number compared to the others.

“What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?” Doing labor “under the sun” suggests that the work was done in the heat of the day without shade or shadow. The laboriousness and the weariness of the labor are being emphasized. Like an axiom, verse 3 is a fitting picture of the condition under which mankind lived especially in Old Testament times and for much of the Gospel Age.

**Eccles. 1:4 One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever.**

Verse 4 describes earth as a stationary planet that abides through generation after generation, but on the surface of the earth, the people are like mown grass. The grass grows and it is cut down; the next year more grass comes up, but it, too, is cut down. The theme is the same for verses 3 and 4.

**Eccles. 1:5 The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose.**

The sun “hasteth” to the place where it arose. The sun comes up in the morning, and the people labor under that sun until dusk. Eventually they go home and go to bed. Meanwhile, the sun continues its pursuit and arises again the next day.

These verses are presented from a negative standpoint, and the picture is depressing and sad for all except the consecrated. For God’s people, the picture is exactly the opposite, as shown by David’s writing in Psalm 19. Verses 1-3 of that Psalm read, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no [audible] speech nor language, where their voice is not heard.” The language is not heard, but the music, the melody, the harmony, is there for those who take the time to reflect. David was of that nature—not only did he lie down at night in the field with the sheep and study the heavens, but he noticed them also by day. Thus the spiritual man, in living on this earth (in which everything is vanity, vanity, vanity), progresses and grows from a baby, to a mature person in Christ, to (hopefully) be reckoned as a more-than-overcomer and sit on the throne of glory beside Jesus in the Father’s presence. What more could one ask?

Thus we can see two different pictures. Being a man after God’s own heart, David had the proper perspective (1 Sam. 13:14). In the beginning, when Solomon was teachable, he did not

ask for wealth, but his life is a lesson to show what not to do.

**Comment:** Psalm 119:90 says, “Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: thou hast established the earth, and it abideth.”

**Reply:** That text is positive, whereas these verses in Ecclesiastes are negative, but we learn by mistakes—either our personal mistakes or the mistakes of others. Mistakes become stepping-stones if we observe and learn by them, that is, if they are properly recognized.

**Eccles. 1:6** The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits.

Verse 6 continues the same theme. All kinds of wind—trade winds, sirocco, etc.—go toward the south, turn to the north, whirl about continually, and return again according to the circuits. A lot of activity is shown in these verses. The laborer labors under the sun. One generation is born, matures, and expires, and another generation comes up and expires. The sun continues in its transit. The wind blows toward the south, turns to the north, and goes around. These descriptions are like the quotations of the coworker at the office in New York City.

**Eccles. 1:7** All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.

Now the same theme is used with rivers. The rivers replenish the ocean; the water is taken up, is deposited on the continents in high places, and runs down in rivers to the sea again. To the natural man, everything seems to be vanity, but there will be a resurrection with an opportunity for a future life that will be very meaningful. But as far as the present life is concerned, man’s days are full of weariness and a lot of trouble.

**Comment:** Solomon had knowledge of the winds being in different circuits and how the water table works.

**Reply:** Yes, he had *natural* wisdom.

**Eccles. 1:8** All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.

Verse 8 sums up what was just expressed. While all this activity is going on and man labors, he is not aware of the beauty of even the natural earth. He does not have time at night to see the stars, for he is weary from working all day and has to sleep. Much is lost in the present life because of the setup. As the god of this world, Satan is exercising considerable influence. From Israel the Bible went westward over various lands that have been blessed in the darkness. Isaiah 9:1,2 illustrates the principle, for when Jesus was born up near Galilee, there was light in Zebulun and Naphtali. Prior to his First Advent, all was relatively negative in understanding.

Man does not have time to see and appreciate the pleasurable aspects of nature, but Solomon, being the king and not having to labor 12 hours a day, could write thousands of proverbs and compose more than a thousand songs. Solomon lived in the lap of luxury. Here he was really confessing and saying, “Do not live as I did. I searched out all these things, and what did they bring?” Even though Solomon did not do the laboring but was in a position of opulence, life was still a waste of time from his standpoint except that, in retrospect, he saw what not to do.

**Eccles. 1:9** The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.

Verse 9 emphasizes repetitiveness.

**Eccles. 1:10** Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us.

**Eccles. 1:11** There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after.

In other words, each generation that comes forth has its little day of labor and moaning. The people are not cognizant of what is going on. The axiom that “history repeats itself” is true. Along a particular line, some of the arguments against the truth are repetitive. For instance, the changes in chronology are not new. Those currently writing books on chronology think they are presenting something new, but actually, the thoughts came from a previous generation.

All we have read thus far is a rather dark picture. Solomon was saying, “When I was young, I wanted to know all these things, so I gave my heart to this pursuit.” God blessed Solomon because his initial intent was to be a blessing to the subjects in his kingdom. Solomon felt that by having wisdom and not getting wealth, etc., he would be able to teach the Israelites. God granted wisdom by allowing him to write the Book of Ecclesiastes, which is included in the Bible. Thus being able to write was an answer to Solomon’s prayer for wisdom, but as far as the wisdom’s being a benefit to him, that was another matter.

**Comment:** The wisdom did not benefit his own son, Rehoboam.

**Reply:** That is true, for Rehoboam led Israel astray, and the kingship shifted to the line of Nathan.

As an illustration, students in school are given a reading assignment, and the teacher says that he will question them on the reading to see how well they have progressed. What do many students do? They go to the last chapter and read the climax. Then they start at the beginning of the book, already understanding the author’s intention. This is a wise method, but to read consecutively and get the feeling of surprise and delight at the end is all right too. However, most things are negative. In Grecian philosophy, for example, a person is laughing at the same time that he is sobbing. However, the point is that it is helpful to at least know the ending.

We could follow that reasoning even with the Book of Ecclesiastes by looking at chapter 12, for the first verse tells what Solomon was teaching: “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.” In other words, “As taught in the preceding chapters, remember the Creator when you are young, before the evil days come.” Think how happy babies can be with their lack of understanding, even though everyone around them is poor. As they get older, they become more sorrowful because they begin to realize their situation.

The second verse of the last chapter reads, “While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain.” For instance, for those who like to delve into pleasure, sex, politics, the financial world, etc., the principle “Make hay while the sun shines” is followed from a wrong standpoint. Instead the advice should be, “Make hay while the sun of God’s favor is upon you. Respond and stay in that mode.” Solomon started out that way, with promise, for he wrote the Song of Solomon in his early years when God’s blessing was upon him.

**Eccles. 1:12** I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem.

Again Solomon called himself “the Preacher” and stated that he was the king of Israel in

Jerusalem (compare verse 1). Saul, David, and Solomon each reigned for 40 years.

**Eccles. 1:13 And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith.**

God in His wisdom created the earth not in vain but to be inhabited, and He has purposed that, in due time, all of the other solar systems will also be inhabited. Jesus came to earth, the first planet that was inhabited. Stated another way, at the present time, there are no created beings on any other planet in the universe. Jesus came here to die to lay the foundation of the redemption where the permission of evil took place so that later, after the Kingdom Age, evil will not be tolerated. Anyone who sins at that time will be cut off right away, for all will have had the lesson of earth's history. That lesson will be shown graphically—by word and by eye—with photography and films of the actual events that have happened. The Flood, the Exodus, the Crucifixion, etc., have all been recorded. Instead of reading a book, people will just sit down and listen to and watch the graphic demonstrations with all the pertinent nuances. After the Kingdom Age, a person will be fully responsible for *anything* he does wrong. God allowed the temporary permission of evil because it was the wisest plan. He is not morally responsible for the evil, but He saw that man, with free will and no coercion, would make wrong decisions through his own desire.

Thus verse 13 is saying, “Concerning all things that are done under heaven, this sore travail has God given.” Solomon was very, very wise to know that God allowed evil, but he did not respond like David, who wrote in Psalm 8:3,4, “When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?” David retained that attitude, which, in spite of his mistakes, carried him through. He repented and acknowledged his sin publicly.

In writing the Book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon was trying to repent publicly. The repentance is hard for some to see because people in the Orient speak differently. In fact, the people of Edom were noted for their depth of understanding along natural lines. Solomon treated this book on a high level.

Wisdom not properly acted upon brings sorrow and travail, and that was Solomon's experience. The lesson is to properly direct the degree of wisdom that one has. Many of us were drawn by God to Jesus because He saw in our own lives that we had faith and that we were reaching out to find Him. Without faith it is impossible to please God, so all who are chosen had natural faith to start with. As that faith grows and enlarges, it will bring about success in becoming a member of the Bride of Christ.

**Eccles. 1:14 I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.**

When Solomon stated that he had seen “all the works that are done under the sun,” what kind of “works” was he referring to? They were all *natural*, not spiritual. Many scholars, including even Pastor Russell, have questioned the value of this book, but it is included in the Sacred Canon. I think the problem is that unless Ecclesiastes is studied *as a book*, a person loses the motivation of why Solomon recorded it. Again we will refer to the title: “Ecclesiastes; or, the Preacher.” The word “ecclesiastical” has to do with religion, whereas Ecclesiastes has to do with one who is an advocate of religion, but as time goes on, we will see that the wisdom Solomon sought was in the natural realm—botanical, astronomical, chemical, physical, and all kinds of natural wisdom in all spheres of influence. However, what is lacking is what David did. All of David's energy and contemplations were recorded in his songs, which are called the “Psalms of David.” These Psalms are nothing but praise or the desire that all wicked people will one day



vanish and that earth's society will be clean and pure. In short, all of his desires pertain to a *spiritual* level. In my opinion, therefore, David was wiser than Solomon. Before David put his foot in it, he determined the parameters of his seeking for wisdom as being the *wisdom of God*. For that reason, David was wiser than Solomon, but Solomon was the wisest of men concerning *natural* things. Yes, he certainly surpassed his father David in knowledge along natural lines. When we study Ecclesiastes from that perspective, the book becomes very profitable.

Solomon said, "I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit." In what way are all works vain? Everything is ephemeral, temporary, and transitory. The works do not lead to the spiritual unless a person is seeking for *God's wisdom*. When David looked at nature, he interpreted it completely differently from Solomon because he looked at it from a different perspective. And so, one's *perspective* in searching for wisdom becomes very, very important because Solomon will say that all the wisdom he attained was folly, vain, painful, and gruesome. He reached this conclusion because his wisdom was temporary; it was not lasting; it was not of a good future.

All the works that Solomon saw were "vanity and vexation of spirit." The United States Bill of Rights has to do with the search for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Solomon was searching for, or pursuing, happiness, and from that perspective, he saw that there was no hope. He saw that everything decays; it is temporal and nonlasting. He was searching for the pursuit of life, health, and happiness of spirit, but his *spirit* became vexatious, for he was disappointed in his search.

When a person studies the Bible, his motivation is important. Many people just like to have a lot of knowledge of Scripture. In wanting to be familiar with Scripture, they look upon it as entertainment, but when we search for knowledge from the standpoint of *God's intent in giving it*, that is a different perspective. Otherwise, in the final analysis, all the knowledge, even of the Word, can be "vexation of spirit" because the parameters of the seeking are limited to a wrong perspective. However, even this type of seeking is better than the pleasures of life that Solomon indulged in. Certainly to indulge in reading the Bible is more profitable, but to really profit the individual, the seeking must have more meaning with regard to the future and hope. He who runs after the prize of the high calling as a man runs a race is the type of pursuit of the Word that is very, very helpful.

**Eccles. 1:15 That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.**

When Solomon said, "That which is crooked cannot be made straight," what was his perspective? Let us say that "that which is crooked" is ourselves, for we are born in sin and "shapen in iniquity," and we cannot be straightened except by divine grace and the power of God's Holy Spirit (Psa. 51:5). In our life and the pursuit of happiness, which is above rather than down here, we seek by faith for divine grace and forgiveness. Faith is the arm that reaches up like the arm of a trolley to grasp the live wire (the Holy Spirit) for power. Thus the perspective becomes very important as we study these verses. "That which is crooked cannot be made straight," and we see many evidences of this statement. For instance, people die, and we do not see a medicine that makes them live, that restores them to natural life.

"That which is wanting cannot be numbered." The word "numbered" is a problem in this statement. The thought is, "That which is lacking cannot be found." Something was missing because the parameters of the investigation were earthbound.

The statements here in Ecclesiastes are pithy, or terse, and the person with experience in life could talk quite a lot on each one of these verses. With regard to "that which is wanting,"

Solomon was implying that he had been searching for something, but he was not satisfied, for there was nothing tangible as the result of the search.

**Q:** Was Solomon saying that with all his wealth, he still was not satisfied personally?

**A:** Yes, that is why he spent so many years searching in all different directions.

In broad terms, the first half of Ecclesiastes is negative, and the second half of the book is the more positive or instructional value of what to do. Solomon did not have the answer, but he knew that he had gone in the wrong direction. Thus he gave advice: “Go in this direction, and do not do what I did.” Although he did not have the answer at the end of the direction, he did steer one to the right path. In that sense, the Book of Ecclesiastes is valuable because Solomon passed on his disappointments in life.

Solomon wrote the Book of Proverbs, which, counting the verses and the couplets in the verses, contains more than 1,000 of the 3,000 proverbs that he composed. Over and over again he began a verse with the words “My son [do such and such].” But what did Solomon’s son do? Rehoboam divided the nation of Israel and ended up in a quagmire. Since Solomon had already died, he did not see the fruitage of Rehoboam’s following the wrong counsel of the younger generation. Thus, with all of Solomon’s capability and with his enthusiasm and desire to be a blessing and a good king too, there is a pathetic side to his life from the standpoint of his son.

Solomon had noble desires initially, and God rewarded him with the ability to deal with men and to give wise counsel—in fact, so much so that fame of his good advice on earthly problems spread internationally. The nation was blessed with material prosperity and peace under his rule.

**Eccles. 1:16** I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.

Solomon continued to speak: “I communed with mine own heart [he meditated and took personal inventory], saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they [including my father David] that have been before me in Jerusalem [but along *earthly* lines].” Yes, Solomon was the wisest from that perspective except for Jesus, who acknowledged the accumulation of natural knowledge that Solomon had (Matt. 12:42).

With regard to his pursuit, Solomon added, “Yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.” In his long lifetime, when all is said and done, he had an accumulation of *great* wisdom and knowledge, more than anyone else before or after him, but it was not the sanctifying knowledge that God was looking for in the prophets of Old Testament times. David had sanctifying knowledge, for he was a man after God’s own heart.

**Eccles. 1:17** And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit.

When Solomon gave his heart to know wisdom, the fruit or net end of that pursuit was “madness and folly” and “vexation [and frustration] of spirit.”

**Eccles. 1:18** For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.

The pursuit of the *natural*, the material, the physical, is madness and folly and vexation of spirit.

For those who pursue *spiritual* things, the result is the opposite.

The first chapter is indeed negative. The book began with, “The words of the *Preacher*, the son of David, king in Jerusalem,” and Solomon subsequently repeated, “I the *Preacher* was king over Israel in Jerusalem” (verses 1 and 12). In other words, Solomon realized that in reality all was in vain. He had preached during his lifetime; he was famous for his proverbs, and everyone knew of him. The people had listened to his speeches and to how he solved certain situations, but now he was *preaching* in sort of a sarcastic manner of self-abasement. He was saying, “Look who is talking. It is I, the king, who possessed this knowledge that God gave me, but the result is madness and folly and vexation of spirit.”

From this standpoint, the first chapter of Ecclesiastes is helpful, but the *whole* chapter has to be read in order to understand what Solomon was really trying to say. We then see that he was a *repentant* king, that writing this book was his method of repenting before God and men. Public sin should be publicly confessed in order to receive forgiveness. Private sin, which is one on one or within oneself, should be privately confessed for forgiveness. Thus the degree of responsibility for the possession of knowledge that is wrongfully given is to be erased publicly if possible.

Consider the incident with the Apostle Peter when he dissembled in Antioch. Knowing about the gospel of faith and freedom, he ate with Gentiles, but when some Jews came from Jerusalem, right away Peter got up from the table, for he did not want to be seen fraternizing with Gentiles. He dissembled because of peer pressure, not wanting to be disesteemed by the others. What did the Apostle Paul do? He publicly condemned Peter’s action on that occasion, knowing that if he did not publicly rebuke Peter, he would bear the responsibility. Peter showed great humility by meekly confessing that Paul possessed more knowledge than he did. In fact, Peter felt Paul’s knowledge was so deep that he could not fully understand it, even though he was an apostle. In reading Peter’s epistles, written late in his life, we realize what a mature and changed person he was. Tenderness and fatherliness are manifested, whereas previously Peter was brash and impetuous. He matured into a statesman—into a rock for the lambs to get some stable ground!

Back to Ecclesiastes. The first chapter is like an opening statement by the king of Israel. The chapter ends with verse 18: “For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.” Solomon accumulated wealth through intermarriage with the daughters of kings of other nations, and he acquired wisdom from the Egyptians and from the Hittites to the north, who were famous for understanding and knowledge (1 Kings 4:30).

**Eccles. 2:1 I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also is vanity.**

Solomon said in his heart, “Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also is vanity [emptiness].” What is the pursuit of pleasure? A comparable part today that could tempt and distract the new creature is sports or music. Along another line, it is true that the stars have some influence over birth and the planets have some influence over crops, but the study of astrology is prohibited in the Scriptures. However, astronomy can be edifying when it is not made a habit and when it is viewed in an upward direction as to what God can do and has done.

Thus verse 1 speaks of the philosophy of exploiting pleasure. The Apostle John, the second messenger to the Christian Church, had to confront a certain doctrine that is characterized by the word “gnosticism.” The sum and substance of that teaching is experimental knowledge, the thought being, How can a person give advice to a sinner unless he first experiments in the sin? There were Christians in the Smyrna period of the Church who advocated this philosophy, and

in essence this is what Solomon did. The thought was that by sinning, one could speak from experience, but the sin took the individual away from God. That thinking is the bottom line of gnosticism, of which stoicism is a branch. We can see that history repeats itself.

**Eccles. 2:2 I said of laughter, It is mad: and of mirth, What doeth it?**

Verses 1 and 2 should be considered together, for they are like a couplet. Solomon was saying that mirth and pleasure are also vanity. "I said of laughter, It is mad: and of mirth, What doeth it?" In one's youth, there is folly and giggling with pleasure, and today the giggling is worse because it includes sexual pleasure. The thinking is, "What fun it is—what a delight—to do things that are inordinate!" Solomon saw that there is an emptiness in laughter. In fact, a famous saying is, "Empty barrels make the loudest noises."

"What doeth it?" In other words, "Of what lasting value is the pursuit of pleasure?" It is true that there is relaxation in more honorable pleasure, but the relaxation is only for the moment. The temptation is to continue the pleasure in order to get that temporary relaxation, and soon it becomes a way of life.

**Eccles. 2:3 I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life.**

"I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine." Wine does bring gaiety, but the gaiety is only temporary pleasure, which seems to get more vain as time goes on, especially after a wasted life. Many people say, "If only I could live my life over again, I would do many things that I did not do." In some cases, a habitual sinner could be given seven opportunities of salvation, but he would still be a failure. The Scriptures seem to indicate that there will be two or three opportunities in the Kingdom for a person to change his course. Yes, the Lord is able to save unto the uttermost those who have sinned, but there is a limit. Even with the call to come out of Babylon, a person who is in Babylon and does not know present truth is given at least two opportunities where the truth comes to him as an individual and he makes a decision. If he fails to act the first time, the Lord will give him a second opportunity, but if he fails to act the second time, he remains in Babylon and suffers the consequences (Rev. 18:4).

"I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom [at the same time]." Solomon was drinking wine and trying to be wise. I had an experience while working as an investigator for the State of New York in Harlem. One day while driving home but still in Harlem, a man came up to my car window and beckoned to me. I opened the window a little, and he wanted to talk to me. In trying to reason with him on the truth, I got a lasting lesson; namely, it is useless to try to witness to a drunken person. The Scriptural principle is, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Matt. 11:15). The point is that wine and wisdom are not a good combination.

"I sought in mine heart ... to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life." Solomon thought that experimental knowledge would be helpful, but gnosticism is insidious.

At a Question Convention years ago, a speaker said that those who commit suicide could make their calling and election sure. A sister then called out in agreement, reasoning that in the Kingdom Age they could give proper advice to those who had done that very thing, but such reasoning is dangerous. In a second example, a monthly issue of some literature from a so-called truth organization gave an epitaph to a man who had committed suicide in England by jumping off the White Cliffs of Dover. The epitaph was written as if he had made his calling and election sure, for it spoke of his experience but said that it did not affect the outcome. These

incidents helped me to see the insidious danger and folly of that type of advice.

Thus Solomon tried to mix wine and wisdom so that he could give good counsel. He kept trying to accumulate wisdom.

**Eccles. 2:4 I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards:**

Solomon made great works, built mansions, and planted vineyards. In doing all these things, he got experimental knowledge and gained lessons. For example, he hired men up in Lebanon and Tyre to quarry, engrave, and prepare the Temple stones.

The study of the Book of Ecclesiastes is profitable, but it should not be our life's study. Some brethren just talk on the graces of the Spirit or on character building. Other brothers spend a lot of time on chronology. I myself have given much time to prophecy because I felt there was a lack along this line.

We will return for a moment to Ecclesiastes 1:15, "That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered [supplied]." Many kindhearted and noble-minded people in the world try to make that which is crooked straight. They enter a certain field of endeavor, thinking that with their standards and by their example, they can help motivate those who outnumber them to change their course. Sometimes the temptation comes to us as new creatures that we can be a real help by entering into a bad condition or situation. Whether that is true would depend on certain other circumstances, but there is a saying that if we put a drop of ink in a gallon of water, the ink will taint the water. But if we put a gallon of ink on top of a drop of water, the quality of the water is even more hopeless.

**Eccles. 2:5 I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits:**

**Eccles. 2:6 I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees:**

Most of what Solomon did along this line has perished except for one part of the "pools of water." Only the largest of the pools of Solomon is still extant today, and it is to the south of Jerusalem. From the outline of that pool and the depth of the excavation, it is obvious that the pool must have contained a tremendous volume of water, which was used in Jerusalem. The water, which reached the city by means of an aqueduct arrangement something like the Roman style, was used for sewage as well as drinking purposes, although most of the drinking water was supplied by the Pool of Siloam.

**Eccles. 2:7 I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me:**

Solomon had more servants and herds and flocks than any of his predecessors, who included King Saul, King David, and judges. However, off the top of my head—from recall whether it is right or wrong—it is startling that Solomon did not mention the Temple.

In reading these verses, we see that Solomon explored just about every realm we can think of. Cisterns remain to the present day, especially in the northern part of Israel, such as Megiddo. Stones that Solomon had quarried also remain in the bottom layers of the Wailing Wall. They can be identified because embossments were carved on the rectangular stones, and only under Solomon were the stones quarried and fashioned in that manner. As a result, work done under his reign throughout the land of Israel can be spotted. We would not be surprised if Solomon himself suggested the embossing because it is peculiar to his reign and many of his works.

**Eccles. 2:8 I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the**

**provinces: I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts.**

“I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces.” In Solomon’s dealings with other nations such as Egypt and countries that bordered Israel, foreigners who visited usually left some treasure from their own domain with him. Since he was the wealthiest man in the world at that time, he was given unique gifts. Therefore, as a king, he accumulated benefactions from those who either appreciated his wisdom or just gave gifts in the normal social intercourse that prevailed between nations at peace with each other.

**Comment:** The queen of Sheba brought spices, gold, and precious stones. “And she came to Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels that bare spices, and very much gold, and precious stones: and when she was come to Solomon, she communed with him of all that was in her heart” (1 Kings 10:2).

**Q:** Where did the gold come from?

**A:** The gold came from the mystical land of Ophir, which we believe was up near Turkey, rather than from Saudi Arabia or in Nubia, Africa (1 Kings 9:28; 10:11).

“I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts [of musical instruments].” When we finish studying Ecclesiastes, God willing, the extent of Solomon’s wealth and the benefactions he sought from many fields of endeavor will be seen as astounding and overwhelming, but he got no lasting satisfaction of soul from his possessions. In a few cases, he told of a temporary joy, but that joy did not endure. Apparently, he even suffered despondency. This is the conclusion when we read his words and reflect on what he was saying. For example, his favorite expression was “vanity of vanities; all is vanity” (Eccles. 1:2). In fact, the word “vanity” and the particular Hebrew word (*hebel*) that is so translated were used more by Solomon than by anyone else in Scripture. He also frequently used the term “vexation of spirit,” which seems to suggest despondency and a disappointment so grievous that it bordered on hopelessness (Eccles. 1:14,17). He entered different exploits with enthusiasm, but the final result was emptiness.

In spite of all this accumulation, it was David who gave his life’s savings for the Temple. He saved up an immense sum, and the huge quantities of various materials were listed before his decease (1 Chron. 22:14-16). Solomon subsequently used those materials in building the Temple, but David gathered the materials and furnished the drawings and the measurements.

**Eccles. 2:9 So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me.**

Solomon was great and increased in wealth more than all who were before him in Jerusalem. Moreover, his wisdom remained with him. Jesus testified of the greatness of Solomon’s wisdom, but that wisdom was along *natural* lines, lines of the flesh, such as the fields of science and astronomy, which are more materialistic in nature. We believe David also had this inherent capability, but his thrust was to understand God’s Law, as indicated in Psalm 119. David loved God’s Word; it was his meditation day and night. Solomon had this same capability, but he exercised it in the wrong direction. Therefore, David’s wisdom was superior because it was used in the quest for the knowledge of *God* rather than the knowledge of His works.

When Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes, he intended it to be a legacy. In other words, he wanted readers of the book to understand what he was saying.

**Eccles. 2:10 And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart**

**from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour.**

In the final analysis, Solomon's "portion" of all his labor was that he received vanity and vexation of spirit.

**Q:** Did Solomon write Psalm 127? Verses 1 and 2 state, "Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep."

**A:** That Psalm, which is to the point, was written *for* Solomon. Bible expositors are careful as to which preposition is correct in the superscription—"for" or "by." The King James, which is a very honest version even though it uses archaic but beautiful language, has, "A Song of degrees for Solomon." The name of an individual is often mentioned to indicate who would play the instrument or sing the Psalm in the Temple before the public. In most instances, David furnished the music and the words. He himself was very skillful in playing the harp.

**Eccles. 2:11** Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.

"Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, ... and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no [lasting] profit under the sun." Even today men marvel at some of the remnants of Solomon's efforts, but he felt there was a lack. It is very, very surprising that with all this knowledge, he did not do what David did.

**Eccles. 2:12** And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly: for what can the man do that cometh after the king? even that which hath been already done.

Verses 12-17 are another unit of thought that ends with the repeated expression "for all is vanity and vexation of spirit" (verse 17). The Bills of Rights, which the United States was founded on, speaks of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. In spite of the different woes a Christian experiences, that happiness, a *lasting* satisfaction or joy, exists even in the present life *if it is centered in the Lord*.

**Q:** Did David have an advantage in that so many of his years were spent in warfare, whereas Solomon had years of idleness after the Temple was built?

**A:** It is true that being in a comfort zone or a condition of leisure makes one liable to all sorts of disappointments. David was a fugitive, he knew the hardships of life, and he engaged in personal labor.

We are reminded of Bro. Roy Martin Mitchell, Sr., who gave a talk in the Paterson class many years ago, about two years before he died. We waited and waited for the arrival of the scheduled speaker, but when he did not show up, the Paterson elders asked Bro. Roy, an elder in the New York class who was in the congregation, to give an impromptu talk. His sermon was about a boat on the tempestuous sea. The wind was contrary, and the waves carried the boat way up and then way down into the depths so that it could not be steered. However, the sails on the boat were still intact, so the helmsman desired to go into a certain harbor. The theme of Bro. Roy's talk was that it is the set (or slant) of the sail in the gale that determines whether one gets to his goal. If the sail is properly adjusted, the tempest will even hasten the boat to the harbor. The lesson is that what we are willing to do, the direction of our intent as an individual, has a lot to do with whether we arrive at our cherished destination, or goal, in

heaven. Much depends on our thinking, on the setting of our mind to the task, which Bro. Roy likened to the sail. After the talk, I rushed up to him and said it was the best talk he had ever given. I still remember that talk today because it was so wonderful.

Solomon's trouble was that he did not have the proper goal. Writing the Book of Ecclesiastes was his form of repentance. The Lord did favor Solomon in giving this "downer" advice, for knowing what not to do has a value. Sometimes stumbling stones are stepping-stones in our development of Christian character.

**Comment:** If we did not have any hope as a Christian, this book would be most depressing.

**Reply:** That is true in the world, and we will see this point more and more as we get deeper into the book.

"And I turned myself to behold wisdom." That is one thing, but Solomon also turned himself to madness and folly. In other words, he went into what we might call the hip-hop society to experience the pleasures of the world along ordinary directions. For example, people go to nightclubs for entertainment, excitement, meeting people, and talking. This endeavor of Solomon was narcissism, which was the downfall of many in the early Church, especially in the Apostle John's day, but persecution developed the class the Lord was looking for in the Smyrna period.

"And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and [the opposite of wisdom, namely] madness, and folly: for [that is, but] what can the man do that cometh after the king? even that which hath been already done." Solomon was saying that while he did these things, he wasn't unique in doing them. The uniqueness, if any, was the *extent* to which he went in that direction, for he used power and purposed thought. He was not enticed into or granted the privilege of doing these things. Rather, his pursuits were a *studied* direction of trying to satisfy his heart's desire but along *natural* lines. He searched for what the *natural* man would be looking for, not the spiritual man. Therefore, Solomon was saying, "I am not the only one to have had this experience. Others had it in the past, are having it in the present, and will have it in the future."

**Comment:** 1 Kings 4:33,34 reads, "And he [Solomon] spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes. And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom."

**Reply:** Yes, Solomon had great knowledge along natural lines. As king, he could call in experts on various subjects. For instance, he might ask, "What is unique about the cedar tree?" Then the expert would reply about the bark, the scent, the stature, etc. Solomon grasped, absorbed, and retained the information. Not only were the cedars of Lebanon tall and world-renowned, but they had an exhilarating fragrance.

**Eccles. 2:13** Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness.

**Eccles. 2:14** The wise man's eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness: and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all.

In this comparison, Solomon was saying that his pursuit in the direction of wisdom was better than a pursuit of madness and folly, which was stupidity of the worst sort. At least a wise man has eyes in his head, whereas a fool, who has no purpose at all, is completely dumb and blind. Solomon brought in "darkness" in order to make the comparison with wisdom (Eccles. 5:17; 6:4; 11:8; 12:2,3).



“Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness. The wise man’s eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness [like a blind man]: and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all.” Verses 13 and 14 begin to reveal why Solomon saw that “all is vanity and vexation of spirit” (Eccles. 1:14; 2:11,17,26; 4:4,16; 6:9). He saw that the destiny, or goal, which one pursues is fruitless; it is like a dead-end that brings depression and vexation. In reflecting on these two opposites, wisdom and folly, he saw that neither of them brought what he wanted. Both the foolish man and the wise man end up in a common grave like an animal. The king on the throne and the poor man working in the field have certain things in common, namely, the basic desires of the flesh. All have pain and sorrow in one form or another. In this commonality, visually speaking, there does not seem to be any lasting profit.

How startlingly different David, Solomon’s father, was! Because David looked to the future, all of his desires were to please God. He wanted God to choose the destiny for him. Solomon’s words in this book are very shocking.

**Eccles. 2:15** Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity.

Solomon said in his heart, “As it happened to the fool, so it happened even to me. I asked for wisdom, but why did I make that request in view of the result?” Then he said, “This also is vanity.” Why had Solomon asked for wisdom? He wanted to be able to judge those in his realm—God’s people—for a lasting benefit. His prayer and the circumstances for that prayer are touching, as recorded in 1 Kings 3:5-9.

“In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee.

“And Solomon said, Thou hast shown unto thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day.

“And now, O LORD my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in.

“And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude.

“Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?”

Solomon wanted to be a wise king over the people, but all his searching for knowledge was for *self*, and not especially for his subjects. Thus we can see the folly.

In writing Ecclesiastes, Solomon revealed the innermost thoughts of his heart—thoughts that are usually kept confidential by the old man. Pride and other things prevent a person from publicly revealing too many of his idiosyncrasies and folly. Therefore, this book was Solomon’s form of repentance, and it is good that he did so, for anyone who is really searching Scripture will get this information. In fact, this information is especially helpful to a young person. For that reason, I have always felt that for every page we read of Pastor Russell, we should read a page of the Bible direct. Both are needed, but certainly the Word of God is seven times deeper than the writings of any man including a messenger to the Church. Paul admitted this truth in Romans 11:33, “O the *depth* of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” God’s love and mercy are

unfathomable. The Bible is the guiding light, and a “thus saith the LORD” answers a question in a definitive manner, rather than just an expression or statement made by someone who expounds the Word. To know whether Paul was speaking the truth, the Bereans went home and searched the Scriptures to see if what he said harmonized, and Paul commended them for questioning him. The Bereans needed to find out his authority based on the Word of God. David is a kindred spirit of the Apostle Paul.

**Eccles. 2:16 For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man? as the fool.**

“For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten.” As a couple of generations go by, all people are forgotten. For example, how far back can we go in naming all of the past Presidents of the United States? What a person did may have some lasting benefit, but certainly when one generation comes and another goes, the memories are lost as time passes, for they are of a temporal nature. In contrast, the Bible remains.

“And how dieth the wise man? as the fool.” The memory of a fool lasts for a little while, especially with regard to what has happened in the Presidency. Some of the deeds that a President representing the United States of America has committed while in public office were almost unbelievable. But even though such deeds are in history, they will be forgotten, normally speaking, after a few generations. Time is a great eraser, for it dulls the memory.

Solomon could not understand this commonality of the wise man and the fool. He did understand something beyond the grave, but his understanding did not have a lasting effect. We will discuss this aspect further when we come to a later chapter.

**Eccles. 2:17 Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit.**

Everything with Solomon was for self.

**Comment:** He had a good life, but he hated it.

**Reply:** Yes. His reign was peaceful. Because of God’s providence that Solomon was to be a type, there was no warfare. In the antitype, there will be no insubordination when Jesus is reigning. Only when he goes away for a moment in the Little Season at the end of the Kingdom Age will Satan get loose and do his mischief, thinking the reign is over.

**Q:** Because of his depression, how could Solomon have had the hope of a resurrection? He was repenting for his former deeds, but his attitude made everything seem hopeless.

**A:** Many people quote part of Ecclesiastes to that effect, plus one or two places in Proverbs, but that is not the point. Solomon realized he had wasted his life in the wrong direction, so his despondency was more that his hope *within himself* was all vanity and vexation. He did have a hope but not for himself, and that is the difference. We believe that the hope for mankind is the *opportunity* for salvation in the Kingdom Age, but Solomon did not have that hope. However, he felt that if there is any hope, he would benefit. And that is the reason he wrote this book.

**Comment:** Solomon had so many wives that he had problems keeping track of them and taking care of and pleasing them. Here was another area of vanity.

**Reply:** Yes. On the Mount of Olives, on the southern third of the mountain range that flanks

Jerusalem across the Kidron Valley, one of the mounts is called the “Mount of Offense.” There Solomon built a great palace for one of his wives, but other wives were there too. Many of those wives were acquired for political reasons.

**Q:** Why is this book so different from the Song of Solomon?

**A:** King Solomon wrote the Song of Solomon in his early years when he prayed for wisdom, had a pure heart, and desired to be of benefit to his people. In Old Testament times, men of God’s choosing spoke and wrote things they did not fully understand as they were mechanically and supernaturally moved by the Holy Spirit. That is the method under which Solomon, while he was in a proper condition of heart, wrote the Song of Solomon. To our understanding, Ecclesiastes was written much later in his life, for it records the experiences of a lifetime.

**Comment:** Then Ecclesiastes is even more depressing. If the Song of Solomon had been written last, it would indicate that Solomon understood and had a hope.

**Reply:** I do think Solomon will get life, but he will not be an Ancient Worthy.

**Comment:** With Solomon’s wisdom, perhaps he understood that he had missed out on a higher purpose in life, and that is one reason he wrote Ecclesiastes.

**Reply:** Yes, he wrote it as a form of repentance. Therefore, Ecclesiastes indicates that he had a hope of life, but he was not in the category of the Ancient Worthies.

**Comment:** A lot of the wisdom in Ecclesiastes was spoken of earlier in the Psalms by his father, so Solomon had the advantage not only of wisdom from above but also of wisdom reiterated by David throughout his lifetime.

**Reply:** Certainly David would have taught Solomon. However, the idleness whereby Solomon could explore many fields of endeavor was really his downfall as far as being an exemplary king of Israel. Nevertheless, the peace that existed during his reign was providential.

**Eccles. 2:18** Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me.

Ecclesiastes is a little different from the Book of Proverbs in that the latter is more succinct, generally speaking. Verses 18-23 have more or less a similar theme.

In this verse, Solomon was saying that he must leave the results of all his labor under the sun to the man who would come after him, namely, to his son Rehoboam. In what way did Rehoboam benefit from Solomon’s labor? Without doing the labor himself, he got in a lump sum, as a gratuity, all the learning and wisdom of his father after Solomon’s decease, and what good did it do?

**Eccles. 2:19** And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have shown myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity.

**Comment:** It seems that Solomon knew the shortcomings of his son because he said, “Who knows whether he will be a fool or a wise man?”

**Reply:** Yes, that is the insinuation. He could see that Rehoboam did not have the same industry, thirst, and desire, yet in the final analysis Solomon’s goal was not the best either.

Once again Solomon spoke of vanity. Rehoboam would get the “rule” over all Solomon’s labor wherein he had shown himself “wise under the sun. This is also vanity.” Frustration and vanity were the result of Solomon’s personal experience. Yes, from one standpoint, he did acquire wisdom but not a satisfying wisdom.

The purpose of Solomon’s writing this book was to benefit posterity. God saw that Ecclesiastes would be profitable—that the proverbs and wise sayings should be incorporated into the Sacred Canon. As we get a little further into the lesson and look back, we will see that the book is beneficial if it is considered as a warning of what *not to do*. Later on, the book will also tell what *to do*. The fruit of all Solomon’s labor under the sun—his pursuits—entailed a lot of work.

**Comment:** It seems that Solomon was talking not only about his son but also about his father David as the wise man. Here in Ecclesiastes, Solomon seems to be reflecting on what his father wrote in Psalm 49:7-10, as follows:

“None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him:

“(For the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever:)

“That he should still live for ever, and not see corruption.

“For he seeth that wise men die, likewise the fool and the brutish person perish, and leave their wealth to others.”

**Reply:** It does seem that way. In fact, some Bibles give Psalm 49 as a cross-reference. However, we think this same conclusion came to Solomon through his personal experiences. David was even wiser in this matter, for he was more wary in advance, whereas Solomon was older when he reached this conclusion. Frustrated, he was now trying to pass on the experiences of grief and sorrow that he had gone through.

While Solomon did say in one place that there was a certain joy of acquisition in his labors, the joy did not last; it was ephemeral. He sought the happiness of spirit that he was inwardly craving, but as he ventured into various fields, the happiness was short-lived. Therefore, he ended up feeling frustrated—just the opposite. In short, the *temporary* joy ended up with a *lasting* frustration.

“I have shown myself wise under the sun.” For instance, in speaking to his disciples, Jesus acknowledged that among men, Solomon was the wisest. However, he said something else about Solomon: “Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these” (Luke 12:27). In other words, Solomon acquired all this knowledge, but it did not really benefit him. For one thing, he had 700 wives and 300 concubines, yet he had only one child that we know of: Rehoboam. We think this result struck Solomon very hard, and he should have recognized the lesson quickly. Having only one son was an admonition that instead of the acquisition of so many wives and concubines, he would benefit more if he looked to the Lord for instruction and wisdom.

He did other things too that were not the best. He loved horses, yet there was admonition not to be enthralled with the wondrousness of a finely attuned horse. In fact, he was criticized for having his stables underneath the southeast end of the Temple platform. Therefore, he was not really benefited by his pursuits, and neither was his posterity. Usually when people acquire wealth, power, wisdom, dominion, or whatever, it is with the purpose of leaving a legacy and a good name behind. Many would be satisfied with their labors if they could see that something

of a real and lasting value was left to posterity. But here Solomon was saying that when his wisdom and labors were left to his son, he would not know whether Rehoboam would be a wise man or a fool. As has been suggested, Solomon seems to indicate that the wisdom did not look too favorable in his son's direction.

**Q:** Was Solomon's having so many wives and concubines but only one child a punishment?

**A:** When individuals are rightly exercised, God's providences are the means whereby they are sanctified, or set apart. God's Word, which contains written instruction, is a providence. His providences, or experiences, are suited to a man and are of an instructional value.

**Comment:** Because Solomon did not get the lessons, because he was not rightly exercised, he was not satisfied.

**Reply:** Solomon's experiences ended up as a vapor, for they were of no substance.

**Eccles. 2:20** Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labour which I took under the sun.

This verse clearly indicates Solomon's sentiments toward the end of his life. All of his labor in various fields of endeavor, whatever they were, caused his heart to despair. His labor was a very disappointing experience; it was vanity. His labor was not gratifying because there was no lasting value either to himself or to posterity.

Of course Solomon did leave Proverbs and Ecclesiastes to posterity, but how many have studied Ecclesiastes with any deep, time-consuming effort to understand it? And Proverbs is just packed with information, but how many have studied that book carefully? These two books provide knowledge with a practical benefit, but very, very few understand them. Numerically speaking, far more people have benefited from the writings of the apostles John and Paul. However, those who study Ecclesiastes and Proverbs to any extent with a thirst and a desire will receive superior understanding. For those who are properly exercised thereby, the results are beneficial.

In the constructive mode of the Book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon ended up saying what the Apostle Paul stated: "But godliness *with contentment* is great gain" (1 Tim. 6:6). Almost every Christian has heard this expression in the New Testament, whereas Solomon took a thousand words in Ecclesiastes to say the same thing. Thus the Bible is a book of understanding to all cultures and races of society with their characteristic thinking and national traits. There is beneficial instruction for all. Today, with the computer, everyone is a "teacher" who sits in an armchair and presses a button. No one has to walk or drive to the library to get information, for example. However, that type of acquiring knowledge is not the same, and it can actually be dangerous if one is too wed to it. It is better to take time to ponder things than to rapidly try to accumulate a lot of information.

**Eccles. 2:21** For there is a man whose labour is in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity; yet to a man that hath not laboured therein shall he leave it for his portion. This also is vanity and a great evil.

**Comment:** The Revised Standard Version reads, "Because sometimes a man who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave all to be enjoyed by a man [his posterity] who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil."

The inheritance of wealth, position, or honor in a quick, easy fashion rarely benefits the individual. In fact, in most cases, it spoils the posterity.

Solomon acquired wisdom, knowledge, etc., and left his portion to others who had not labored. Therefore, he was saying, “Even with all my labor, it is vanity, and for those who get wisdom without the labor, that is vanity too.” As stated earlier, “godliness with contentment is great gain.” To acquire godliness, one must study *God’s Word*. What *He* thinks, what *He* says, and what *He* instructs are true wisdom.

**Eccles. 2:22 For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun?**

God was pleased with Solomon’s original desire for wisdom. Solomon wanted to be a wise king who would be of benefit to his subjects, and the kingdom was blessed providentially. As a type, the blessing pictures the peace in the future Kingdom of Christ, as symbolized by the “still small voice” that Elijah heard (1 Kings 19:12). Only at the end of that reign will there be a temporary permission of evil with the loosing of Satan from his prison for the testing of mankind in the Little Season. Generally speaking, Jesus will rule with a rod of iron and will not tolerate any insubordination whatsoever. The soul who will not listen to “that prophet” will be cut off (Acts 3:23).

Jesus acknowledged his own wisdom as being superior to that of Solomon. In a touching comparison, he said that Solomon, with all the glory of his kingdom and his wisdom, did not have the glory and beauty of a lily, a common flower that grew in the field.

Solomon had an exorbitant thirst for knowledge in every field of endeavor, but knowledge for the sake of knowledge is vanity. To the contrary, knowledge *acted upon and properly used* is of benefit and lasting value.

Solomon’s reign was a reign of peace, but the peace that Israel enjoyed did not last very long. There was discontent, especially with the burdensome taxes, but that discontent is usually not dwelled upon because of the type. The political peace that existed under Solomon’s reign was of external benefit to the people, but actually, there was inward dissatisfaction. The people’s grievances became apparent with Rehoboam, and from then on, conditions went downhill for quite a long time. Not many of the successive kings are spoken of favorably.

**Eccles. 2:23 For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity.**

Solomon was speaking of his own personal experience. With all the labor of his pursuit, he did not even have a decent night’s sleep of rest and relaxation from normal labor, the labor (or exercise) of the body, because his pursuit was done under an affluent circumstance. Today many people who do not have the wealth or wisdom of Solomon still have his experience of troubled sleep because of the *love* of money. Even without the acquisition of money, the love of money is the root of much evil. A poor man can have the love of not merely money but also *mammon*, which includes influence, popularity, power, etc., and thus suffer the same frustration and vexation of spirit that Solomon had. Therefore, generally speaking, verse 23 is describing the fate of both the wise and the unwise, the wealthy and the poor.

However, some of the poor who are not consecrated live happy, normal lives because they do not have a hunger for wealth and mammon. Such individuals are better off but especially those who have contentment in a *godly* sense, for that is great gain. God gives benefits and blessings to those who sacrifice this world and its goods. If they are faithful, He adds to the spiritual promises of the future, which are so wonderful that they are unspeakable. To those who are running in that direction with full steam, God gives side benefits even in the present life—benefits such as a lot of friends in the truth and their bread and water being secure; that is, they

are blessed in a material sense more than the average person, even though they have vowed to give up those things. In fact, the more they vow to give up material things, the more the Lord blesses them, the principle being, “Prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it” (Mal. 3:10). And Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Thus the principle works both ways, for one who really gives his heart in full, unreserved consecration to God receives a satisfaction and a peace of mind and heart that nothing else could give. Moreover, he can go to the throne of grace for all of his sorrows and griefs.

**Eccles. 2:24** There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God.

“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 [normal or ordinary] labour.” The Bible says that one is to provide for the welfare of his own family but in a *normal* (not an abnormal) sense.

**Comment:** A simple, little story seems to illustrate the sentiments of this verse. A wealthy man riding in a limousine looked out the window and saw a farmer dressed in working clothes coming in from the field. The farmer was approaching his modest house, and inside the fence, one of his young children was waiting with joy while his wife stood at the door. It was a very odd thing. In a moment, the wealthy man realized that he had his gold, but he did not have a child to run to greet him after a day of work. He lived alone.

**Eccles. 2:25** For who can eat, or who else can hasten hereunto, more than I?

**Eccles. 2:26** For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit.

What took Solomon more or less a whole chapter to say, the Apostle Paul expressed in a deep, little formula: “Godliness with contentment is great gain.” Solomon saw that God’s providence is on the person who is trying to lead a decent, honest, quiet life. Such individuals get a joy and a happiness that others, be they rich or poor, do not attain because they have the wrong focus of attention in life.

“For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy.” A *godly* man gets wisdom, knowledge, and joy *without* all the extraordinary labor and *without* an exorbitant thirst and thrust in pursuit. He gets these things just by the normal pursuit of life because he has the *right* spirit. In short, the godly man ends up with the *real* wisdom.

“But to the sinner he [God] giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God.” The sinner has the opposite experience. Some people lay up earthly treasures, and then, at the end of their life, they see that the best thing they can do is to endow a university, a hospital, or another organization with the fruit of their labor. Of course in Solomon’s day, there were no such institutions. A very remarkable thing happened in the 1930s with the advent of Social Security. Before that, a family inherited the responsibility of taking care of their own elderly, but with human frailty and the sinful methods of mankind, children often forgot the parents and left them on their own to be destitute. Or if elderly people without means became a burden to their families, they were put in old folks’ homes, and in many cases, the poor, the feeble, and the old suffered terribly. Therefore, Social Security and Medicare have been a great blessing to man in the United States. These social programs, which are peculiar to our day, have been a benefit to those who are properly exercised thereby.

David saved up a *tremendous* sum of money for the Temple. We do not see Solomon making such a sacrifice for that purpose, even though great wealth and the gold of Ophir came into the kingdom to pay certain workers. To David's credit, he paid in advance for the materials of the Temple. David also had the plans for the Temple. Yes, Solomon built the structure, but it was David's Temple that Solomon built. Thus, with father and son, we see two different slants of two different individuals. Sometimes a son is superior to his father. In fact, there are many cases in history where a son was more honorable and noteworthy than his father, but the example of David and Solomon is the opposite.

Solomon concluded with the now familiar statement: "This also is vanity and vexation of spirit." He looked on his life as a waste of time, but what did he do? He wrote the Book of Ecclesiastes, which consists of the thoughts that were in his head. In later life, he felt that he could leave this legacy. In the Book of Proverbs, he included advice to his son Rehoboam. Here in Ecclesiastes, he also brought in advice to his son, and the Lord overruled the advice so that we might benefit from Solomon's experience. We have often heard the saying that a person's personal failures can be stepping-stones to progress and success if he is rightly exercised. I believe that Solomon will get life but maybe not the honor that he might have received had he pursued his life in the same direction as David.

**Comment:** The Song of Solomon must have been written when Solomon was young.

**Reply:** Yes, that seems to be the case, for there are some evidences to this effect in the Song itself. We also get that impression in the history of Solomon in the Book of 1 Kings, even though, normally speaking—and in broad-brush terms—the books of the Bible are sequential. For instance, the books of Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah are sequential civil histories that took place in Israel. The prophetic books are also sequential, generally speaking. For example, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel are sequential, although some of the prophetic books are parallel timewise to the historical books. In other words, the prophetic books could have been sequentially integrated with the historical books. This integration would be very profitable to do on our own, for it would help us to understand a great deal of history as it occurred. We lose a lot to only read them in the order in which they appear in the Bible. However, we feel that Solomon's writings are one exception to the sequential order of the books of the Bible.

**Comment:** The Book of Job is also out of the time line.

**Eccles. 3:1 To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:**

Most brethren have some familiarity with this chapter in Ecclesiastes and a verse or two later in the book. The rest of the book is usually not considered much.

Verses 1-8 contain quite a lot of repetition. An action is stated, and then there is either a refraining from that action or the opposite action. Fourteen situations are enumerated.

Verse 1 is like a preamble or an introduction. It is saying that providence affects men's lives, and the things that are enumerated have both a natural and a spiritual application. With the mind-set Solomon had for acquiring wisdom, his expressions pertain to providences that occur along natural lines in the experiences of mankind in general. Of course we can see a beneficial spiritual application as well. Thus verses 1-8, which are almost like proverbs, have a dual application. While as Christians, we live in the flesh, our primary vocation is to live the spiritual life, and with many of us, earning a living is our avocation. Therefore, our priorities are in reverse order to the priorities of the natural man.



**Q:** Is verse 1 saying that there is an order of things and that under heaven God has control of these things—that things are ordered?

**A:** Yes, there are providences, but the providences that occur to the *natural* man are more or less haphazard; that is, they are not custom-tailored. However, the providences for those who have made a commitment to serve the Lord in the Gospel Age are a much different situation. Solomon's advice was that the providences which happen to the natural man occur in spurts. In other words, there does not seem to be a special design, but based on what he had learned through life's bitter experiences, he was giving advice on when certain things occur. He kept repeating the thought that everything is the same, that all is vanity and frustration. This information is valuable even to the natural man, and for us, as new creatures in bodies of flesh, these providences along natural lines are proper to a certain extent as long as they do not sacrifice or inhibit spiritual growth.

We understand verse 1 to be saying that providences do occur, and serious-minded people who have studied history would agree. Many authors have written books showing that history repeats itself. What many in the world have said is that while history repeats itself, man never learns the lesson in spite of looking back and seeing reoccurrences again and again. Certain lessons should be learned by looking backward, but mankind does not benefit from them. The Israelites are a good illustration. Natural Israel does not seem to admit past failures. Very often the Israelites went their own way, even though they were favored as a people. Verse 1 is saying that providences happen. To the consecrated, they are tailor-made, and to the unconsecrated, they happen. The question is, How does one react to providences?

**Eccles. 3:2** A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;

“[There is] A time to be born, and a time to die.” What about that statement?

**Comment:** Some individuals are providentially born for special works to be done.

**Reply:** Yes. For example, in the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son, and there was a time that he had to die. Jesus recognized that time, knowing that his ministry would be 3 1/2 years long. He knew that he had to die at a particular Passover season; that is, he knew his hour had come at the fourth Passover of his earthly ministry because his birth had occurred in the fall of the year (Matt. 26:45; Luke 22:14; John 7:30; 8:20; 12:23,27; 13:1; 17:1). Accordingly, Jesus made sure that he was available in Jerusalem, for he knew he had to die on the Cross at a specific time. There was also a set time when he was to forsake his trade of carpentry and begin his public ministry as a new creature, for under the Law, a priest started his ministry at 30 years of age. Based on the extraordinary circumstances of his birth, he knew that he had been born for a purpose, and he wanted to be in alignment with that purpose.

Of course we had nothing to do with our natural birth, and we do not know in advance when our decease will be. The birth and the death are in God's hands. Therefore, not knowing the time of death, we should live each day as best we can, and if possible, we should try to note what the purpose was in connection with God's calling us to be a Christian.

“[There is] a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted.” What is the thought here?

**Comment:** Spiritually speaking, this is a reminder of the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares.

**Reply:** We have nothing to do with that planting and plucking up because the Son of man does the sowing. The Heavenly Father begot us “with the word of truth,” but that word of truth

providentially came to us through Jesus (James 1:18). Jesus knew us before we knew him.

But when we think of our part, there is another way of explaining the time to plant and the time to pluck up. There is advice along the line of our responsibility. First, the seed is planted, and then when spring or summer comes, depending on the nature of the seed, it will prosper. With the Hebrew calendar, the ground is plowed up after the winter rains, and then the seed is put in the ground.

There is a twofold perspective in viewing all the statements in verses 2-8. With regard to the “time to plant,” we plant a seed of truth whenever we have an opportunity. In other words, there is a time for a word in season. “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver” (Prov. 25:11). Paul told Timothy, “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season” (2 Tim. 4:2). The Lord appreciates our zeal in planting a word, especially when it is in season for others and out of season for us, for that shows that witnessing is the burden of our heart. We are often forgetful particularly as we get older. Sometimes we forget to bring a tract with us, and then something happens to embarrass us for missing an opportunity. We trust that the Lord will forgive us because of other circumstances that have arisen. But of course in early life, when we are full of energy and have all of our senses, we should always be prepared.

There can also be a time to plant and a time to pluck up with our fellowship or our witnessing. In the latter case, we try to interest someone in present truth and may even be able to do some nurturing, but if the other party’s interest grows cold, then we do not force the issue but move on to another place.

**Comment:** A time may also come for leaving a particular ecclesia.

**Reply:** God’s providence may indicate that it is expedient to leave one group or area for a different environment that would be more favorable to our spiritual new creature.

We are just giving a few suggestions to show that this advice of Solomon is helpful to consider.

**Eccles. 3:3 A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;**

“[There is] A time to kill.” When would be “a time to kill”? One example is the killing of unholy thoughts or desires, which are to be dealt with radically. The sooner, the quicker, and the more drastic one is in saying no, the better and the more effective the result is. The same principle is, “Resist the devil [and adversarial thoughts], and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). Against such firmness, Satan will feel further effort is not worth his time and attention at that moment. He will return at another time when we are weaker and try to catch us off guard.

Also, there is a time to kill fellowship that is unprofitable or dangerous to us as new creatures. With friends or neighbors who are earthly-minded but well-intentioned, we should use a modicum of common sense, but we have to be careful not to get too entwined.

**Comment:** Sometimes it is necessary to disfellowship unruly brethren.

“[There is] a time to heal.” What are some examples of a time to heal?

**Comment:** Jude 23 says, “And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.”

**Reply:** When we see one who is in that danger zone, we are to pluck him out, hating even the garment that is attached to the deed(s) committed. Sometimes that is impossible to do because the situation has gone too far. Sometimes, too, there is the danger that we might get spotted in

the extrication or the extraction, but if we hate the practice or habit that the person has succumbed to, we would have to be very careful that the nature of the salvation or rescue effort is not misunderstood as our approving of the sin.

**Comment:** Jude 22 says that we are to have compassion with some and make a difference.

**Reply:** Yes, a distinction is to be made.

**Comment:** James 5:14 tells of another time to heal: “Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.”

“[There is] a time to break down.” From the new-creature standpoint, the breaking down may be a wrong doctrine. In this case, the doctrine would not be just a difference of opinion but a dangerous difference that could lead one astray. Therefore, we would try, within reason, to warn or avoid the brother (or sister), to frown on the wrong doctrine, and to make a distinction between a proper love and a proper hatred.

“[There is] a time to build up.” To break down is destruction or demolition work, and to build up is construction. Thus there is a time, from the standpoint of the new creature, to warn others of the dangers of certain moral principles that are misconstrued or wrong deeds that can lead to a more drastic error of doctrine or behavior. To offer to replace these wrongs with something of an opposite nature is a building up, a construction work.

**Comment:** When the Pastor wrote *Food for Thinking Christians*, it was pursued as more of a destructive work. Subsequently he decided it was wiser to do a building-up work.

**Reply:** Yes, he found that it is proper to use guile when one can do so with a good or constructive purpose in mind. For instance, one could steer an injurious conversation in another direction. Some people are seemingly born with the ability to change the thinking or behavior of others in a very nice way. Others are more abrupt and crude but well-intentioned, which is important.

**Eccles. 3:4** A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

**Q:** When considered altogether, are these different “times” showing the permission of evil?

**A:** From a certain perspective, that is true, for *after* the Kingdom Age, in the age beyond, everything will be positive. There will be no evil thinking, no evil deeds, and no need to worry. Everything will be constructive, happy, and beautiful, whereas *during* the Kingdom Age, there will be sorrow, death, and tears. Therefore, the advice in these verses is good for the new creature during the Gospel Age, and from a natural standpoint, the principles will be helpful for the world of mankind to learn in the Kingdom Age. But things will change, so that beyond the Kingdom Age, there will not be these contrary things. For instance, if a person does wrong after the Kingdom Age, he will be immediately expunged. There will be no mercy, grace, or forgiveness because mankind will have been fully instructed in knowing what not to do. Any who then disobey will not be given opportunity of reform. One reason for the Gospel Age and the Kingdom Age is to show the contagion and the danger of disobedience. In summation, verses 2-8 do imply the permission of evil.

“[There is] A time to weep.” What are some thoughts for this category?

**Comment:** Paul said, “To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (1 Cor. 9:22). In a time of sadness, we

can share in the burdens of our brethren.

**Comment:** “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning” (Psa. 30:5).

**Reply:** That reference is more general, for “joy cometh in the [Kingdom] morning.” But of course that is true for us too, for that is when we hope to have our change to a much different situation.

“[There is] a time to laugh.”

**Comment:** Jesus said to his disciples, “Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh” (Luke 6:21). Those who overcome and get a spiritual resurrection will experience this joyous type of “laughter.”

“[There is] a time to mourn, and a time to dance.” This contrast is almost synonymous with the preceding “time to weep” and “time to laugh.” The weeping and laughing are a more emotional occurrence, whereas the mourning and dancing pertain to deeds. In both cases, there is an expedient time to act.

**Comment:** We are reminded of the time when David “danced before the LORD” (2 Sam. 6:16).

**Reply:** His wife Michal, Saul’s daughter, considered the dancing before the Ark of the Covenant to be ill behavior. She felt that he had acted shamelessly like a common person.

**Comment:** Weeping is of shorter duration, whereas mourning, or despair, involves more time. Also, we might describe the joy of those who were healed by Jesus as “dancing,” for some leaped with joy, whereas laughter is usually a quicker, more static action.

**Eccles. 3:5** A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

“[There is] A time to cast away stones.” When did such a time occur?

**Q:** David “cast away stones” when he used a slingshot with a stone to kill Goliath. Do the five stones picture doctrines?

**A:** Yes, and the one stone, or doctrine, that killed Goliath would be what David said to the giant: “I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied” (1 Sam. 17:45). In other words, “I come to you because you have defied the Lord our God, the Creator of heaven and earth. I am coming with His name and His power, and I will slay you because you have insulted Him.” Proof that the stone pictures doctrine is that it penetrated Goliath’s forehead, or mental faculties.

**Comment:** The top stone of the Great Pyramid was cast away when the builders rejected it.

**Reply:** Yes. The top stone was a representation of Jesus.

**Comment:** Stones that had leprosy as part of a house were cast away.

“[There is] a time to gather stones together,” to gather them in a heap or store them.

**Comment:** To make a pillar, a memorial to God, the Israelites gathered stones and heaped them on top of each other.

**Reply:** Yes, a memorial was made to God of an event that they wanted to preserve in memory. The pillar was left so that if the Israelites ever came back to that location and saw those stones, they would remember what had taken place there. Thus the stones were a memorial, and sometimes they became a remembrance of a covenant, or promise, made either by God to the Israelites or by them to God depending on the circumstance.

**Comment:** An example of gathering stones together was the building of the Great Pyramid.

**Reply:** Yes, that is a good example. In addition, the tearing down of the Second Pyramid, which is in opposition to the Great Pyramid, is an example of casting away stones. Zechariah 4:7 indicates that the Second Pyramid will be disassembled to remove the pernicious thinking that is associated with the antitypical false pyramid. “Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone [top stone of the Great Pyramid] thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it.”

**Comment:** 1 Peter 2:4,5 reads, “To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” The reference is to gathering together the “stones” of the Little Flock.

**Comment:** Jesus gathers the Little Flock, the antitypical precious stones, or jewels, on the high priest’s breastplate.

**Reply:** Yes, the high priest’s breastplate shows the placement in glory of the 144,000 members of the Little Flock in their gold ouches, or clasps.

“[There is] a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing.” Sometimes certain normal intimacies are shown at inappropriate times and places. These should be done in their own proper way, for there is a danger otherwise. For example, 2 Corinthians 13:12, “Greet one another with an holy kiss,” can be inordinately applied. Sometimes this “holy kiss” is on the mouth, which is inappropriate. If we are on the receiving end of such a manifestation, we should show our disapproval in some manner. If we are on the giving end, we certainly should know that it is an improper application. The “holy kiss” is done cheek to cheek. The word “kiss” means to gently touch, so it does not have to be with the lips. In fact, a handshake is one form of the gentle touch. The Arabs invariably greet one another cheek to cheek, which is a proper expression of friendship between male and female. There is a little more liberty between two of the same sex than between two of the opposite sex.

**Comment:** There is also the principle of extending the right hand of fellowship.

**Reply:** Yes, that is a very good application. We have to be careful, and the Scriptures tell of occasions when we are held responsible for what we should or should not do with regard to fellowship. The general attitude today is that we should “love” one another, but sometimes that love is carried too far, for there is a time to rebuke. The prevailing thought is that we never hate or condemn, but that would depend on the circumstance. Thus there is a time and a place to refrain, avoid, rebuke, and admonish.

**Eccles. 3:6** A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;

“[There is] A time to get.” There is a time to get knowledge and to grow. For example, babes are to “desire the sincere milk of the word, [so] that ye may grow thereby” (1 Pet. 2:2). Those who are young and babes, relatively speaking, are to desire and hunger after the ABC’s of truth, which build one up. Then later they can digest meat and the deeper truths (Heb. 5:14).

**Comment:** The King James margin has “seek” instead of “get,” and the New American Standard Bible (NASB) has “throw away” instead of “cast away.”

**Reply:** Yes, we are to throw away that which is unprofitable. Paul advised Timothy to avoid certain things because they were unprofitable. “Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying” (1 Tim. 1:4). “But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes” (2 Tim. 2:23). And he said to Titus, “But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain” (Titus 3:9). Idle conversation and inordinate genealogies are to be avoided. Time is valuable, so we should set priorities. Another example is that “bodily exercise profiteth little”; it does profit some, but inordinate exercise wastes valuable time (1 Tim. 4:8).

**Comment:** Daniel sought to understand prophecy, but he had to give up the pursuit as “lost” because it was not the due time for understanding. “But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased” (Dan. 12:4).

**Reply:** Yes, Daniel would have been wasting his time to inquire further.

**Eccles. 3:7 A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;**

“[There is] A time to rend [tear up and discard], and a time to sew.” There is a time to break a friendship and a time to renew a friendship. The Apostle Paul first said to excommunicate the fornicator (1 Cor. 5:1-6,11), but later he said that rather than have the individual be sorrowful unto death—commit suicide—it was time to welcome him back because he realized the seriousness of what he had done and desired reinstatement with the brethren (2 Cor. 2:6-8). Paul said in effect, “Now you can receive the individual back. The sorrow was godly, but do not let it last too long, for it might end up with his committing suicide.” Thus there is a time to excommunicate, and there is a time to recommunicate.

These *opposite* instructions show that we have to be balanced, whereas the tendency is to be polarized along one line or the other. We are bent in the direction of being either too strict or too lenient and forgiving. Neither extreme is appropriate. We need the Holy Spirit to teach us the proper balance.

“[There is] a time to keep silence, and a time to speak.” One time to keep silent is when we are as sheep before the shearers (Isa. 53:7).

And Paul said, “I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence” (1 Tim. 2:12). Sisters should realize that they are not the teachers. In such cases, it is the responsibility of the elders to steer a sister in the proper direction. That is hard for elders to do, but there are different ways to hopefully contain a sister who is teaching.

Keeping silent might have to do with voting. Of course there is both voting by hand and voting by mouth. With regard to “a time to speak,” we have to be careful that, through silence, we do not give assent to something that is contrary to proper thinking from the Lord’s standpoint.

**Comment:** A time for silence can be a time for listening.

**Reply:** Yes, the Apostle James said, “Be swift to hear, [and] slow to speak” (James 1:19).

**Eccles. 3:8 A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.**

“[There is] A time to love, and a time to hate.”

**Comment:** We are to love righteousness and hate iniquity.

**Reply:** Yes, David wrote prophetically of Jesus, “Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness [iniquity]: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows” (Psa. 45:7; compare Heb. 1:9). Jesus was exalted to glory because he not only loved righteousness but also hated iniquity. David said of God’s enemies, “I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies” (Psa. 139:22).

“[There is] a time of war.” The Bible tells us to “fight the good fight of faith” (1 Tim. 6:12). Of course we should refrain from harmful discussion or evil speaking, so we also need to war against “corrupt communication” (Eph. 4:29).

“[There is] a time for peace.” An example would be a time to reconcile or mediate, a time to end warfare, when to do so would be expedient according to what the Lord’s Word teaches.

**Comment:** An example of a time for war is to stand up for principle, but on the other hand, we have to realize that not everything is a principle. With a preference, we can pursue peace by yielding to others.

**Eccles. 3:9 What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth?**

How we interpret this question depends on what we have in mind. After reading previous verses, one might hastily reply, “The question has a negative import,” but actually, it is just a simple, clear question that is not prejudiced either way. Solomon was not saying there is no profit for a man who labors. Rather, he was just raising the question. In verse 10, we will begin to see the connection.

**Eccles. 3:10 I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it.**

Verse 10 describes the permission of evil as “the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it.” This verse makes us reflect on the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. Henceforth man was to earn the fruit of his labors by the sweat of his brow. Part of the curse was that he would have to till the ground; that is, food would not just automatically come from the ground like the fruit on the trees in the garden. Not much strenuous labor was required in the Garden of Eden because all of the trees were good for food. When Adam and Eve were first created, the fruit was supplemented by herbs.

On the one hand, the permission of evil was the result of disobedience, but on the other hand, the permission of evil is instructive if one is properly exercised in it. The permission of evil produces some good, for a stumbling stone becomes a stepping-stone when a person is rightly exercised by the experience. In verse 9, therefore, Solomon was simply raising a philosophical question, and in verse 10, he answered it.

**Eccles. 3:11 He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.**

God made everything beautiful in His time. Also, He set the world in man’s heart so that no one can find out the work that He “maketh from the beginning to the end.”

**Q:** Was Solomon saying that God has a time frame, but since man does not recognize it, he does not know what God is doing now? Solomon seems to be saying that God has a plan.

**A:** Solomon knew that there was some order in God's creation, but it was far above the perception of man in both its ultimate purpose and its time frames. Many of these time frames are much longer than one's personal lifetime. For instance, a time frame might take a thousand years, whereas man lives, say, a hundred years. Therefore, with regard to many things, one cannot necessarily see the end from the beginning from the perspective of time. In other words, man is limited by time. From one perspective, there are a certain number of hours of daylight, so we are all limited in what we can do or accomplish.

**Q:** Was Solomon also saying that God set the world in man's heart so that people would concentrate on the beauty of nature rather than on God? Generally speaking, man is naturally minded, not spiritually minded.

**A:** That slant is in this verse. In fact, that is what Solomon himself did, whereas David rose above this situation. David was a shepherd of sheep, and Solomon was a shepherd of people, so based on training, Solomon's perception should have been much higher than David's. One's attitude or frame of mind is the determining factor. Therefore, it is the set of the sail that determines the goal. With his humble profession, David had time to lie in the field in the evening and observe the stars and the wonders of nature. The lowly estate in the beginning of his life worked great wonders for him in appreciating the God of nature, and it gave him more time to reflect in depth. In contrast, Solomon, with his brilliant mind, reflected rather quickly on higher thoughts, instead of thinking deeply and philosophically as to what God's purpose is.

God "hath set the world in their [mankind's] heart." We are made flesh, and to sustain our lives, we have to both eat flesh and work in material things. That initiative is good—man should work for his living. However, while many earthly, fleshly instincts are good in one respect because God originally created everything perfect, they have deteriorated over time and become more like those of an animal. Being in one sense the highest of the animals, man should have retained his higher level of thinking and living, especially since he knows there is a God, whereas animals, as far as we can see, have no perception of a Creator.

Solomon did surmise that there is a God and that perhaps God has a purpose beyond that which man experiences when he is born and when he dies. Solomon was also saying that he did not know too much about the hereafter, but he *could have known more* because Paul stated in Hebrews 11:10 that Abraham "looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God"; that is, Abraham looked *to the future*. Therefore, it is the set of the mind that makes the difference. Solomon was brilliant in perceptive qualities, and he had the time, the money, and the authority to search out and engage in whatever he wanted to do. The problem was that he did not have that higher goal. We are only in the third chapter of Ecclesiastes, but he eventually presented this conclusion.

In the past, the Jewish people did not have much access to the Scriptures unless they went to the synagogue. Therefore, a person needed to have the drive to obtain *spiritual* understanding, whereas Solomon had the drive to understand *material* things. The thought he expressed, "so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end," is stated differently in 1 Peter 1:10-12, which says that the holy prophets and the angels desired to look into the things of the future. Some of the Old Testament prophets did know that something good was coming, but the specifics, the details, were wanting until Jesus brought to light life and the call to immortality (2 Tim. 1:10).

In summary, we think that in verse 11 Solomon was emphasizing the limited parameters of man in his search for understanding, and certainly that was Solomon's personal experience.



**Comment:** In verse 10, Solomon said, “I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it.” Having a respite from war in his reign of peace, surely he did not have the problems that his father David experienced with Saul and some of his own sons.

**Reply:** No doubt Solomon had great executive capability. Of course the peace during his reign was providential because it was meant to be a type, or picture, of the benefits of the Kingdom Age of peace, safety, health, and happiness. However, the peace obtained in Solomon’s day was of a much lower quality than that which will exist in the Kingdom under Messiah’s rule. It is true that Solomon did not have the enemies of David, of Saul, or even of his own son Rehoboam later, but we think that verse 10 shows his knowledge of the pronouncement of the penalty of sin upon man; namely, “Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Gen. 3:17-19). In observing the common man’s struggle for survival in everyday life, Solomon would have been very cognizant of the curse, but his question was, What is next?

**Eccles. 3:12 I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life.**

Verse 12 is rather broadly stated. We know that there is some good in mankind, but the good is very, very limited, for a person is born into travail. The number of his days is marked with the burden of life and the effort to survive and obtain the necessary food. Therefore, verse 12 is a broad-brush statement. Solomon was saying that if one looks upon mankind as a whole, there is “no good” in the majority of people. However, he qualified this statement with the word “but”—“but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life.”

On the one hand, if a man does good, he will be rewarded to some extent in the present life, but generally speaking, mankind’s experience seems to be nothing but trouble. On the other hand, for a certain segment of society, it has always been true that some have been satisfied with their humble estate, and they seem to have the attitude of mind, “This is what is before me, so I better not complain. Instead I will try to get the most that I can out of the providence which has befallen me.” That attitude is helpful, but it is not the attitude of most people.

**Eccles. 3:13 And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God.**

Solomon was suggesting what is good to do. However, his advice was not being followed by others, nor had he followed it himself. Now, in later life, he saw that he had wasted a good deal of time, whereas he could have done much better if he had had the proper focus of attention.

**Comment:** It is human nature that when we work hard for something, we appreciate it more when we obtain it. This is true of food or anything else.

**Reply:** Yes, the harder a farmer works, the more food he produces to put on the table, in spite of the changes in weather and the misfortunes of life. If a person is born with that drive and has reasonable health, he can find some means of survival. Even wicked people who have servants and are brutal and unkind to them do not want to kill their servants, for they want to get out of them the most that they can. Of course that attitude brings labor and suffering on the servants, but they would at least eke out a living and not starve to death. Under the feudal system, generally speaking, servants who were good, honest, and trustworthy fared better than those who did not have that drive.

“It is the gift of God.” Here is something constructive that Solomon said. In other words, “godliness with contentment is great gain.” With the right attitude, even the godly common man would be content in his labor.

**Q:** Earlier, in discussing the time for every purpose under heaven, we started out with the time to be born and the time to die pertaining to Jesus. Can all of the acts and their opposites in verses 2-8 apply to Jesus?

**A:** Yes. That is true even when we think from the standpoint of the laws of nature. With humans, for example, a nine-month pregnancy is the average for a normal birth. In fact, all animals and insects have a specific time period in which they are born and in which they die. In the various species, there seems to be a mathematical design, or law of nature, that was implanted by the Creator. Of course Solomon’s saying there is a time for every purpose under heaven is particularly true with regard to mankind.

**Eccles. 3:14** I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him.

**Eccles. 3:15** That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past.

**Comment:** God’s Word will not return unto Him void. “So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it” (Isa. 55:11).

**Reply:** Certainly that is what God said in His own Word, and faith has to accept that statement as the reality. Solomon had faith, but the exercise of his faith was more that of a statistician than a result of the wholesomeness that should have persisted in his early life. Therefore, we see the Book of Ecclesiastes as an admission that Solomon saw his own failure, and he wanted to pass on that information to posterity. He made recommendations as he went along. In this third chapter, he had already recommended that besides there being a time to weep and a time to be joyful, a time to hate and a time to love, etc., which was more or less common sense, it is good that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the benefit of all his labor (verse 13). This advice was constructive, so he interspersed all the negative comments with a few constructive comments, and this will be increasingly true in the latter part of the book.

**Q:** Solomon also said in effect, “If a man does not work, he does not eat.” Did he understand more because of his wisdom, such as saying here that no one can add to or take away from anything God does? Did Jesus quote from Solomon at times?

**A:** Even when the Lord tells what happens through disobedience and gives examples, that information is instructive. The disobedience itself is not instructive, but it helps us to learn what not to do as well as what to do. Since the Book of Ecclesiastes is included in Holy Writ, we know that it has its purpose and place in God’s estimation. In one way, with the writing of this book, Solomon did what he wanted to do, as we will find out later. Job, too, wanted his experiences to be recorded, and unbeknownst to him, God had the recorder right there, for Elihu gave the lessons to posterity in writing the Book of Job.

“That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past.” The sun is an example of this principle. The sun comes up in the morning, and it sets in the evening. It did that yesterday, it does that today, and it will do that tomorrow—and man cannot do one thing about it! Man can neither initiate nor inhibit the sunrise or the sunset, and what was in the past is now in the present and will be in the future. Thus some things that we observe and know are the Creator’s work we little nobodies down

here cannot inhibit. They are God's prerogative as the Creator. Even the natural man with a bit of sense would observe these things. Accordingly, the farmer knows that there is a summer and a winter, a time to sow and a time to reap, and he adjusts to God's schedule as best he can. In fact, the more wisdom the farmer uses in adjusting to God's schedule, the more fruitful is the product of his labor.

We think Solomon was saying that God has His own ways, and as the heavens are high above the earth, so His thoughts are beyond the thoughts of men. What a difference there was when Jesus came and the Holy Spirit was given to Christians! By God's grace, we are able to get little glimpses of things that are very outstanding and unusual. To a large extent, God has taken us into His confidence and shown us details of the future.

From what Solomon said here, we can see he felt that people who do good will somehow be requited by God and that to do good is better in the final end. He also felt that a person who does bad will be requited, but he did not develop that thought because what lies beyond the grave was beyond his perception.

Solomon was saying that with regard to what we see in nature, even our bodies have a time schedule. Whether we like it or not, we were born and are living, but when we will die we do not know, for that is in God's hands. Even we, as new creatures, do not know some of these things, but we know far more than those who have just an earthly mind.

**Q:** Is verse 15 also saying that God knows the end from the beginning?

**A:** Yes, that is the implication. God knows, but we are limited.

Solomon drew certain conclusions from things that he observed in nature. As new creatures, we can also learn by observation—for example, how God operates, to a certain extent. We can understand His method in doing some things.

**Eccles. 3:16** And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there.

Solomon definitely saw the permission of evil occurring. He knew that God could stop it if He so desired, but Solomon suspected that God had a purpose in mind. Solomon admitted that he was limited in his understanding in that area, even though he said he was wiser than his father David. Incidentally, we do not think this statement about Solomon's wisdom was proper. He was wiser with regard to laws of nature but not wiser in spiritual things. Those who set their heart above to worship and serve God in deed and in truth are the wisest of men.

**Comment:** Judgment took place in the cities of refuge for someone who might have killed a person accidentally. Sometimes the judgment was not exactly what it should have been.

**Reply:** That principle operates in verse 16. For instance, when a crime was committed and the perpetrator ran away, he could flee to a city of refuge, but in order to gain entry into that city, he had to state why he was there. Of course people cannot read the heart, but ostensibly there had to be a good reason. A person could not stay indefinitely in that city of refuge. Under certain circumstances, a person stayed there until the death of the high priest, but in other cases, the person could not remain there—for example, if it was found that he was culpable for a death. If substantive evidence of wrongdoing was found, the person was returned to the place where the supposed criminal act had occurred.

Today Satan is turning everything upside down. If someone is guilty of a crime or is likely to be found guilty, the lawyer tries to get the case transferred to another locality so that the

testimonies do not prejudice the case. That procedure is contrary to what is stated in the Mosaic Law. The trial should be held, and the testimony heard, at the scene of the crime. In our day, the judge will say, “It does not matter that the man stole previously. We can consider only one deed in the trial. Any past crimes must be put out of the mind.” We can see that Satan is the god of this world, for little by little everything is being perverted. Some think all the problems in the world are an evidence that Jesus is reigning, but the *good* things are going downhill. The United States was founded with the Constitution, and men fled here for refuge from the religious strife of Europe. The laws were very good and very noble, but now everything is being degraded. George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and others were honorable men.

Thus there was a place for judgment under the Law. A person who fled to a city of refuge might be guilty, or he might be innocent. A trial had to be held.

**Comment:** When we go to a judge, we expect righteousness, but Israel was condemned because the judges took bribes and gave false judgments.

**Reply:** In other words, wickedness went in the place of judgment.

**Q:** Could verse 16 be read, “And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment, and the place of righteousness, that wickedness was there, that iniquity was there”?

**A:** Yes, it could be. In fact, that is a very good rendering, but the subject matter is predicated on principles. I like the thought of the city of refuge, but this suggested rendering is good.

**Comment:** Solomon seems to be making the comparison between God, with whom there is no variableness or shadow of turning, and the iniquity and wickedness in man’s judgment.

**Reply:** Yes, that thought was discussed under verse 15. All of God’s work is perfect, and it is forever. Sometimes His work is above our understanding, but nevertheless, it has a purpose.

**Eccles. 3:17** I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work.

Chapter 3 began with this same principle about time: “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven” (Eccl. 3:1). However, verse 17 is speaking about *God’s* time, whereas some of the previous verses pertain to us. In other words, God has His timetable too—not just for man but His *own* timetable.

Solomon was saying in his heart, “God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for there is a time ... for every purpose and ... work.” There are many things that we imagine on principles. To some extent, the conscience makes judgments of right and wrong on certain matters. Sometimes we make mistakes, but from a human standpoint, judgment seems to be inherently planted in us. Stated another way, that ability has not been entirely obliterated by the Fall.

**Eccles. 3:18** I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts.

**Comment:** With the King James marginal reference, this verse reads, “I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might *clear God, and see that they themselves are beasts.*”

**Reply:** Yes. The alternate rendering is saying that God will manifest the sons of men to *see that they are fallen*. The “wise” of the earth have deduced that man has evolved from a lower state and that through all of his mistakes, the race is evolving to a higher and higher state, whereas

the truth is the other way around. Man was created perfect but fell.

**Comment:** Man is the problem, for God is clear from guilt.

**Reply:** In time mankind will see that they themselves are beasts. If man was evolving to a higher state, verse 18 would not be a true statement.

**Eccles. 3:19** For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity.

**Eccles. 3:20** All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again.

**Eccles. 3:21** Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?

**Eccles. 3:22** Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?

Verse 22 ends the chapter with the same theme that is in verses 12 and 13: "I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life. And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God."

Solomon's words in verses 19-21 should be very humbling from the normal concept that after all is said and done, man goes down into the dust of the earth with the animals. Actually, from one standpoint, man is an animal but of the highest order because he can reverence God, whereas the beasts cannot. Solomon was saying that man's pride should be humbled, but that is not generally what happens in life.

What is man's future? Solomon definitely suspected that God has a purpose, that He is beholding mankind, and that to do good is better than to do wrong. From a natural standpoint, Solomon felt that it is implanted in man to do good, so man's conscience should tell him that somehow and somewhere the Creator will have retribution for those who do wrong, wickedness, and violence.

Based on the Hebrew, we think verse 21 should be translated a little differently. Solomon did feel that when a man dies, the spirit, or soul, goes upward, whereas that of the brute beast goes downward. The animal nature of man enters the tomb just like the beast and becomes dust of the earth, but the spirit is another matter.

**Q:** Then is the question form of verse 21 incorrect?

**A:** We are studying Ecclesiastes, but Solomon's other writings (Proverbs and the Song of Solomon) provide some information as to what he actually believed. Therefore, knowing what he wrote elsewhere has an effect on our understanding of his statements and questions in this book. Solomon was saying that there is very little knowledge of the hereafter as far as details are concerned. While man may accumulate a lot of knowledge down here, as Solomon did, he did not have a great accumulation of knowledge about the future. He was certain there is a future but not with regard to the flesh, and he did not know what happens to the soul at death.

Many believe that Solomon was teaching the immortality of the soul, and others conclude that he did not believe in the hereafter at all, that he felt the dead were dead forever. But that does not mean Solomon had either of these views when he made these statements. The point is that

to some extent, little inflections in the questions and answers are prejudiced by his past thinking as already revealed in his other books, especially Proverbs.

Solomon sensed that he had wasted his life, and he admitted this thought in his own way. His writing was like the wise men of the East, who talked in such high language that it is hard for the ordinary person to get the gist of what they were really saying. Ecclesiastes was Solomon's form of repentance for his past deeds. At least God rewarded him in the sense that his experience is recorded for our benefit.

**Q:** Please comment on verse 22.

**A:** Not until Jesus came were life and immortality brought to light. What the prophets, the holy men of old, and the angels wanted to know was not given, but they did get hints and glimpses of things to come. All of the prophets spoke of restitution, each in his own way, but the information was given in fragments. Of all the prophets, Isaiah has perhaps the most information on restitution, but even he did not fully understand, for he spoke mechanically as he was moved by the Holy Spirit.

As stated, verse 22 refers back to verses 12 and 13. Solomon was saying that he did not know too much about the hereafter, but it is good for man to enjoy the good of his labor, for God will answer goodness. Godliness with contentment is a gift. In fact, it is great gain, for it has its profit in spite of all the sorrows and labors accompanying it.

Solomon's writings are a stark contrast with the writings of David. As the lineage went from David to Solomon and then to Rehoboam, it went downhill, yet from the worldly standpoint, Solomon's thinking is higher than David's. Solomon built wonderful palaces and the Temple, but David gave him all the measurements.

**Comment:** Some Christians feel that the death pronounced on Adam was a spiritual death, and they supposedly support this thought with Scriptures, including saying that the spirit goes back to God. Our reply is that a person must have the Holy Spirit in order to die a spiritual death. Verses 19 and 20 refute the other thinking in stating that both animals and man have a spirit.

**Reply:** We know without question that the spirit, the soul, the Hebrew *nephesh*, the Greek *pneuma*, of the *brute* beast does not go upward. However, the Scriptures are silent on *domestic* beasts. Therefore, the Scriptures do not tell us one way or the other what God has in mind for the souls of domestic beasts.

**Eccles. 4:1** So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter.

**Eccles. 4:2** Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive.

Verse 1 is related to Ecclesiastes 3:22, the last verse of the previous chapter: "Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?"

"So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun." Solomon beheld the oppression that was so manifest to him by those who did the oppressing, as well as by the recipients of that cruelty with their tears. As would be true, generally speaking, those who were oppressed had no comforter or any sensation of relief from the oppression. "And behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter."

But what about the last portion of the verse? “And on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter.” Of course the oppressors certainly had the power to oppress those in slavery underneath them, but the statement is that they had power but “no comforter.” What was Solomon saying?

There was a measure of dissatisfaction and discomfort with those who were being oppressed, as well as with those who were doing the oppressing. In the present life, the spirit of both the oppressors and the oppressed was disquieted. Neither category achieved a satisfying purpose of rest and contentment because evil seemed to attend both of them. Of course our sympathies would lie with those who were being unjustly and cruelly treated, but Solomon was apparently taking both sides. There was a relentless drive on the part of the oppressors, and the oppressed were relentlessly being driven. Thus there did not seem to be a satisfaction in either situation.

Consequently, Solomon said in verse 2, “Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive.” If verse 2 ended the matter, we could understand what Solomon was saying, namely, that there is no pain in the grave (and no joy either). There is no sensation when a person is dead, and that circumstance would be better than the disquietude manifested in verse 1 by both classes. The next verse, verse 3, is what creates the problem, for we want to know what Solomon was driving at.

**Eccles. 4:3** Yea, better is he than both they, which hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.

“Yea, better is he [the person who is already dead] than both they [the oppressor and the oppressed], which hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.” It would be easy to get the impression that Solomon did not believe in a resurrection, and if that were the case, what he said would seem to be a reasonable conclusion. If there is no life after the present life, then it is better not to be born and have the vain experience of not really achieving the pursuit of happiness. What was Solomon driving at?

**Comment:** For verses 2 and 3, the NASB is a good translation. It reads, “So I congratulated the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still living. But better off than both of them is the one who has never existed, who has never seen the evil activity that is done under the sun.”

We are inclined to think that Solomon believed in an afterlife because in the previous chapter, he indicated that some kind of judgment is coming based on what a person has done in the present life. From that standpoint, he was implying here that with the conditions he had observed during his lifetime, if a person is to be born, it would be better to be born in the future age when conditions of oppression will not exist. However, the language being used seems to contradict this explanation, so we will keep these verses in mind as we go on to later chapters, where we will get additional information.

**Comment:** Solomon seems to be saying, “Better is he who is dead than both the oppressors and the oppressed who have not yet been born.”

**Reply:** Yes, that is just stating the thought in reverse fashion.

**Eccles. 4:4** Again, I considered all travail, and every right work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbour. This is also vanity and vexation of spirit.

Solomon said of those who are doing a faithful work earning their living—being either under slavery or in the employ of someone—that such labor, when honestly executed, is certainly

acceptable. In considering all the travail and comparing it with “every right work,” work that was being done righteously, he saw that the one who is doing rightful work is envied by others. The person becomes a target of envy by those who witness his diligent and faithful labor and the reward that he gets as a result of earning an honest day’s living. Solomon saw that even this—doing what is right and good—seems to invite criticism or envy. In other places, Solomon said that if one does not do good, he seems to get away with it, but even doing good does not bring entire satisfaction because others will envy or persecute him in one form or another.

To use the term “under the sun” (verse 3) means that Solomon was speaking in very broad terms, or generalities, rather than using specific cases. Thus we are not getting the full benefit of his thinking here except that he said, “This is also vanity and vexation of spirit.” In other words, vexation of spirit is experienced even by those who are doing righteous work. One may have honesty of purpose in his heart, but others consider him to be a “holier-than-thou” person who thinks too much of himself. Therefore, the honest worker does not get the reward of appreciation that he might anticipate from his neighbors for what he is doing in an exemplary fashion. Actually, in our experiences, that is not always the case, for some neighbors do appreciate the example of a righteous person, but Solomon was describing the way the matter would generally be viewed.

Solomon was explaining things as a broad-brush, general observation of the direction in which society was going. Today, for example, we see such things as the increase of homosexuality and the removal of the Ten Commandments from public institutions, and we realize that conditions are getting out of hand. The Scriptures indicate that the evil we are witnessing will increase and increase until the real “flood” Time of Trouble comes where God’s judgment will be upon the evildoers.

Generally speaking, society and morality are going downhill. The only thing going uphill is technology, which is marvelously becoming more beneficial but is not necessarily being beneficially used at the present time. Technology is increasing for the betterment of mankind under proper situations in the Kingdom.

If we understand that Solomon was speaking in broad terms, we can understand his comments. We are blessed because we have God’s Word to feed on, His providence working on our behalf, Jesus’ robe of righteousness, and the Holy Spirit to give us joy, peace, and hope that a better day is coming for all the obedient of mankind. But very few have that hope, relatively speaking.

Throughout Ecclesiastes, Solomon repeatedly used the expression “vanity and vexation of spirit” in one form or another. For instance, the last verse of chapter 4 reads, “Surely this also is vanity and vexation of spirit,” showing that one thing after another is vanity. Instead of things going uphill, Solomon saw everything going downhill, and that is exactly what is happening today. To say that Jesus is reigning when these things are happening is derogatory, for the implication is that he is not doing anything to curb the evil. Satan and the fallen angels are having a heyday from this perspective.

**Eccles. 4:5 The fool foldeth his hands together, and eateth his own flesh.**

Verses 5 and 6 are like proverbs. “The fool foldeth his hands together.” The term “fool” is repeatedly used in Ecclesiastes and Proverbs. A fool who folds his hands together squanders his time and does not work. How does a fool eat “his own flesh”?

**Comment:** He destroys his character.



**Reply:** Yes, not working is damaging to character. In fact, the Apostle Paul said, “For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat” (2 Thess. 3:10). And he added, “If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed” (2 Thess. 3:14). In such cases, the Christian is to show some kind of dissatisfaction or disapproval. That procedure was followed in the early Church when some went on long journeys lasting for a year or two and sponged on the brotherhood. They were given food and lodging, and the length of their stay depended on the generosity of the host. Seeing this practice happening more and more, Paul gave an admonition on how to treat the spongers.

If an individual’s hands are folded together, we can think of him as sitting comfortably in an easy chair and intertwining the five fingers of each hand so that his arms are locked together across his stomach. When he is in that posture for a while, he falls asleep.

Today the unemployed are completely at rest at home receiving welfare checks, and they get monthly allowances for food according to the number of children in the family. Moreover, they are on Medicaid, which means that all hospital expenses are paid by the government. People who habitually live this way are a burden to society. Because they get everything free, they have no initiative to go out and try to earn a living. In recent years, laws have been enacted in certain states so that if a person is able to work but refuses to do so, his monthly allowance is reduced. Thus measures are now being taken to counteract the welfare problem, but that was not true for 30 or 40 years. People have lived and died on welfare. Some who are really dishonest take on different names so that they receive a double monthly allowance, or they work where they do not pay taxes. As an investigator for taxes at one time, I saw that the state could not distinguish if a case was bona fide because there were so many cases involving individuals with the same common last name. The government would lose more money if it investigated all of these cases than if the people were left alone. Therefore, the dishonest practices burgeoned. Not only were these people damaging their characters, but they were jeopardizing their eternal futures. If we consider the “flesh” in verse 5 as earthly restitution, they were damaging, or eating into, their future life.

**Eccles. 4:6 Better is an handful with quietness, than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit.**

Verse 6 is self-explanatory.

**Eccles. 4:7 Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun.**

Verse 7 sounds like verse 1: “So I returned, and considered....” After Solomon was busy doing something, there came a period in which he could contemplate and think by himself. Thus he returned again and again to his reflections on vanity, grief, and vexation of spirit as witnessed in the example of society that was before him.

**Eccles. 4:8 There is one alone, and there is not a second; yea, he hath neither child nor brother: yet is there no end of all his labour; neither is his eye satisfied with riches; neither saith he, For whom do I labour, and bereave my soul of good? This is also vanity, yea, it is a sore travail.**

Solomon was speaking of misers. A miser is a loner who could easily provide for himself, but a drive is in him of wanting to increase his goods for the future. This drive to accumulate continues with him, even if he lives to age 90. He is so focused on increasing his goods that when he dies, there is not even a relative to whom he can leave his goods and money. Thus he makes no provision along this line. Solomon saw the miser’s life as a constant waste and a disquieting experience because the individual was never satisfied.

Similarly, a king on the throne has to worry all the time that he might be assassinated by someone who wants to take his place. These verses are broad axioms of what the situation is, generally speaking.

“Neither is his eye satisfied with [the accumulation of] riches [already in his possession].” In addition, the miser never stops to question, “For whom do I labour, and bereave my soul of good?” In other words, he does not ask, “Why am I doing this to myself and never able to have a rest?” The constant drive and desire to accumulate or obtain goods of one kind or another is a lack of sanity. What was Solomon’s conclusion? “This is also vanity, yea, it is a sore travail.”

**Eccles. 4:9 Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour.**

**Eccles. 4:10 For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up.**

**Eccles. 4:11 Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone?**

**Eccles. 4:12 And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.**

Verses 9-12 are the most favorable comments Solomon made in this chapter, for generally speaking, everything was negative in his observation. In this case, “two are better than one.” For example, when unemployment is rife, sometimes a woman can get a job to support the family, and sometimes a man can do so. If a child or a close relative lives with them, he may be employed. Therefore, it is of benefit when more than one is involved.

**Q:** Could these verses be talking about more than just marriage? For instance, as brethren, we should not be loners. We need contact with at least one other brother, if not more, so that if we fall out of the way, someone will be there.

**A:** Solomon would not have had that thought in mind, but we can extrapolate the lesson.

There are cases where two together are a problem, but generally speaking, by the law of averages, more than one—a second or a third in harmony or unity—is a better situation than a loner.

**Comment:** Two are better than one in marriage if they are equally yoked.

**Reply:** Yes, although sometimes it works the other way too, but that is a very iffy situation. Certainly Paul advised the consecrated not to marry the unconsecrated—unless they have been keeping company for a long time when one of them consecrates.

Several of Solomon’s statements and observations help us, as Christians, to be on our guard. And that is one reason why the Book of Ecclesiastes is included in the Scriptures.

Generally speaking, the expression “two are better than one” refers to marriage, but of course the principle is true that if two people in harmony are working on a project, that project is more apt to be successful. “If two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone?” is a reference to marriage, especially if the two are poor, for in sharing a bed, they share the body heat and help each other. Even animals huddle together for survival during the winter months. Thus there is a benefit in communal consolation, whether it is warmth of spirit or body in a literal or a symbolic sense. This reasoning seems to be very practical.

**Comment:** When David was cold in his old age, a young woman was found to warm him. This incident shows the principle of body heat (1 Kings 1:1-4).

**Comment:** When there are two, one can provide warmth of spirit to the other individual who is depressed or discouraged.

**Comment:** Verse 12 is commonly used in wedding discourses.

**Reply:** Yes, and it is good advice as a principle or as common-sense, pragmatic wisdom.

**Eccles. 4:13 Better is a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished.**

Verses 13 and 14 are more particularized. An old and foolish king (singular) was a particular example, namely, Solomon himself. He was contrasting “a poor and a wise child” with “an old and foolish king.” He was saying that it would have been better for him to be born poor but with wisdom. Verse 13 was part of his confession.

Better is a poor, wise child than an old, foolish king “who will no more be admonished.” People do not generally like to admonish a king because they think they will suffer consequences. Rather than trying to instruct an old and foolish king, a person would probably remain silent and not risk incurring displeasure, especially if the king had a disposition that was not amenable to being admonished.

Solomon came to his own senses and was now confessing his problem, which no one else showed him except the Lord, who did so through his conscience. By that means, God revealed to Solomon his foolishness.

**Eccles. 4:14 For out of prison he cometh to reign; whereas also he that is born in his kingdom becometh poor.**

“For out of prison he cometh to reign.” Here Solomon was giving a second particular example of someone, namely, Jeroboam. Jeroboam fled to Egypt for refuge, but when he heard that Solomon had died, he returned to Israel. Verse 14 is prophetic, for Solomon was stating something that had not yet happened. Ahijah the prophet tore Jeroboam’s new garment into two parts and prophesied that the kingdom of Solomon would be divided (1 Kings 11:29-35). Rehoboam was Solomon’s successor, but the kingdom was divided with ten tribes being torn from him because he did not follow the Lord’s instructions.

“For out of prison he [Jeroboam] cometh to reign; whereas also he [Rehoboam] that is born in his kingdom becometh poor.” Rehoboam ended up with poverty of spirit and a lack of commendation.

**Eccles. 4:15 I considered all the living which walk under the sun, with the second child that shall stand up in his stead.**

Solomon “considered all the living which walk under the sun.” He was viewing matters in a broad sense, but every once in a while, in rare instances, he had a particular case in mind.

Now Solomon particularized, adding “with the second child that shall stand up in his stead.” Rehoboam and Jeroboam both ended up with damaged characters. Rehoboam became weak when he followed the wrong advice of his young counselors. Had he prayed to the Lord about the matter, he would have been given the proper advice.

**Eccles. 4:16** There is no end of all the people, even of all that have been before them: they also that come after shall not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and vexation of spirit.

“There is no end of all the people ... that have been before them: they also that come after shall not rejoice in him.” To whom does the pronoun “him” refer? One application would be Solomon, the “old and foolish king.” We hear the expression “history repeats itself,” meaning that people do not seem to learn from history. Those of the succeeding generation do not get the lesson until they experience it for themselves. They could have obviated the difficulty if they had paid attention to the course of history.

“Surely this also is vanity and vexation of spirit.” Everything in chapter 4, with the exception of verses 9-12, is negative and “vexation of spirit.” Much later in the book, Solomon will give good advice and positive instruction. He is giving his reflections on the good, the bad, and the in-between.

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

In the tenth century, when verses were formulated in the Old Testament, this first verse was actually the last verse of the preceding chapter, but the division as it is here is more fitting. The King James translators felt that there is a coherency of thought in verses 1-7, even though some deep remarks were made that do not necessarily tie in. Verses 4-7 are a logical unit, but first, we will consider verses 1-3. We would agree that all seven verses should be tied together in reality.

What is verse 1 saying in effect? As an illustration, many years ago when I attended a weekday *Volume* study that pertained to prophecy, among other things, a particular party always came to the meeting with a joke. The meeting began with a smart remark, and even sometimes during the study, something was introduced that was very foreign to the meeting itself. These remarks had an adverse effect on the progress of the study because they were not fitting. As time went on, that party did not attend with much regularity, and the mood frame of the meetings was better without him. Therefore, “keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God” means that proper conduct at a Bible study meeting—and depending on the subject matter too—is to be more quiet and not too talkative, boisterous, and happy.

“Be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil.” Fools do not realize that they “do evil,” but their comments and levity of heart, mind, and mood frame produce a bad effect, especially for the leader of the meeting. Thus fools do harm or injustice to the purpose of gathering together for study and fellowship.

Verse 1 reminds us of James 1:19, “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.” We go to a Bible study meeting to learn and get a blessing because Jesus said, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name [in sincerity and truth], there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20). The consecrated meet together, and even if there are only two or three individuals, the Lord is ready to bless them.

**Eccles. 5:2** Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.

“Be not rash with thy mouth.” We should not be hasty to speak, and we should be careful of the nature of our words. Not only are we not to be hasty, but our utterances should be in conformity with reverent and holy fellowship. Anything not in harmony with that atmosphere is detrimental.

The advice thus far in chapter 5 reminds us of the pragmatic reasoning of James 3:1-10, which reads as follows.

“My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.

“For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.

“Behold, we put bits in the horses’ mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body.

“Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth.

“Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!

“And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.

“For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind:

“But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

“Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.

“Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.”

Notice, James said that if any man can fully control his tongue, he is a perfect man. In other words, it is impossible in the present life to fully control the tongue in every matter. Therefore, one should be careful with regard to the tongue.

**Comment:** For that reason, verse 2 says, “Let thy words be few.” If we do not utter a lot of words, we cannot get in too much trouble. Therefore, the less said, the better.

God is in heaven, and we are down here on the earth. If we are looking for a blessing from God in our fellowship together, we should expect that someone in the meeting will be moved to bring a blessing *if* the conditions are appropriate and *depending on* the purpose of the fellowship.

**Eccles. 5:3 For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool’s voice is known by multitude of words.**

There is a slight change here. The slang expression that “empty barrels make the loudest noises” is somewhat in the same vein as verse 3.

For this verse, the NIV has, “As a dream comes when there are many cares, so the speech of a fool when there are many words.” Much would depend on the nature of the “business,” or

“cares.” Generally speaking, we live in an unfriendly world with unclean conversation and conduct during the workday. It is easy to get caught up in that atmosphere, so when we go home at night, we try to be relieved of any distress, anxiety, or discomfort experienced during the day. When we have a dream and retain a fragment of it upon awaking, we can frequently see, in analyzing the dream, that some incident which happened during the previous day subconsciously made an impression on our mind. In other words, the dream is somewhat predicated on an actual incident. As much as possible, therefore, it is important to habitually think on things that are pure, honest, of good report, etc. (Phil. 4:8). This type of thinking is a safeguard against the intrusion of unholy thoughts, which are often introduced by the Adversary or his minions to harass and distress the Christian in his walk.

**Eccles. 5:4 When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed.**

Verse 4 is an important statement because it pertains to a vow, especially a consecration vow when we make our intentions known to the Lord and affirm, or vow, that we will keep it. We should be very careful in making such utterances and not do so too hastily. There is more honor and reward for those who make good vows and keep them. However, the tendency is to be moved by impulse to make a vow, which is like a contract, and the Lord will hold us to our words. There will be something to pay for any foolish remarks along that line.

**Comment:** As an example, some have impulsively vowed they will never get married.

Verse 4 fits in with the preceding three verses, particularly when a vow is made in public. When done publicly, a vow is twofold or threefold because it is made before God, others, and self. Therefore, an impulsive vow is an instance of being too quick to speak in the presence of other consecrated individuals. We have said in the past, as a general axiom, that one should never say “never.” In other words, we should not say, “I would never do such and such.” Once we make a statement of that nature before others, we are going on record. We often hear others make such statements, and then later we see that they have done the very thing they claimed they would never do.

Jesus said that we should not make a consecration vow too quickly. It is one thing if we are thinking along the lines of making a consecration, and then we are moved on some occasion to directly formulate a vow. That is a little different than going cold into a circumstance because we are moved by oratory and other factors into hastily making a commitment that we had not previously been thinking about. In Luke 14:28, Jesus counseled individuals to first sit down and count the cost before entering into a solemn vow of consecration to the Lord. “For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and *counteth the cost*, whether he have sufficient to finish it?” Jesus was not trying to discourage one from making a consecration vow because in preaching the gospel, we hope that the message will be helpful in bringing others into the truth, and that is a good motive. Rather, the Lord was saying, “Before making a vow of consecration, think about it, for the Lord will require it of you. The vow will cost you something.” Then if a person consecrates, he will at least have considered the vow first and knows it will be done through the Lord’s grace and strength. The person will say, “Yes, I intend to consecrate, and I am of sober mind. I am sorry for what I have done in the past, but I would love to be a follower of Jesus.” Then he will make a proper commitment.

The Lord is not discouraging consecration at all, but he wants the prospective candidate to give it more serious attention and realize that a vow cannot be changed later by saying, “I did not know what I was doing and saying.” To the contrary, when a person vows a vow, he cannot use that excuse subsequently. Those who make such a commitment in a formal fashion and then later rescind it have much to pay and are in grave, grave danger of losing all truth and going into outer darkness. Thus Jesus’ words are actually an encouragement. He just wants

individuals to realize that they are making a *lifetime* commitment.

God “hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed.” A fool is one who speaks too quickly: “I am going to do this and that.” “I would never do that.” “I will always do such and such.” A wise man is careful and more sober.

**Eccles. 5:5 Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.**

The point of counting the cost is that it is better not to make a vow than to do so and not fulfill it. Some have had their children make vows of consecration at a very tender age. In certain cases, parents may have a measure of pride in the fact that their child has consecrated, but the vow is unwise because later the young one goes out of the truth. We know of one who, at a very young age, made a commitment at a convention, but it was not long before the individual left the truth completely. Therefore, it is better to wait until one is at least a teenager or older. Although there are instances where young ones have been faithful, that is not the usual outcome. A person should know what he is doing and the problems he will be facing.

Many exercise pressure, whereas perhaps they are thinking of themselves more than of the one they are pressuring. For instance, some parents have required their young children to sit quietly through every talk at a convention. When those children go to school, they usually leave the truth because of too much pressure. To ask children to attend just one meeting, or two meetings at the most, and then allow them the liberty of choice goes a long way in helping them develop on their own. If parents do too much steering, the children will be resentful later when they are older. Some are born with a talent as parents to know how to raise their children in a very favorable manner.

**Eccles. 5:6 Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?**

“Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin.” How could one’s mouth cause his flesh to sin? An example would be for a person to say, “I will never marry,” and then find he has to marry because he is burning. By marrying, he dishonors his vow. There is nothing wrong with marriage, especially if one would like children or does not want to burn unduly with desire. In fact, “marriage is honourable in all,” but if one says he will never marry and then does so, he dishonors his vow and causes his flesh to sin (Heb. 13:4). Doing something that would normally be honorable then becomes dishonorable. Thus the mouth can cause the flesh to sin in various ways.

“Neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?” Who is the “angel”? Jesus is an “angel” in the Book of Revelation, and he is also the “angel” of the Law Covenant (Exod. 3:2; Acts 7:30; Rev. 1:1; 10:1,5,8,9; etc.). Also, a guardian angel, plus at least one subordinate angel, has been appointed to each of the consecrated.

Let us say that 100 different consecrated people throughout the world are praying to God at the same instant. I personally believe it would be unreasonable to think that God would hear everyone at the same moment when He is planning or doing something else. However, the guardian angel would listen to every prayer request. Therefore, he would know what the consecrated individual under his charge is thinking and is requesting (forgiveness, guidance, etc.) and would bring the matter to God’s attention at a fitting time. It is the *habit* of thought and prayer and the *desire* of the heart, mind, and will that are to be rewarded. The guardian angel is always watching the individual, and if he sees something that is harmful or dangerous,

he seeks advice from God as to what to do for that individual. In other words, the guardian angel is responsible for doing everything possible to help the person make his (or her) calling and election sure. When a problem arises, he is swift to call it to the attention of the Heavenly Father or Jesus personally. Of course all of our prayers have to be proffered to God through the merit and advocacy of Christ, our Savior.

In summary, we think the “angel” of verse 6 in regard to prayer is probably the guardian angel, and next would be Jesus and finally God. A rapport exists, and they keep in touch with each of us. That is why Hebrews 1:14 reads, “Are they not *all* ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” All of the holy angels in heaven are at Jesus’ disposal as guardian angels over the called, the consecrated, of this age. Those angels are doing their best to help each of us make our calling and election sure, so if we do not make the high calling, it will be our fault, not theirs.

Both the “angel” and God are mentioned in verse 6: “Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the *angel*, that it was an error: wherefore should *God* be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?” If we are all called in the hope of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, and then we do not realize we are running for that prize, we are destroyed by our inattentiveness in prayer and trying to do God’s will. If we do not succeed, it is the work of our hands—our own deeds—that will be held accountable, not the guardian angel, not our Lord Jesus, and not the Heavenly Father. Of our three enemies (the world, the flesh, and the Devil), the worst enemy, in one sense, is the flesh, for it is *always* with us. The Devil is only there when he sees that we are vulnerable to attack.

**Comment:** The first part of verse 6 in the NASB reads, “Do not let your speech cause you to sin and do not say in the presence of the messenger of God that it was a mistake.”

**Comment:** If someone makes a vow and then says, “Oh, it was an error, for I did not know what I was doing,” God’s attitude is, “Do not even try to use such reasoning.”

**Reply:** A brother many years in the truth was a prison chaplain, and he used to witness to the prisoners. To distinguish him as a “minister,” he was given a reverential robe so that he would be recognized and would have certain liberties in going in and out of the prison to speak to the inmates. Over time he attended fewer and fewer meetings with the brethren. He confessed at one time that he had some sort of chest in which he laid the robe. When he subsequently saw the responsibilities of the truth and realized that he had to give up that robe because certain unfavorable conditions of the nature of his employment as a prison chaplain would adversely affect his making his calling and election sure, he looked longingly at the robe in the chest and could not give it up. Someone then commented, “Maybe the Lord never recognized your consecration.” Sad to say, that brother never came back as far as I know.

The comment about the Lord not accepting the brother’s consecration was the worst thing that could have been said under the circumstance. Although not directly in the conversation, I had to speak up because I was within hearing distance. The gist of my reply was, “I do not agree with that statement. He made a vow to the Lord, and he has to keep it.” A situation of that nature has happened twice in my life. The point is that sometimes we are pulled into wrong situations where silence would give consent. If we are within hearing distance and do not speak up, we incur guilt.

**Comment:** In Matthew 12:36,37, Jesus said, “Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”

**Eccles. 5:7** For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities: but



**fear thou God.**

A paraphrase is, “For in the multitude of dreams and words, there is emptiness. Therefore, fear [reverence] God.” Verse 7 is more or less in harmony with verses 1-6. We have to be attentive to the truth. To some extent, we are responsible for our environment, but today we cannot completely eradicate the environment because evil is all around us—on billboards, at the checkout counter in the supermarket, at the newsstand, in conversations with a group, etc. Fifty years ago we could avoid evil because there was a different type of culture, but that is not true now. Therefore, we have to train our minds to ward off these things. The warfare of the Church of Laodicea is primarily along mental lines because there has been very little persecution for righteousness’ sake.

**Eccles. 5:8 If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for he that is higher than the highest regardeth; and there be higher than they.**

“If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter.” The poor are being oppressed in certain regions of the earth, and justice is perverted in the courts and in politics. There are violations of righteousness along various lines. However, when we see oppression of the poor, violence, and the perversion of judgment and justice, we should not marvel because “he that is higher than the highest regardeth; and there be higher than they.”

**Q:** Was Solomon saying that God, who is higher than the perpetrators, regards these evil deeds?

**A:** Yes. God is quite aware of the injustices, but for reasons of His own, He is not interfering at the present time. We call that reason “the permission of evil.” God has purposed to allow these conditions to come about, but He is not responsible as the causal element, for others are doing the perversion. God has His reasons for not entering the arena right away where the injustices are taking place; namely, the past 6,000-plus years have been a testing and training period to develop faithful classes of the Ancient Worthies and the Gospel Age saints, who will be agents in the future government.

**Q:** What would be an example of oppression?

**A:** An example of oppression is a slave being beaten by a master or a feudal lord with a large estate draining his subjects and taking their produce.

**Eccles. 5:9 Moreover the profit of the earth is for all: the king himself is served by the field.**

Verses 9-17 are more or less one scene that is being pursued by Solomon in his reflections. In verse 9, he was saying that the profit of the earth is for all, including the king himself. As we proceed, we will see that Solomon went into the particulars.

**Eccles. 5:10 He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity.**

**Eccles. 5:11 When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes?**

“He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver.” In the New Testament, this same theme is stated, “The love of money is the root of all [much] evil” (1 Tim. 6:10). Not only is this true with regard to monetary matters, but the love of goods or property amounts to the same

thing. In the accounting field, goods and property are called “assets”; that is, they are not cash, but they create a backing for good credit, for they can be liquidated if necessary.

Solomon added, “This is also vanity,” so he was still pursuing the thought of vanity and emptiness, although he was gradually using the expression less frequently. Here and also in verse 11, he gave a summary thought. In fact, verse 11 is saying the same thing but using other words. When goods increase, what happens? “They are increased that eat them: and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes?” How could this thought be stated using other words?

If a person who owns a store or has his own property uses the profits to buy more stores or additional land, he does have something to show for his efforts as time goes on, but building up the assets brings added responsibilities and worries that command more of his attention and time. Thus he has less freedom and enjoyment from his possessions because the cares of this life have increased. He goes to bed at night worrying about decisions he has to make or circumstances that jeopardize his business or land.

Therefore, with the increase of goods come responsibility, worry, and proportionate anxious care. Solomon was asking, “Is the effort worth the consequences?” Yes, the increase can be seen with the eyes, and a person can even boast of the number of stores he owns, but his time is absorbed in that business. There are more wholesome pursuits in life than owning property or goods—for example, character building, worshipping God, or doing benevolent acts for other people. However, the person who is preoccupied with his business is not looking in those directions.

**Q:** In addition, is the thought that the more silver a rich person has, the greater is his appetite to keep accumulating? In the end, his accumulation of riches is not good for anything except to look at.

**A:** Yes, that is what Solomon was saying, but verse 11 changes the pursuit to goods and property.

**Eccles. 5:12** **The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep.**

“The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much.” What a person earns or does personally should be just to get a moderate means of life. He should not have a grandiose vision of the future as to what he would do if he were wealthy, powerful, and influential. A simple man who does an honest day’s work, even if he is tired at the end of the day, has some satisfaction in doing that which is profitable, and he is satisfied with his daily earnings. Moreover, he sleeps peacefully at night without problems about the ownership of goods disturbing him.

“The abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep.” The increased responsibilities of the rich even bother their sleep.

**Eccles. 5:13** **There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt.**

Solomon’s summation was, “There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for [or by] the owners thereof [are] to their hurt [or harm].” Instead of repeating, “This is vanity,” he said the same thing in another way. In other words, “Is the accumulation of riches worth the effort because the struggle brings its own problems?”

**Eccles. 5:14 But those riches perish by evil travail: and he begetteth a son, and there is nothing in his hand.**

“But those riches perish by evil travail.” For example, if a person acquires a lot of property for agricultural purposes, a storm may arise and destroy his entire crop, or a forest fire may destroy his house. “Evil travail” means that when ordinary people acquire goods, there is no guarantee the goods are in safekeeping. Goods may be stored in a barn, but the barn could burn down. Money may be put in a bank, but the bank could fail. Thus no matter how careful and industrious a person is in accumulating goods, property, or money, there is no means whereby the possessions can be kept in real security. All the time, effort, and fatigue of mind and body are sometimes to no avail because of a circumstance that arises.

People may think, “If I earn a million dollars, I will be able to do this and that,” but when they get that million dollars, they want two million dollars. Hence there is no real satisfaction. A person may be intending to give his son a college education or to leave money to his family when he dies, for example, but providence sometimes takes away, through “evil travail,” what a person has. Then “there is nothing in his hand” to leave to others.

At one particular job, I saw workers trying to put their children through college while they themselves were suffering temporally. In fact, they got impoverished and had to stop paying the college fees because they needed the money for their own survival.

Thus the pursuit of goods can be very frustrating. There is a saying, “Uneasy lies the head of him that weareth a crown.” This same principle goes down through society, from rich to poor, so that the common laborer who earns his goods by the sweat of his brow may end up in a better situation than those who have a drive and purpose that is wrongly founded. With many who suffer, their character is growing and developing, so in the final analysis, they have better “assets” for the future Kingdom than those who acquire a lot of goods. The latter are more likely to be of the class that says in the Kingdom Age, “When will the new moon be gone and the sabbath over so that we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes?” (Amos 8:5,6 paraphrase). Those who are rich in the present life are more apt to have the evil heart condition of wanting to return to former practices and repeat the accumulation of wealth and power. This abnormality seems to be quite prevalent in society.

A day laborer is promised a day’s wage. When he gets that money, which will buy just enough goods to satisfy him and his family for that one day, he is actually better off than the rich. At least the day laborers do not have big ideas of euphoria ahead of them on the horizon. In many cases, the pursuit of riches is harmful.

**Eccles. 5:15 As he came forth of his mother’s womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand.**

This is a familiar statement. We are born into the world naked, and we leave the earth with nothing material that we can take with us. Everything ceases. Solomon would say, “This is also vanity.” The Lord’s counsel for the Christian is, “But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matt. 6:20,21). That is real security. Having faith in God, making a commitment to serve Him, and fulfilling that commitment to the best of our ability are the best type of insurance we could ever get. What security the Heavenly Father promises His children if they follow His instruction!

**Comment:** David was happy to lay up all the materials for the house of God. In these verses, Solomon was saying that he did not necessarily want to leave his goods to his son.

**Reply:** Solomon knew that Rehoboam would inherit the kingdom. When Solomon died, he left behind a wealthy kingdom, but his son did not have the character to make good use of that inheritance for the benefit of others, as well as himself. Rehoboam erred in following the counsel of the younger men, who advised making the people work longer hours for less wages. They reasoned that thereby Rehoboam would get even more riches than his father Solomon had. Instead unfortunate providences came on the nation of Israel as retribution from the Lord, and the government was quickly split only three or so years into Rehoboam's reign.

**Eccles. 5:16** And this also is a sore evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go: and what profit hath he that hath laboured for the wind?

Notice that Solomon avoided vain repetition here. Instead of saying, "This also is vanity," he said, "And this also is a sore evil." In verse 13, he remarked, "There is a *sore evil* which I have seen under the sun." He used the same theme of vanity but changed the verbalization.

"And this also is a sore evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go: and what profit hath he that hath laboured for the wind?" Remember, the Book of Ecclesiastes was Solomon's form of repentance. Subconsciously he was bemoaning what he himself had done. He was trying to pass on for the benefit of his son, and anyone else who would want to please God, the best advice that he could give. As the king, he was responsible for his subjects, but of course he thought first of his own son, who would be his successor as king. Therefore, Solomon was trying to benefit others by his own mistakes.

**Comment:** Solomon's rhetorical question about laboring for the wind is similar to Paul's saying that the Christian should run the race for the high calling with certainty and not as one who beats the air (1 Cor. 9:26).

**Reply:** Yes, Paul used the same principle in a spiritual sense. In practicing boxing, some run about and dance as they wave and flail their arms at an invisible person. They do all kinds of jabs, but the effort does not really profit them because nothing is there. What do many boxers do in order to develop? They hang a bag of sand from the ceiling with a cable, and that bag weighs as much as they do. By putting their strength into punching that heavy bag, they develop strong muscles. In other words, they develop through the opposition of punching that bag, which is not a bag of wind. And so, the exercise in doing good in life promotes character.

**Eccles. 5:17** All his days also he eateth in darkness, and he hath much sorrow and wrath with his sickness.

This comment is interesting, for Solomon was really talking about himself. He was saying that even when man eats, he does not eat with pleasure. There is no enjoyment because problems are weighing on his head. It is as though a cloud with attendant worries and sorrows is over him. Solomon called a pursuit along the lines of the flesh a "sickness," which it really is. A pursuit along the lines of the spirit—laying up treasures in heaven—is quite a different matter.

**Eccles. 5:18** Behold that which I have seen: it is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for it is his portion.

**Eccles. 5:19** Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God.

**Eccles. 5:20** For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answereth him in the joy of his heart.

Solomon was honoring the day laborer and saying that he is better off than anyone who has great riches. The day laborer worketh “under the sun”; that is, he gets up at sunrise and works 12 hours a day. When I was a boy, it was not uncommon to work those hours. Gradually the length of the workday was reduced: to ten hours a day, then eight hours, etc. Day laborers sleep better, they are healthier, and they enjoy their meals.

The work was good for the day laborer in that it developed character for the future; that is, he was actually laying up treasures for the Kingdom Age. “For he shall not much remember the days of his [past] life.” He will not remember all the labor and how tired he was. He will forget these things because of the character he was developing. The meek “shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5; Psa. 25:13; 37:11). Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount was primarily directed to his disciples of the Gospel Age, but it is also a good sound principle with regard to people in the Kingdom Age. “For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” is a general principle (Gal. 6:7). Sowing is constructive whether it is along earthly lines or spiritual lines; it is a building up.

As Solomon got nearer the end of his treatise, he gradually became a preacher in the sense of giving more constructive advice. First, he told all the things that can destroy a man; he gave chapter after chapter on what not to do. Then, as he got closer to the end of his writing, he grew more religious. Such was Solomon’s method of trying to make good for a past life that was wasted in some respects. We are reminded of the prodigal son who returned from eating husks and said twice to his father, “I have sinned against heaven, and against you” (Luke 15:18,21 paraphrase). Here Solomon was saying the same thing in effect. He wanted to make good on what little was left of his life. He correctly felt that his experience could be passed on to benefit others.

Warnings of what not to do have their place, although we usually prefer to know what we should do and how to do it. Many people take a Scripture like “There is no fear in love” and feel there is no exception, but fear has its place as a watchdog (1 John 4:18).

**Comment:** In other words, they love righteousness, but they do not hate iniquity.

**Reply:** Yes, and Solomon even wrote on that subject by saying there is a time to love and a time to hate (Eccl. 3:8). We should want the destruction of iniquity.

Solomon was saying that God answers the day laborer by rewarding him with a temporary joy. The joy is ephemeral in that the day laborer does not take any joy with him, but he has benefited from character development.

**Eccles. 6:1** There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men:

**Eccles. 6:2** A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honour, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it: this is vanity, and it is an evil disease.

Solomon saw that there was in others the same type of pursuit that he himself had taken. He had explored all avenues in his zeal for acquisition. In fact, he had accomplished extraordinary goals, but they did not satisfy him. He did not derive the happiness and joy he had expected. Nor did he achieve the realization that he had done something really good and substantial for others.

Verses 1 and 2 are Solomon’s summation. Instead of repeating, “All is vanity and vexation of spirit,” he said his pursuit was an “evil disease.” We call those who have this pursuit for wealth “misers.” God did give riches, wealth, and honor to Solomon and all that he thought his soul

would desire, but Solomon gave them to a “stranger” to eat. This “stranger” could even be his own son. Perhaps there was a lack of training and attention for Rehoboam because Solomon was busily engaged in his pursuits. Now he realized that it was more important to give good, wholesome instruction to his son. In addition, the people who helped him to acquire the riches all suffered, for due attention was not given to them as individuals.

When considered from the good perspective of peace and prosperity, Solomon’s reign represents the reign of Christ and his Kingdom. In the unfavorable sense, we see Solomon’s complaints. The same thing happened with Adam, for before he sinned, he had everything going for him. God even asked Adam to name the animals as they passed in front of him. The Creator of the universe said that the birds in the sky, the animals on the earth, and the fish in the sea were all Adam’s, for Adam was a king. However, because Adam did not obey, he pictures the Fall of mankind. The picture of Jesus as the Second Adam is based on the First Adam before he fell. In making pictures that are type and antitype, we have to be careful to put things in their proper bins for the comparisons. Otherwise, we will get into problems.

**Eccles. 6:3 If a man beget an hundred children, and live many years, so that the days of his years be many, and his soul be not filled with good, and also that he have no burial; I say, that an untimely birth is better than he.**

Solomon was pursuing the same theme. This “man” hungered for an increase in goods, and in his accumulation, he even got a hundred children. There are such individuals in history. For instance, Rameses II, Pharaoh of Egypt, had 50 sons, and he would have had daughters as well. Tombs were constructed for all 50 sons so that when they deceased, each would have his own sepulcher. Rameses arranged for the whole complex to be built with rooms that could be easily extended as more and more sons were born. Thus additional chambers were quickly provided. The arrangement of the different levels in which the tombs would be stored was already in place, so it was just a matter of putting more cubicles in this metropolis.

Only recently, in the last 30 years or so, have many of these tombs been unearthed in Egypt. They were underneath and in back of one level that had already been explored. Then one day someone who was curious broke through and found a similar chamber with another complex on the other side. When archaeologists continued their explorations, they found corridors and many cubicles. Thus the discovery of these tombs occurred in a progressive manner, slowly but surely.

This “man” who begot 100 children lived for many years. Incidentally, Rameses II lived a long time, and the longest living Rameses reigned for more than 90 years, so he was more than 100 years old when he died. Even the Biblical Joseph lived to be 110 years old. These ages were startling for that time period.

Verse 3 continues. The soul of this “man” was “not filled with good,” so he did not have a burial. Therefore, Solomon wrote that “an untimely birth is better than he.” The man produced 100 children, but what happened to some of the kings? They were evil, and as a result, some of them were dragged through the streets even in Israel. Another example is Queen Jezebel, who was pushed out of a window by the eunuchs, and dogs ate her flesh. Different individuals acquired tremendous assets, but they experienced an ignominious death. One king died as a leper, not the contagious type but the type where he was all white like snow from head to toe, so he continued to reign. Nevertheless, the leprosy was considered a judgmental act of God.

**Q:** Does the term “untimely birth” mean a stillbirth or a premature birth? If the infant lived for a few minutes and then died, he would be better off because he would have a resuscitation.

**A:** In most instances in the Old Testament, an “untimely birth” was a stillborn. Of course an

“infant of days” or even an infant of one day will have an awakening in the Kingdom (Isa. 65:20). In answer to the question, there are different ways of viewing a Scripture, and we do not always get the full thought. In the enigma we are reading now, Solomon may have used an extreme case to show that as far as not doing good or being of benefit to others is concerned, a stillbirth would have been better. For example, Jesus mentioned straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel, but we are not to take that statement literally. Jesus spoke figuratively to teach a lesson through exaggeration. Hyperbole is used quite frequently in the Scriptures to get a thought across in a dramatic way. Some concordances give 50 or so references along that line.

**Q:** Then does the “untimely death” in verse 3 refer to a premature birth or to a stillborn?

**A:** We cannot be dogmatic because the statement can be taken either way.

**Q:** Was Solomon saying that if a hypothetical man lived many years and had many children but had a heart filled with evil, it would be better if he had never been born?

**A:** I mentioned something to that effect because the man did nothing of merit for others. Because he did not benefit mankind in any way, he lived a worthless life. This type of life is being expressed in a hyperbolic sense. Another such example is Jesus’ figurative statement that the very hairs of a consecrated head are all numbered. Jesus was teaching the lesson that the guardian angels are watching with such care that no accident or anything untoward will occur that might be unduly dangerous or harmful to us as new creatures. In other words, nothing can happen without their knowing it almost in advance because the angels have a sense whereby they can foretell an event before it happens. Since they do not have this ability in an infallible sense, they can make mistakes, but generally speaking, they can foretell events.

With the parables too, Jesus often made an unusual statement, but his purpose was to call attention to the parable and make it stick in our minds. Both God (as the Author) and Jesus use this technique to show their watch-care and concern for the consecrated. Everything is for us, so we are the problem if we do not make our calling and election sure. Nothing can be against us except *ourselves* in not heeding the proper instruction.

We may not be able to explain the semantics of every little detail in the Book of Ecclesiastes, but we are getting the general lesson that Solomon was trying to impart. The goals that we set in our lives are very, very important. For example, notice that chapter 5 begins, “Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil.” That first verse is the theme for the whole chapter, and we think the translators grasped that significance.

**Eccles. 6:4 For he cometh in with vanity, and departeth in darkness, and his name shall be covered with darkness.**

Note: No commentary is available for verses 4-12, as the study was apparently not recorded. Therefore, in lieu of commentary, alternate translations will be inserted from the Revised Standard Version, the New International Version, and the New American Standard Bible.

RSV: “For it comes into vanity and goes into darkness, and in darkness its name is covered;”

NIV: “It comes without meaning, it departs in darkness, and in darkness its name is shrouded.”

NASB: “for it comes in futility and goes into obscurity; and its name is covered in obscurity.”

**Eccles. 6:5 Moreover he hath not seen the sun, nor known any thing: this hath more rest than the other.**

RSV: “moreover it has not seen the sun or known anything; yet it finds rest rather than he.”

NIV: “Though it never saw the sun or knew anything, it has more rest than does that man—”

NASB: “It never sees the sun and it never knows anything; it is better off than he.”

**Eccles. 6:6 Yea, though he live a thousand years twice told, yet hath he seen no good: do not all go to one place?**

RSV: “Even though he should live a thousand years twice told, yet enjoy no good—do not all go to the one place?”

NIV: “even if he lives a thousand years twice over but fails to enjoy his prosperity. Do not all go to the same place?”

NASB: “Even if the other man lives a thousand years twice and does not enjoy good things—do not all go to one place?”

**Eccles. 6:7 All the labour of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled.**

RSV: “All the toil of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not satisfied.”

NIV: “All man’s efforts are for his mouth, yet his appetite is never satisfied.”

NASB: “All a man’s labor is for his mouth and yet the appetite is not satisfied.”

**Eccles. 6:8 For what hath the wise more than the fool? what hath the poor, that knoweth to walk before the living?**

RSV: “For what advantage has the wise man over the fool? And what does the poor man have who knows how to conduct himself before the living?”

NIV: “What advantage has a wise man over a fool? What does a poor man gain by knowing how to conduct himself before others?”

NASB: “For what advantage does the wise man have over the fool? What advantage does the poor man have, knowing how to walk before the living?”

**Eccles. 6:9 Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire: this is also vanity and vexation of spirit.**

RSV: “Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire; this also is vanity and a striving after wind.”

NIV: “Better what the eye sees than the roving of the appetite. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.”

NASB: “What the eyes see is better than what the soul desires. This too is futility and a striving after wind.”

**Eccles. 6:10 That which hath been is named already, and it is known that it is man: neither may he contend with him that is mightier than he.**



RSV: "Whatever has come to be has already been named, and it is known what man is, and that he is not able to dispute with one stronger than he."

NIV: "Whatever exists has already been named, and what man is has been known; no man can contend with one who is stronger than he."

NASB: "Whatever exists has already been named, and it is known what man is; for he cannot dispute with him who is stronger than he is."

**Eccles. 6:11 Seeing there be many things that increase vanity, what is man the better?**

RSV: "The more words, the more vanity, and what is man the better?"

NIV: "The more the words, the less the meaning, and how does that profit anyone?"

NASB: "For there are many words which increase futility. What then is the advantage to a man?"

**Eccles. 6:12 For who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow? for who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?**

RSV: "For who knows what is good for man while he lives the few days of his vain life, which he passes like a shadow? For who can tell man what will be after him under the sun?"

NIV: "For who knows what is good for a man in life, during the few and meaningless days he passes through like a shadow? Who can tell him what will happen under the sun after he is gone?"

NASB: "For who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime, during the few years of his futile life? He will spend them like a shadow. For who can tell a man what will be after him under the sun?"

**Eccles. 7:1 A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth.**

If we were to read just the last half of verse 1, "the day of death [is better] than the day of one's birth," that would be a rather strange statement. How would we explain this thought?

**Comment:** The statement would be true if the individual ended up closer to God.

**Reply:** Yes. The preceding statement, "A good name is better than precious ointment," clarifies the end of the verse. Not only is a truly worthy good name better than precious ointment, but dying in that condition would seal one's victory of character, let alone bring a reward of membership in the Little Flock.

**Comment:** Even the unconsecrated with a good name would be better off at the end of their life.

**Reply:** Yes, even in the world, this principle would be true.

**Eccles. 7:2 It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart.**

The beginning of verse 2 is a worldly axiom: The “house of mourning” is better than the “house of feasting.” Many people look forward to having a good time. Therefore, going to the house of feasting is the primary goal, and they do not think beyond that point, for the feasting itself is a satisfying reward. Stated another way, “feasting” is the happy end that is usually considered. However, the living will one day lay to heart the fact that such is frequently not the case.

**Q:** Was Solomon saying that it is better to be sober-minded in life?

**A:** Yes.

Now let us spiritualize verse 2. There are those Christians who enjoy going to conventions—and so much so that attending conventions seems to be their supreme goal. They feel, “What could be better than to have a convention almost every day?” But that thinking can be misleading. Objectives in going to conventions include sociality and the associated pleasure, feasting, and having a good time, but attending conventions too frequently is destructive. For instance, the normal affairs of an ecclesia, such as a coordinated Bible study, would be continually disrupted. Thus the responsibilities of the home ecclesia should be considered and given more serious attention.

There are other perspectives as well. Our sanctification, our complete separation from the world unto the Lord, is a wonderful hope, but that hope will not be achieved by too much sociality on a continuing basis.

**Eccles. 7:3 Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.**

**Comment:** The heart is made softer and more tender through sadness and trials.

**Reply:** That is a good thought.

**Comment:** A sorrowful situation brings a person closer to the Lord.

**Reply:** Yes. Matthew 5:4 is a cross-reference in some Bibles. Jesus said, as part of the Sermon on the Mount, “Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.”

The King James margin has a very strange alternative rendering for the beginning of verse 3; namely, “Anger is better than laughter.” However, that statement is not necessarily true, and almost invariably translators interpret this verse with “sorrow” like the main text of the King James Version. The meaning for the Hebrew word *kaas* that is rendered “sorrow” seems to fit. Although I still prefer “sorrow,” another rendering is “vexation of spirit,” which is not quite like either “anger” or “sorrow” but is sort of betwixt and between. Thus “distress [or emotion or vexation of spirit] is better than laughter” would be an alternate explanation.

**Comment:** When bad times come, those of the world often turn to the Lord, but when things are going well, they are far from Him.

**Reply:** Yes. Those of a meek, sober, and humble frame of mind who are burdened with a problem are more prone to seek counsel from above.

**Q:** Would the “thorn” in Paul’s flesh (2 Cor. 12:7) be an example of vexation of spirit?

**A:** Yes. That example gives more validity to those who feel that verse 3 should read, “Vexation of spirit is better than laughter.”

**Eccles. 7:4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.**

Here the word “house” describes a more or less general attitude. Certainly the “heart of the wise” is more apt to be in the “house of mourning [or sobriety]” than in the “house of [continuous] mirth.”

Where there is continual laughter, some would assume that alcoholic beverages have been imbibed. Along another line, some people are so empty-minded or nervous that frequent laughing is a habit. During a study on the Lord’s Word, we would not want to have a “house of mirth”—that is, continuous laughter—even if the laughter was due to a physical or nervous condition, for it would be disruptive.

**Eccles. 7:5 It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools.**

It is sometimes hard, even if one is not a fool by nature but is generally serious, to hear a rebuke of the wise where it is merited; that is, the person finds it difficult not to be sensitive to a rebuke, even if the rebuke is done properly. But here in verse 5, the rebuke of the wise would be very, very appropriate when the situation exists in which fools are talking too much—that is, where they dominate the conversation. This situation can easily happen, so there are some hard things, as well as pleasant things, to do in a proper manner, especially for the Christian.

All the axioms that Solomon mentioned in verses 1-5 are cogent, helpful remarks to respond to. He was gradually changing to constructive advice, whereas previously everything was vanity, vanity, vanity.

**Eccles. 7:6 For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool: this also is vanity.**

Isn’t the expression “the crackling of thorns under a pot” unique and powerful? Some of us will remember that with the old-time method of heating and cooking, particularly with wood, the continuous sparks and crackling were disruptive. A sparkler is exciting on the Fourth of July, but there is an emptiness when sparklers are used endlessly as a habit. Incidentally, the crackling here is due to thorns, and thorns, briars, and thistles are not substantive; that is, they lack solidity. In Scriptural terms, there is no fruitage from thorns and thistles in themselves. Yes, roses have thorns, but a thorn is not the rose. Thorns have a sharp point, and they are empty, discomforting, irritating, and disruptive—like the crackling of thorns under a pot. This language is powerful, and so is the laughter of the fool. Of both Solomon said, “This also is vanity.”

**Comment:** A person who is cooking with wood does not want to use brush and thorns, for the fire would not last.

Solomon used “vanity” twice in this chapter but not with the frequency of its use in earlier chapters. In coming chapters, he used a little different terminology for the most part. Although he was saying the same thing in effect, at least he changed his expression.

**Eccles. 7:7 Surely oppression maketh a wise man mad; and a gift destroyeth the heart.**

Verse 7 has a paragraph break as though it is the beginning of new commentary. In other words, the translators of the King James Version felt that verses 2-6 are more or less different variations of the same theme that sorrow is better than laughter.

“A gift destroyeth the heart”; that is, a bribe corrupts the heart in judgment. If one receives a bribe at the time of judgment, it stills his mouth; the bribe quiets him from properly reacting.

“Surely oppression maketh a wise man mad.” A wise man can be upset for allowing himself to get into a situation that is damaging. Hebrews 12:13 tells us to make straight paths for our feet.

**Comment:** The NIV has, “Extortion turns a wise man into a fool.”

**Q:** Wouldn't seeing the oppression of others stir up righteous indignation in a wise man?

**A:** Yes. In that case, the “madness” would be affirmative. Righteous indignation is good virtue, especially if it has an outward expression and is not smothered. Sometimes it is proper to manifest disapproval by a verbal explanation, the expression on one's countenance, or at least some type of body language to counteract what would be considered a damaging situation wherein unfortunate things have happened and have gotten out of hand. If possible, it is better to steer the situation in a better direction.

This advice would also apply to the second half of verse 7. A person may get into a harmful situation because of friendship, for example, where he is sensitive to the feelings of others, but that sensitivity is not proper for either his own welfare or the welfare of the other party or parties. There are times when it is good for a wise man (or woman) to rebuke in some fashion in order to manifest disapproval. For individuals to suppress, or keep under, what would be rightfully done by a wiser person results in an unfavorable situation; that is, it destroys one inwardly. Under such situations, a person may go away in a worse condition of character than when he first entered into the situation. From this standpoint, the word “suppression” is more appropriate than “oppression” except, of course, in cases where violence is occurring.

**Eccles. 7:8 Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.**

**Comment:** Paul said, “Now no chastening [or trial] for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are [rightly] exercised thereby” (Heb. 12:11).

**Reply:** That is a complete answer for verse 8.

“Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof.” When verse 8 is coupled with verse 7, it modifies the parameters of verse 7 to a more specific situation. If the condition that exists in verse 7 terminates quickly, the results are better than entering into such a situation. Stated another way, it is better to end the situation than to continue in it, but sometimes this cannot be done. For example, it might be more disruptive for one to use righteous indignation, for the fruitage of such action would not be that beneficial. Then the containment of one's spirit—the controlling of his impatience—works out for his betterment, whereas one who is proud in spirit is haughty and boastful and acts with a superior attitude.

**Eccles. 7:9 Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools.**

Verse 9 continues the theme of verses 7 and 8. “Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry.” Right away we think of James 1:19, “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, *slow to wrath*.” We should be slow to get angry but not so slow that we fail to have righteous indignation where it is merited. The point is that we should not be too apt to get angry. Proverbs 16:32 states the principle: “He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth [controls] his spirit than he that taketh a city.”

“For anger resteth in the bosom of fools.” Usually a fool is empty. He is apt to do a lot of talking and not necessarily be angry himself, but he produces anger in others as a result of the atmosphere. Sometimes people who are fools are prone to be even a little loud-mouthed, boastful, and dominating in that sense, and that condition rests in their bosom. But the comment here in verse 9 seems to be contrariwise the way it is expressed.

**Comment:** Anger resting in the bosom of fools seems to indicate that being quick to get angry constitutes being a fool.

**Eccles. 7:10** Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this.

The translators considered verse 10 a summation of verses 7-9, for the next verse is marked with a paragraph break. What is verse 10 saying?

**Comment:** This verse is a reminder of the Israelites when they left Egypt. They kept thinking about how temporal conditions were better in Egypt.

**Reply:** Yes, their emphasis was on the “former days.” The Israelites’ attitude was, “Why did you bring us out here in the wilderness to die when there were graves in Egypt?” (Exod. 14:11,12; Num. 21:5).

As days or time goes by, those who are symbolically pictured as being wise with their “hoary head,” their white or gray hair, should be thankful for having had the lessons from past experiences (Prov. 16:31). They find that meditating on the past experiences of life is more profitable than their present situation now, for they know what not to do from henceforth. While the Scriptures encourage us to take inventory of our past life—to look back on our past providences and how the Lord has led us—we cannot dwell too long on the past lest we get heady or high-minded. However, it is profitable to briefly consider and keep in mind from time to time things learned from the past. The problem with natural Israel is that they forgot God’s “works, and his wonders that he had shown them” (Psa. 78:11).

**Comment:** Some people dwell on the past and waste their time from the standpoint of endless genealogies (1 Tim. 1:4). Others live in the past and never seem to progress.

**Reply:** Sometimes we think that way when we are hearing testimonies. Almost every testimony of some individuals is a narration of the past, whereas it is supposed to be more current—such as something that has happened in the past week. However, there are occasions when one properly relates an experience from the past that is very beneficial to others, but to continually do so is a form of vain repetition.

**Eccles. 7:11** Wisdom is good with an inheritance: and by it there is profit to them that see the sun.

“Wisdom is good with an inheritance.” The suggestion is that both are good—wisdom and an inheritance. An inheritance, whether it is money, property, land, or a house, can be profitable as well as wisdom. However, in this case, I prefer the King James marginal reference. “Wisdom is as good as an inheritance, yea, better too.” Certainly wisdom is better, especially when we read verse 12. A person may or may not get an inheritance, but at least he has wisdom.

“And by it there is profit to them that see the sun[light].” In other words, with wisdom there is profit to those who have understanding. This understanding would be utilizing wisdom in a more profitable manner. An example is Solomon, who was very, very wise, but he did not have David’s high level of understanding. David saw the proper use of knowledge—that the

knowledge of God's Word, character, commandments, ordinances, and laws is far superior to *natural* understanding, in which Solomon greatly excelled regarding animals, trees, rain, the atmosphere, etc., and the whims and wiles of humanity. Solomon observed the negative aspects of the frailties of mankind. David's knowledge was quite different, for he specialized in drawing moral lessons from the natural. His type of knowledge was truly "see[ing] the sun[light]," the better part, for he saw how to employ wisdom. The thousands of proverbs that Solomon wrote were excellent axioms, and the Bible includes them as having value. In addition, some of his statements in Ecclesiastes are included in the New Testament. Therefore, if we state verse 11 in simple language, it would be something like the following: "Wisdom is one thing, but understanding the *utilization* of that wisdom is preferable."

**Eccles. 7:12 For wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence: but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it.**

"For wisdom is a defence." Wisdom is a defense, a protection, a shadow, and a covering. Later in this chapter, we will see how wisdom is a defense, so this portion of verse 12 will be held in abeyance for now.

"Money is [also] a defence." In other words, if one has some reserve of money or capital (a house or whatever), it is a great help in providing a livelihood and preventing anxiety that would destroy peace of mind and stability of rational conduct.

"But the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it." The inference is that the excellency of knowledge gives life to those who have it. Solomon was depressed. He had spent a whole lifetime searching for that which he did not see until his declining years. He had pursued *knowledge instead of life*, and there is a big difference. Had he pursued *wisdom* as David did, his state of mind would have been much happier. In the Psalms, David was always saying, "Blessed be the LORD," "Bless his holy name," "How excellent is thy name in all the earth," "I will dwell in the house of the LORD," and similar happy thoughts. The Book of Ecclesiastes does not contain such sentiments, for here the general drift, or theme, is vanity, which is negative. And this is even true to a certain extent in reading Solomon's proverbs, many of which are very sober. The proverbs are helpful, but they have to be offset with happier circumstances and the promises of God and Jesus.

Thus here Solomon was admitting that the true application of wisdom gives life to them that have it, and the inference or suggestion is that he did not have this kind of wisdom for a long, long time. God forgive me if I misconstrue the matter, but I see Ecclesiastes as Solomon's form of repentance and his acknowledgment that much of his pursuit of knowledge was a waste of time and effort. He wished that he had applied his time in a more constructive fashion. Near the end of the book, we will see that Solomon gave the benefit of this instruction, so in pursuing Ecclesiastes from verse to verse to its end, we will notice that he goes on an upward slant. He climbs upward in his advice and presents more of a positive aspect and thus leaves a legacy. I would understand Solomon to have desired greatly that God would put his proverbs and sayings in a book to benefit others in knowing what not to do and the pitfalls that are in the way.

**Eccles. 7:13 Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked?**

What did God make "crooked"? Isaiah 6:9,10 reads, "And he [God] said [to Isaiah], Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed." This text is saying in effect that in giving instruction, God purposely calls certain individuals.

Why? Whether in the Jewish Age or the Gospel Age, knowledge under present circumstances would be premature with a majority of the race because the people do not have the necessary faith and stability of character to gain life. If they understood God's Word under present circumstances, they would be more apt to fail because they are not the right material now. In the Kingdom Age, when mankind have Jesus as the Messiah and they are given the necessary help, it will be much more profitable for their salvation than at the present time. Therefore, generally speaking, the Lord makes sure that the people are not converted in the present life. Jesus, too, said something along this line in Matthew 13:10,11. The disciples went to him and asked, "Why don't you explain to the people what you are telling us? Why do you speak to them in parables?" Jesus replied, "Because it is given unto *you* to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to *them* it is *not* given." In other words, Jesus purposely did not want the people at large to be converted at that time. The disciples were given privileged information because they had *faith*, and without faith it is presently *impossible* to please God with the fullness of obtaining life (Heb. 11:6). Thus withholding truth from the world at this time is actually doing them a kindness in one sense.

With regard to the fire that came down on Sodom and Gomorrah and destroyed all the people, Bro. Magnuson used to say that when we know the truth, we can say, "Blessed be the LORD," because the fire stopped wickedness at a place in time that kept the people from becoming incorrigible. If the wickedness had continued on and on without the abrupt destruction and termination, their characters would have been crystallized in evil. Thus the destruction worked out more for the people's good than if they had lived longer and died a normal death.

Mark 4:11,12 and John 12:40 are along the same line: "He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them." Thus three of the Gospels emphasize that Jesus purposely did not try to convert Israel but only those who had a hearing ear, which requires natural faith to start with and confidence in God.

The Pharaoh of the Exodus is another example. God hardened Pharaoh's heart through the plagues lest he see (Exod. 7:13). The hardening accomplished two things: (1) it cut his life short, for he was destroyed in the Red Sea at a relatively young age, and (2) it provided a very profitable and helpful type. Therefore, God has various reasons for doing what He does, and the reasons are higher thoughts than we would have—unless He helps us to understand part of the methodology He employs.

**Eccles. 7:14** In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him.

"In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: ... [for God has set the day of prosperity and the day of adversity] the one over against the other, to the end [with the purpose in mind] that man should find nothing after him." We will consider the terms "day of prosperity" and "day of adversity."

**Comment:** The Apostle Paul said, "I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need" (Phil. 4:12).

**Reply:** That Scripture is telling us that even in the Gospel Age, opposite experiences are beneficial to new creatures in Christ Jesus—and so much so that in the Song of Solomon, the Bride class prays, "Awake, O north wind [adversity and trials]; and come, thou south [prosperity and peace]; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits" (Song 4:16). Both extremes are

helpful for developing a Christlike character, and they are helpful for the natural man as well.

We do not have books that explain much about the Song of Solomon, and practically nothing is said about Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon in the *Reprints* and the *Volumes*. The reason may be that the Pastor made such strict vows that he did not lead a natural life along certain lines. Even when these books were referred to, George Fisher and Clayton Woodworth, who wrote the New Testament applications, often did the writing, using their own excerpts from the *Reprints* and the *Volumes* to answer particular verses. Similarly, a sister was involved with selecting the *Manna* texts and commentary. Thus the Pastor himself did not comment on many of these verses. Instead, when the verses came up, someone else arbitrarily inserted comments where it was thought they would be especially appropriate.

Consider children in olden times versus today when they are wise before their time. The latter condition is abnormal. For instance, children are given books about sex even in kindergarten, but that was unheard of a hundred years ago. People grew up happy in their youth. In their tender years, they had the vigor and joys of life without the responsibility of earning a living to support a family. Then, as time went on and they became adults and had children of their own, they experienced the responsibilities and worries of life, and creases started to appear in their foreheads, particularly if they did not have employment.

According to nature, there was this joyful period, and even in hard times, the parents were happy that their children could play. As a little boy, I had nothing to speak of, but I played with clothespins and made airplanes out of them, for example. The tiniest and simplest things of life brought pleasure. Being unaware of the sobriety of life, I was in a happy, little dreamland.

And so, in human nature, it seems that “one [is set] over against the other,” and there are up and down periods. Even those of the world have ups and downs, and so do the consecrated. However, with the Christian, these opposite experiences are overruled for the development of the new-creature character. With this different perspective, the experiences are helpful. The rain and the drought, the sunshine and the cold, etc., all have their part. As a result, we appreciate certain things more than if we grew up in a very wealthy family and were spoon-fed all our life, for under such conditions, we would not develop the proper character.

Therefore, Solomon’s words can be applied especially to the new creature: “In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other.” God’s providences bring both joyful and not-so-joyful experiences, and nothing happens accidentally. The experiences come upon us for our instruction and benefit if we are rightly exercised. The words of a hymn are, “Send sorrow, send pain. Sweet are thy messengers, and sweet their refrain.”

What is the purpose of the contrasting experiences? It is “to the end that man should find nothing after him.” Following the same line of thinking that has just been expressed, people in their declining years of age and health, when they are more sober-minded, generally say, “I wish I could relive my life with what I now know.” Of course, generally speaking, they will be given that privilege in the Kingdom Age, but they are not presently aware of that opportunity. As people near death, many look back on their life and feel that it was a waste, for they never really found what they were looking for. American democracy was founded on the principles of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, but only as new creatures can we find the special joy of understanding and having access to the Father. In fact, it is *unbelievable* what has happened to us, not because of our righteousness but by God’s grace. Those to whom this grace was not extended in the present age did not have the feeling of the publican who, when he was praying, smote his breast and said, “God be merciful to me a sinner” (Luke 18:9-14). Jesus said that the publican went down to his house more righteous than the Pharisee who had prayed, “God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men.... I fast twice in the week, I give tithes



of all that I possess.” God was more pleased with the publican who felt that his life was a waste and *humbled* himself than with the Pharisee who exalted himself. In other words, the publican was in a better condition and attitude of heart to receive a blessing and hearken to instruction. In the culture that is being developed today in the world, it appears that most people want to be teachers more than students. To some extent, this may also be true in the Church.

The clause “that man should find nothing after him” refers to the attitude of those in the world who say at the end of their life, “I am going to die. This is the end of the road. I wish I had another opportunity.” They die without faith and hope. Some without any hope of a resurrection pursue a course in life of “eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.”

It is good that sobriety comes upon many in their later years so that when they are awakened from death in the Kingdom Age, they will be in a better condition to receive the blessings. What a surprise it will be to find that they are alive when they saw everything as dark prior to their death! They will be in a better position than those who had everything they wanted in the present life—power, servants, a life of prosperity, etc. When such individuals come forth from the tomb, they will find an equality with everyone starting one step at a time.

**Q:** Was Solomon expressing the permission of evil when he said, “In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other”?

**A:** The permission of evil was not really understood back there. If we have the proper thought, Solomon repented and God saw that his advice would be helpful, but he will not be one of the Ancient Worthies because of the type of life that he led. He did many things opposite to the Lord’s instruction. In contrast, David did a couple of horrendous things, but he was forgiven because he *repented* and *publicly* confessed and *opened* his heart. Although Peter denied the Lord, and Paul put Christians to death before his conversion, *repentance* preceded their death, and they *lived a life* of reformation. Not only did they ask for forgiveness, but their deeds manifested repentance and righteousness.

**Eccles. 7:15** All things have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his wickedness.

“All things have I seen in the days of my vanity.” Notice, Solomon now used the term “the days of *my* vanity,” whereas earlier he had commented, “All is vanity and vexation of spirit” (Eccles. 1:14; 2:11,17; etc.). Thus we can see a gradual change in the latter chapters of Ecclesiastes. How enlightening!

“There is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his wickedness.” This statement sounds like Malachi 3:15, “Now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.” However, conditions will change in the Kingdom Age.

Solomon made this statement with regard to the present life, for he saw that the just man does not get his merit. In fact, as the underdog, he is deprived of certain things, whereas wicked men seem to prosper. The situation is the same today. Here Solomon was pointing out the negative aspect, but subsequently, as we will see, he said that the righteous man chooses the proper course and will be rewarded. However, to all appearances in the present life, it is the other way around, especially when the Lord told the Israelites under the Law that they would live longer and prosper if they obeyed.

What is the difference? The Ancient Worthies consecrated their lives to do whatever the Lord required of them. When they were appointed to office, He told them, “You will be opposed, but you are my servant, and I am going to use you. Do not be afraid when your message is

rejected.” In addition, God gave the Ancient Worthies to understand that they would get a better resurrection. Take Jeremiah, for example. The whole nation ridiculed him. He was put in stocks, cast into a cistern, mocked, and had all kinds of adverse experiences, but he was faithful in declaring the Lord’s word. He will be rewarded, but that did not happen in the present life.

Solomon observed mankind from a broad-brush perspective and did not closely observe those who faithfully served the Lord. Thus those he observed greatly outnumbered the worthy class. David’s words in Psalm 91:7 give some idea of the proportions: “A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee.” Although that Scripture pertains to the Christian, the same principle applied in the Jewish Age. The Ancient Worthies were a definite minority.

**Eccles. 7:16 Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself?**

On the surface, verse 16 seems to be the wrong advice, but the perspective in which we understand it makes all the difference in the world. For example, during the WPA days, there was a sign at the side of the road without any punctuation: “Slow men working.” The sign could be understood two different ways: (1) Cars were to go slow because men were working, or (2) slow men were working.

What are some ways of understanding the statement “Be not righteous over much”?

**Comment:** A cliché is, “Do not make a mountain out of a molehill”; that is, we should not make big things out of trivia.

**Comment:** We are not to be self-righteous.

**Reply:** Yes. In Mark 10:17-22, a rich ruler came to Jesus and said, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life? I have kept the commandments from my youth up—not to commit adultery, not to kill, not to steal, not to bear false witness, and to honor my father and my mother.” Jesus told him what he lacked: “Sell all you have, give the money to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me.” Certainly not all Christians are given this instruction, but in this case, Jesus saw that the ruler’s hunger for money was such a curse to him that it was better for him to get rid of it all. If he got down to basics, he would prosper more in following Jesus. Therefore, this advice was proper for this individual.

“Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise.” The scribes and Pharisees thought they were the wise ones, and the position of the Catholic Church is that the Trinity is a mystery we are not supposed to understand, the implication being that the theologians know more than the laity. When asked a question they cannot answer, they respond that it is meant to be a mystery. Thus one can use the very words of Scripture to justify a wrong course.

**Comment:** Paul cautioned the brethren in Rome not to think more highly of themselves than they ought. “For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith” (Rom. 12:3).

**Comment:** We have the tendency to make everything a principle when, in many cases, liberty should be given.

**Reply:** Yes, sometimes we do not give the liberty to others that we should.

**Comment:** Paul also said in Romans 11:25, “For I would not, brethren, that ye should be

ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.” Christians can be “wise” in their own estimation by not recognizing the part Israel will play as the blesser nation in the Kingdom in the next age.

**Comment:** Romans 12:16 states, “Be not wise in your own conceits.” Just as Elihu, who pictures the Great Company, presumed to teach and rebuke Job, who pictures the Little Flock, so having too high an opinion of self has been a failing of the Great Company down through the Gospel Age.

“Why shouldest thou destroy thyself?” What is the thought here?

**Comment:** To be either “over much” righteous or “over wise” can relegate one to the Great Company or, if carried to an extreme, even into Second Death. For example, Peter and Jude both warned about a Second Death class who “speak evil of dignities” (2 Pet. 2:10; Jude 8).

**Eccles. 7:17 Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time?**

Again a portion of the study could not be transcribed because no recording is available. Therefore, for verses 18-29, alternate translations will be inserted from the Revised Standard Version, the New International Version, and the New American Standard Bible.

RSV: “Be not wicked overmuch, neither be a fool; why should you die before your time?”

NIV: “Do not be overwicked, and do not be a fool—why die before your time?”

NASB: “Do not be excessively wicked, and do not be a fool. Why should you die before your time?”

**Eccles. 7:18 It is good that thou shouldest take hold of this; yea, also from this withdraw not thine hand: for he that feareth God shall come forth of them all.**

RSV: “It is good that you should take hold of this, and from that withhold not your hand; for he who fears God shall come forth from them all.”

NIV: “It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other. The man who fears God will avoid all extremes.”

NASB: “It is good that you grasp one thing, and also not let go of the other; for the one who fears God comes forth with both of them.”

**Eccles. 7:19 Wisdom strengtheneth the wise more than ten mighty men which are in the city.**

RSV: “Wisdom gives strength to the wise man more than ten rulers that are in a city.”

NIV: “Wisdom makes one wise man more powerful than ten rulers in a city.”

NASB: “Wisdom strengthens a wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city.”

**Eccles. 7:20 For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.**

RSV: “Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.”

NIV: “There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins.”

NASB: “Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins.”

**Eccles. 7:21 Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee:**

RSV: “Do not give heed to all the things that men say, lest you hear your servant cursing you;”

NIV: “Do not pay attention to every word people say, or you may hear your servant cursing you—”

NASB: “Also, do not take seriously all words which are spoken, lest you hear your servant cursing you.”

**Eccles. 7:22 For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others.**

RSV: “your heart knows that many times you have yourself cursed others.”

NIV: “for you know in your heart that many times you yourself have cursed others.”

NASB: “For you also have realized that you likewise have many times cursed others.”

**Eccles. 7:23 All this have I proved by wisdom: I said, I will be wise; but it was far from me.**

RSV: “All this I have tested by wisdom; I said, ‘I will be wise’; but it was far from me.”

NIV: “All this I tested by wisdom and I said, ‘I am determined to be wise’—but this was beyond me.”

NASB: “I tested all this with wisdom, and I said, ‘I will be wise,’ but it was far from me.”

**Eccles. 7:24 That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out?**

RSV: “That which is, is far off, and deep, very deep; who can find it out?”

NIV: “Whatever wisdom may be, it is far off and most profound—who can discover it?”

NASB: “What has been is remote and exceedingly mysterious. Who can discover it?”

**Eccles. 7:25 I applied mine heart to know, and to search, and to seek out wisdom, and the reason of things, and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness:**

RSV: “I turned my mind to know and to search out and to seek wisdom and the sum of things, and to know the wickedness of folly and the foolishness which is madness.”

NIV: “So I turned my mind to understand, to investigate and to search out wisdom and the scheme of things and to understand the stupidity of wickedness and the madness of folly.”

NASB: “I directed my mind to know, to investigate, and to seek wisdom and an explanation, and to know the evil of folly and the foolishness of madness.”

**Eccles. 7:26** And I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her.

RSV: “And I found more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and whose hands are fetters; he who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her.”

NIV: “I find more bitter than death the woman who is a snare, whose heart is a trap and whose hands are chains. The man who pleases God will escape her, but the sinner she will ensnare.”

NASB: “And I discovered more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are chains. One who is pleasing to God will escape from her, but the sinner will be captured by her.”

**Eccles. 7:27** Behold, this have I found, saith the preacher, counting one by one, to find out the account:

RSV: “Behold, this is what I found, says the Preacher, adding one thing to another to find the sum,”

NIV: “‘Look,’ says the Teacher, ‘this is what I have discovered: Adding one thing to another to discover the scheme of things—’”

NASB: “‘Behold, I have discovered this,’ says the Preacher, ‘adding one thing to another to find an explanation,’”

**Eccles. 7:28** Which yet my soul seeketh, but I find not: one man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found.

RSV: “which my mind has sought repeatedly, but I have not found. One man among a thousand I found, but a woman among all these I have not found.”

NIV: “while I was still searching but not finding—I found one upright man among a thousand, but not one upright woman among them all.”

NASB: “which I am still seeking but have not found. I have found one man among a thousand, but I have not found a woman among all these.”

**Eccles. 7:29** Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.

RSV: “Behold, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many devices.”

NIV: “This only have I found: God made mankind upright, but men have gone in search of many schemes.”

NASB: “Behold, I have found only this, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices.”

**Eccles. 8:1** Who is as the wise man? and who knoweth the interpretation of a thing? a man’s wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the boldness of his face shall be changed.

**Comment:** God, the source of all wisdom, is “*the wise man.*” Daniel said that God is the

interpreter of dreams (Dan. 2:27,28).

The boldness, hardness, or strength of the countenance changes with wisdom from above.

**Comment:** Referring to the Church, God said to Daniel, “The wise shall understand” (Dan. 12:10). If a man is seeking after God, his face will shine and reflect God’s glory.

**Comment:** Stephen’s face shone like that of an angel when he was being stoned to death (Acts 6:9,10,15).

**Reply:** Yes. We assume that Stephen made his calling and election sure, for he received a vision from God at that time. An unusual young man, he was faithful unto death on a short-term basis. Paul was also unusual when he got the truth, but sometimes the Lord delays the death of a person because it may be helpful to those in need that such an individual lingers for a time.

From a natural standpoint, before one has the truth, he might be hard, depressed, despondent, bitter, or even violent because of dissatisfaction with life, but once he gets the truth and knows that God has planned a wonderful future, he changes. Through the influence of the truth, a person who previously had a hard face or a stiff neck becomes more humble, considerate, and kind in his judgment and thinking. In fact, the reasoning in the last verse of the previous chapter was somewhat along this line.

**Eccles. 8:2** I counsel thee to keep the king’s commandment, and that in regard of the oath of God.

**Comment:** Solomon’s instruction was to keep the word of the king’s law whether the “king” was a secular ruler or the Almighty God Himself.

**Reply:** That is true. A Christian is advised to honor and even pray on behalf of those in positions of authority for both their benefit and the benefit of those underneath that control or jurisdiction (1 Tim. 2:1,2). Only in regard to matters of conscience with respect to God’s will would we refrain from obedience to the civil authority; that is, we are not to do that which is contrary to the divine instruction.

God’s oath, or will, is that we should respect those in authority (Rom. 13:7). For example, Daniel said to King Nebuchadnezzar, “Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory. And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath he given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold” (Dan. 2:37,38). Therefore, those underneath Nebuchadnezzar’s authority were to pay attention, for God had permitted this situation.

Solomon, a *king*, was saying in effect, “I, King Solomon, counsel you to keep the king’s commandment, and that in regard of the oath of God.” It is interesting that the Presidents of the United States take an oath of office regarding their intention to be a benefactor to the people. Only despots or dictators would decline to make such a promise. In short, Christians are to be obedient and respectful like aliens in a foreign country.

**Eccles. 8:3** Be not hasty to go out of his sight: stand not in an evil thing; for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him.

“Be not hasty to go out of his [the king’s] sight: stand not in an evil thing; for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him.” Here it would be appropriate to think of the king as God. When we see that we are in a wrong situation, we are to withdraw from it and not stand there in

stubbornness. With God as our Father, with Jesus as our King, and also with civil magistrates—that is, on both the spiritual and the natural plane—wisdom dictates that we should not be stubborn and go contrary to good advice.

The early Christians wanted to be persecuted. Accordingly, there was a period of time in the Smyrna period of the Church where certain individuals had a challenging attitude toward civil authority. Of course *pagan* emperors and kings were the rulers at that time, and some Christians felt that a sure way to get a heavenly inheritance was to disobey, so they looked for an opportunity to do so. Having a belligerent attitude, having a chip on their shoulder, they challenged someone to knock it off. And that is what happened, but those Christians did not get the inheritance they were anticipating. All we really have to do is to be faithful to the truth, and the necessary persecution will come, for “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12).

Thus verse 3 is practical advice, even along natural lines. We are not to stir up a hornets’ nest unless it is expedient to do so. It is different if a circumstance calls for doing that which is contrary to our usual behavior. In other words, there is a time and a place for everything (Eccles. 3:17).

**Comment:** In a later chapter, Solomon said, “If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place; for yielding pacifieth great offences” (Eccles. 10:4).

**Reply:** Yes, “a soft answer turneth away wrath” (Prov. 15:1). There are times when it is necessary to stand in opposition, but we have to pray for the Lord’s wisdom that we are taking the right stand.

**Comment:** When Jesus went before his accusers in the last week of his earthly ministry, he spoke very little.

**Reply:** Not until the last part of Stephen’s sermon did he begin to criticize his accusers. “Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers” (Acts 7:51,52). When the religious leaders heard those words, they were ready to stone Stephen. In spite of his logic and excellent instruction about what the fathers did not do but should have done, Stephen was advising the current generation, who were about to stone him, but they responded the usual way—with *anger and fury!*

**Comment:** Truth either convicts or enrages.

**Reply:** Depending on the nature of the truth, that would be especially true when it penetrates. In other words, *hard, penetrating* truths will either convict or enrage, not just ordinary truth.

There should be respect for the office of those in authority, even if those in the office do some very despicable things. The office would be maligned if an issue is pressed too hard. For example, when anyone in Japan came in and had an audience with the emperor—no matter what his rank—it was expected that when the person finished his request, he had to back out of the room and not turn to the right or the left. It was proper decorum for the person to keep his face in communication with the emperor and slowly walk backwards from his presence.

“Stand not in an evil thing.” When a person who has done something wrong is called before the magistrate, if he pleads guilty because he is guilty, the judge will respect that plea because many trials take an inordinate amount of time and money. To “stand” in an evil thing would mean that a person has done the wrong but does not confess in the proper fashion.

“For he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him.” Since a guilty plea followed by a request for mercy does make a difference in some cases, a guilty person should plead for the mercy of the court.

**Eccles. 8:4 Where the word of a king is, there is power: and who may say unto him, What doest thou?**

Verse 4 is common sense.

**Eccles. 8:5 Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing: and a wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment.**

In critical times, one is careful that his remarks are prudent and proper. If the decision facing him is very difficult, a quick prayer is offered: “God, help me! Grant me understanding.” In such situations, we cannot pray to our Heavenly Father or Jesus in the usual formal and proper way. Thus our circumstances are taken into consideration according to the expediency of what is occurring. Certainly a man who is drowning cannot offer a formal prayer; his prayer would be hasty but very much from the heart.

The term “a wise man's heart” indicates that at critical times a person prays in his heart for wisdom to say the right words. For instance, during the pagan period of the early Church, there were edicts against Christianity. Any confession of being a Christian or any allegiance to Christianity automatically brought death, so the early Church was forced to go underground, especially in the catacombs of Rome. The case is told of some who were en route to a secret meeting of the brotherhood at night when they were accosted by a guard who asked, “Where are you going?” The response was, “We are going to honor a dead relative,” meaning that Jesus had died and they were going to pay their respects. Sometimes a prudent answer like that brings favorable results. No doubt the Christians under those circumstances had prayed for wisdom as to how to answer.

**Eccles. 8:6 Because to every purpose there is time and judgment, therefore the misery of man is great upon him.**

“Because to every purpose there is time and judgment.” Notice that the term “time and judgment” is repeated from verse 5. “Therefore the misery of man is great upon him.”

**Comment:** The first clause sounds like Ecclesiastes 3:1, “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.”

**Reply:** Yes. There is a proper time to hate, a proper time to do something strong, but it would be an unusual and rare circumstance. For instance, Jesus called the scribes and Pharisees “serpents,” a “generation of vipers,” “hypocrites,” “whited sepulchres,” etc. (Matt. 23:27,33). Like Moses with the incident of the golden calf, Jesus could not contain his anger because of the cruel and vicious spirit that the religious leaders manifested. The meanness of their disposition was so apparent that it called for a strong answer.

The Apostle Paul advised being strong to the strong, weak to the weak, and mournful to the sorrowful, but some do the opposite (1 Cor. 9:22). If someone is sorrowing and has a genuine reason for his grief, it is insensitive for another party to say, “Cheer up! Rejoice always in the Lord.” There are times when sorrow has its place and is beneficial. To vent one's sorrow and tears is sometimes healing. Thus to everything there is a time and a judgment, but it is strange that the thing we should not do, we do more often, and the thing we should do, we do less often. These reactions seem to be the law of fallen human nature—that in our “judgment,” we take the easier way when it is improper to condone something by our silence.



Verses 1-6 imply that the Lord is permitting evil. To develop the patience and character that the Lord is looking for, we need to experience things that are not so pleasant. We need both the north wind and the south wind, the sun and the shade, and the rain and the drought, so there is a time and a place for almost everything. With regard to the Christian, Psalm 91:10 states, “There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.” Thus there is a reason for a trial—either we have done something wrong, or we have done something right. Regardless, we are to accept the providence that has come before us.

**Comment:** Queen Esther went before the king with a request for her people, the Jews. She approached the king after Mordecai, her uncle, had told her not to think she would escape the destruction planned by Haman, for she, too, was a Jew (Esther 4:13,14). She fasted and prayed and then went before the king, so it was customary to be prudent and cautious when dealing with a king.

**Reply:** Yes, as stated earlier, kings have power. Esther could have imprudently thought that if the king was so enamored with her, she could simply confess she was a Jew and he would be more merciful. The Lord, through Mordecai, gave her very good advice. Telling Esther what not to do was more expeditious in this matter than letting her proceed according to her emotions, and she learned the lesson well. Preparing in advance, she tactfully and wisely approached the king, and her request was granted.

God allows the permission of evil for mankind to learn what evil really is. In future generations beyond the Kingdom Age, evil will not be permitted to last for any length of time because the history of what happened down here on earth with the permission of evil will be available to all. That history will be a sufficient dramatization of what disobedience brings upon God’s creatures who do not hearken to His commands. The enactment of the permission of evil is much more effectual than just saying, “Don’t do this, and don’t do that.” People will see events on film as they *actually* occurred on earth.

The permission of evil has been very hard on the poor in countries such as Africa and India, but when people are awakened in the Kingdom, those who suffered the most in the present life will be more appreciative than those who had luxuries and leisure. The experiences will stand the poor in good stead in the long run, but in the short term, their experiences are excruciating. Incidentally, the same lesson can be drawn along spiritual lines. Those who are forgiven much can love much more (Luke 7:47).

**Eccles. 8:7 For he knoweth not that which shall be: for who can tell him when it shall be?**

“For he knoweth not that which shall be.” This is the situation of the whole groaning creation, who, unbeknownst to them, are waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God. Only those who have been enlightened, such as the prophets of the Old Testament, are aware of what is coming. Although they did not know details, they certainly understood much more than those who were not obedient and submissive to God back there.

“For he knoweth not that which shall be: for who can tell him when it shall be?” Verse 7 is perhaps a supplement to verse 6, which speaks about the time of judgment and misery that comes upon some in a very remarkable fashion. The distress or suffering is great, but when relief comes through death or some other circumstance, they cannot foretell the future with clarity. In other words, Solomon was saying, “That which shall be shall be.”

**Comment:** The NIV reads, “Since no man knows the future, who can tell him what is to come?”

**Reply:** Yes, that is true with the unenlightened world of mankind. The exception would be the

prophets, who understood certain things that came forth from their own mouths—not with any depth, of course, but with a sufficiency for making their calling and election sure as Ancient Worthies.

“For who can tell him when it shall be?” Of course the Heavenly Father knows the future, but no human can provide reliable information in his *own* wisdom. Witchcraft, necromancy, seances, etc., are forbidden. To a certain extent, the fallen angels have knowledge. For instance, the fallen spirits possessing two men in the country of the Gergesenes said to Jesus in Matthew 8:28,29, “Art thou come hither to torment us before the time?” Thus the fallen angels know something; that is, they know more than mankind.

**Eccles. 8:8** There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it.

“There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit.” In this case, the “spirit” would be like breath. When a person expires, he exhales his last breath. It is true that the word “spirit” sometimes represents the soul, but when one’s breath goes out of him, he dies.

“And there is no discharge in that war [of the flesh].” A famous expression is “dying thou shalt die,” and that war is inherent in the flesh of mankind (Gen. 2:17 King James margin).

“Neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it.” In what way do the wicked feel they can be delivered in some measure from death? Some make a living by “killing” others; for example, they may step on somebody, putting him under, in order to get ahead. Following the worldly saying “The best defense is a strong offense,” some use violence to preserve their life. There is some truth in that saying, even along spiritual lines. Those who fight the good fight with a *fullness* of faith will be more successful than those who are weak in faith. Along earthly lines, the acquisition of riches and power by the wicked enables them to get the best medical advice and health care, so they think that violence benefits them. Thus the wicked justify their wrong deeds by thinking along wrong lines. Sometimes wickedness seems beneficial in the short term, but it does not pay in the long term.

**Eccles. 8:9** All this have I seen, and applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun: there is a time wherein one man ruleth over another to his own hurt.

**Eccles. 8:10** And so I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done: this is also vanity.

To all appearances, those who do righteousness seem to die like everybody else. Therefore, many feel, “Why should I do good and die when I can do wickedness and die?” They have no conscience as to something happening to them beyond this life. Thus the ungodly who do not believe in God reason that they will enjoy life to the full while they have it, and they devote themselves to that end. No matter what the cost or how much harm they do, that is their philosophy, for they believe that when a person dies, he is dead forever. If there were no God and no hope for the future, then there would be some seeming logic to that kind of reasoning. Many people know there is a God, but they would rather not let their conscience awaken them to that benefit and try to live accordingly. Deathbed repentance is convenient for many, but we see the vanity, or foolishness, of such thinking.

As far as Solomon could see initially in his pursuit for knowledge, the wicked seemed to live as long as the righteous, generally speaking. However, later on in Ecclesiastes, Solomon changed his thinking. It is strange that the one who was so blessed sought after this experience like a fatalist. Fortunately, he was eventually delivered from this thinking. He lived a reasonably long

life in which he could make amends and give some benefit to others through his counsel.

**Eccles. 8:11** Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

Verse 11 calls to mind Malachi 3:5, “And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a *swift witness* against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts.” The Lord’s being a “swift witness” in judgment is quite a contrast to His long patience with the “sons of men” who do evil. People misconstrue God’s patience during the permission of evil to mean He is not cognizant of evildoers. The delay encourages many in their evil because they do not see any speedy judgment. As time goes on, they get more and more set in their evil ways.

**Comment:** Verse 11 can also be used to show that God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah so that the evil was not “fully set” in their hearts to the point of incorrigibility.

**Reply:** Yes. Certainly evil was in the hearts of the people to the extent that the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because of their inordinate desires even for the angels who were in Lot’s home. The two angels subsequently delivered Lot, his wife (temporarily), and his two daughters. Had the evil continued on and on, the populace would have become incorrigible. Thus there comes a time when the character of a person who is delving into iniquity becomes crystallized in wrongdoing. For example, we see the evil of the Palestinian leaders in teaching young children to *hate* Israel. When those children grow up, that hatred is in them almost to the point of incorrigibility, and it is impossible to reason with them. Only the execution of power in inflicting punishment would force them to hear.

“Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily [by God], therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.” Solomon was explaining his observation that the great majority of the general populace were given over to doing evil works.

**Eccles. 8:12** Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him:

Solomon seemed to sense that for those who pursued a course of righteousness, having the general spirit of an upright moral character, it would somehow be better for them than for the wicked who sin a hundred times and live a long life without correction. He was commenting on human behavioral instincts and giving practical, common-sense observations of the general situation.

Not having much information, Solomon was just saying that doing good would have merit somehow and somewhere, and evildoing would be requited and punished eventually, even though the days of the latter are prolonged in the present life. He commented, “Yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him.” When we read the whole Book of Ecclesiastes, we see that Solomon was saying the following. Certainly there is a God and He has principles, but for some reason, He is allowing this situation with evil to occur. Solomon did not fully understand.

**Q:** Was Solomon contrasting the sinner who lived a long life in verse 12 with the wicked in verse 13 and saying that the sinner does not have to be wicked if he turns to God and reverences Him?

**A:** Yes. Some of the Lord’s people experienced this sensitivity before they consecrated. When their consciences were pricked, they felt a lack, and they realized that to commune with God,

they had to repent and confess their sins in full. Jesus said God is looking for such individuals and will draw nigh to them. In other words, Solomon certainly had a measure of natural faith, and not only does God call on those who have natural faith, but also He rewards them *if they respond* to His providence. When Solomon was made king, he gave a long prayer in which he asked for wisdom and not for wealth. The Lord graciously gave him natural wisdom such as no man before him had ever had. In addition, God rewarded Solomon with wealth, good health, and a stable reign over the nation of Israel. Although Solomon did not do what David had done, the advice he gave was practical common sense.

If an individual operates according to his conscience and has good natural faith or common sense, these qualities tend to lead him in the right direction *if God calls him*—that is, if God gives such a person the opportunity of the high calling. No one understood to any real depth the reward of the Kingdom Age, either natural or spiritual, until Jesus came and brought life and immortality to light. The following is a list of several individuals from the Old Testament who had quite a lot of light but not a specific or detailed knowledge.

1. Job knew that when he died, he would be awakened.
2. Enoch walked with God and was translated.
3. Daniel knew from the prophecies which were given to him that good times were coming, but he did not have much specific information until late in life when he realized the “days” represented years, the principle being a “day for a year” (Num. 14:34; Ezek. 4:6). However, he did not know what year the prophecies would start because he did not know when the wall of Jerusalem would be built. It was not until Jesus and the Holy Spirit came that the details of prophecy began to be revealed slowly to the Church down through the Gospel Age.
4. Abraham must have been very astute, although the Scriptures do not go into that aspect of his life—perhaps because it would, to a certain extent, undercut the importance of the Abrahamic promise, which was to be a keystone of Old Testament prophecy. However, he must have had considerable information because he knew that his destiny would eventually be spiritual. Abraham “looked for a [heavenly] city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10,16).
5. Moses was also very learned in Scripture, and he looked forward to the Messiah. Evidently, he could have been the Pharaoh of Egypt, but he gave that up because of his faith in the promises of God—the Abrahamic Covenant as well as the coming of the Messiah.

“Though [Solomon knew that] a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged,” he seemingly contradicted that statement in the next verse, which we will now examine.

**Eccles. 8:13** But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God.

“But it shall not be well with the wicked, *neither shall he prolong his days.*” In verse 12, Solomon said the opposite, namely, that a sinner’s “*days be prolonged.*” What he meant was that the days of the wicked will not be prolonged in the next life. When the wicked are awakened from the tomb at that time, the situation will be different. If one then refuses to bow the knee, he will be cut off, and for a hundred years, those who bow the knee will have to walk up a pretty steep highway of holiness because they will have to overcome the unfavorable character traits that they manifested and developed in the present life.

In other words, Solomon was saying that the prolonging of days in the present life is as *nothing* compared to eternity. The current life is but a nightmare, a passing moment, even if it should

be a hundred years long. But if we consider the next age when there will be an opportunity for *everlasting* life, we can say that the wicked will not prolong their days in the final analysis. Then the days of the wicked will be cut short; that is, the days will be but a “shadow” because the wicked will not reverentially “fear” God.

These are just common-sense observations as Solomon understood them. They make sense, for choosing to serve God is the best thing that could ever have happened to us. By God’s grace, we have an opportunity that was not afforded to anyone before Christ came at the First Advent.

**Eccles. 8:14** **There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous: I said that this also is vanity.**

In purposing to observe the behavioral traits of men with a particular focus, Solomon pursued knowledge almost like a mathematician. For his investigation, he set parameters in a certain direction to see if this, that, or something else was the way to go. Thus days, months, or even years were involved in a particular pursuit of knowledge, and he ceased a pursuit when he began to see that it was not the answer, that it had no merit or viability, and that it was vanity, emptiness, and nonsense. Then he focused his attention in another direction to see if that could bring the desired results of true happiness. Not until very late in life did he find that happiness.

“There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous.” Whether Solomon looked at the wicked or the righteous, he saw that some lived long lives. Also, he saw that the wicked sometimes died violent and sudden deaths, and so did the righteous. Solomon could not understand why God was allowing this situation to continue. In his investigation, he found no comprehensible answer. He did think God had a reason, but by looking at providence, he was not sure what that reason was.

One lesson is that we cannot judge people by their outward appearance, for God looks on the heart. Things happen to both the wicked and the just, but if the individual was one whom God was favoring in Old Testament times, there was a reason for what might ostensibly seem to be accidental and sudden; namely, the life might be cut short because the person had reached a sufficiency of character development to assure him a better resurrection. But outwardly the righteous did not appear any different from the wicked.

The Apostle Peter said essentially the same thing (1 Pet. 2:19,20; 3:17). When a judgment or calamity comes on a person who has dedicated his life to the Lord, he knows that experience happened for one of two reasons; either (1) it was a correction for wrongdoing, or (2) it was an affliction or persecution for something done properly. In the latter case, the suffering was meritorious and is accounted as a jewel in the crown laid up beyond the veil. Since we cannot judge the heart when we look upon the judgment of a fellow Christian, we can say that it is meant for a learning experience either as a correction for something done foolishly and wrong or as a help in the Christian walk. If the Christian is rightly exercised, the experiences are very helpful in guiding him in the proper ways of the Lord.

Generally speaking, then, we cannot tell by outward circumstances what the purpose of a judgment is. However, on rare occasions, the purpose can be relatively ascertained. Obviously, for example, if a man curses God or Jesus and then dies suddenly, we know that the death is a judgment for what he did. With the righteous, the consecrated, we can sometimes make a judgment, based on their fruitage, when there is an outward manifestation of a behavioral trait for either good or not so good.

In looking at the people of his day, Solomon could see if a person was trying to live a godly life or a life of debauchery, and he could see that in both cases, there were similar experiences. What was his conclusion? He said, “This also is vanity.” In other words, he had come to a dead end and did not have an answer for whether an experience might be God’s providence or just happenstance. The experiences of a worldly person can occur by chance, but the experiences of the justified class of either the Jewish Age or the Gospel Age are permitted for a reason—either to be corrective or to be instructive and rewarding because of suffering for righteousness’ sake. The Ancient Worthies suffered for righteousness too, but their reward is of a different nature.

**Comment:** Job’s comforters also did not understand that bad things can happen to good people.

**Reply:** The comforters gave very discouraging, negative advice to Job. The difference with Solomon is that he would have kept his mouth shut. He would not have made that judgment. The lesson for us is that what we do not understand, we should not judge. Therefore, we have to be slow in judging with our mouths. We should not be too quick to render judgment, unless there is an obvious pattern of behavior.

**Eccles. 8:15** Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun.

“Then I commended mirth.” In pursuing pleasure, Solomon was now looking in a different direction. He would have thought, “Maybe if I pursue this course, it will bring me the happiness I am looking for.”

“Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry.” Usually the slogan continues: “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.” However, Solomon did not add that last thought but said instead, “for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun.” He could observe that poor people were working under stringent conditions even during his reign of peace. They had to work hard to earn a living, but the attitude with which they lived made a difference. A person who is happy in the world tries to live a good life, not necessarily with the Lord’s instruction but with a certain moral standard. Such individuals seem to have a happy life, and they die in that situation. However, Solomon was not saying there is no future life. He was simply making a common-sense observation, and there is some value to that observation.

We can extrapolate from this advice of Solomon and give a spiritual application: “Godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Tim. 6:6). Not all Christians have contentment, but those who do not could have more of this blessing in the present life. Certainly they may get life by being faithful to their covenant, but a contented attitude, no matter what happens, is a privilege not all Christians avail themselves of, perhaps because some have problems in their very makeup that make it difficult to assume that type of attitude. “Godliness with contentment” is not a fatalistic attitude.

“A man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry.” Isn’t that true? A person cannot eat money. Solomon was talking about the average citizen who does not have the advantages of the ruling class. “For that shall abide with him of [the fruits of] his labour [during] the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun.” Thus contentment is a blessing of God in spite of the hard labor. One’s attitude is very important in reaping the blessings of joy and happiness in the truth.

In verse 15, therefore, Solomon pursued the observation that a contented attitude is commendable, for at least those individuals got some joy in life. Verses 10-14 cover his earlier

observations about the wicked and the righteous.

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

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

Verses 16 and 17 are very revealing, and they bolster some earlier verses regarding Solomon's personal attitude. "When I [Solomon] applied *mine* heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth: ... though a *wise man* [that is, Solomon himself] think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it." Solomon was admitting that he had wasted his time in the pursuit of wisdom, for he had failed to obtain what he was looking for.

What does the rest of verse 16 signify: "(for also there is that neither day nor night seeth sleep with his eyes:)"? In his pursuit for knowledge in all different subjects and along various lines of information, Solomon never had a good night's sleep, for up to this point, he had not found the real happiness, rest, and contentment that he was seeking. Earlier he said that at least a poor man, a laborer who is content with the food he eats and the home he has, gets a decent night's sleep, but that was not Solomon's lot.

This pursuit for wisdom can be viewed from different perspectives. When Solomon sought mirth and the pleasures of life in his pursuit for wisdom, he was trying to find out if that channel was what he was looking for. In this pursuit for wisdom, he observed and compared the behavioral pattern of seemingly just people with that of obviously wicked people. He did not get satisfaction when he saw that the same things happened to both types of people. The result of this particular pursuit was like asking, Why does God permit evil? The philosophy, the understanding, of the permission of evil was lacking. Solomon's observations of providences did not provide the answer, the reason. Now he sensed that he had failed in his pursuit for wisdom, and he wanted to do some good in life by passing this information on to others.

It is meritorious for a person to admit his failures. Many years ago in a testimony meeting, a brother told about his life and the disappointments he had had with a Ouija board and the pursuit of mystics and magicians. He even cried as he entered into his experiences, and my heart went out to that brother. He had lost a good portion of his life to those experiences. Subsequently I was happy to have some fellowship with him after the meetings.

Solomon did not obtain that which he sought, but David did. David had joy in his heart, as manifested in his abundant praise for God in the Psalms. Yes, there is discouragement in the Psalms as well, where David was plunged into the depths of sorrow. However, the Holy Spirit used his emotions to utter prophecies pertaining to Jesus, and he may have correlated those prophecies with his own life. In addition, David uttered experiences that were particularly his, but out of those lump-sum experiences, he praised God throughout his life.

**Q:** Does the parenthetical portion of verse 16 pertain to Solomon personally?

**A:** Yes. Solomon was talking about the restlessness of sleep night after night. When a person has a disquieting day with traumatic experiences, usually his sleep is adversely affected at night. Today medicines are available that, to a certain extent, can calm a person down, but previously it was difficult to have a refreshing night's sleep after an especially disturbing day. A man who labors hard for 12 hours a day, but is satisfied with earning a living and providing sustenance for his wife and children, sleeps well in his exhaustion, generally speaking. However, very few people are of that disposition. Of course such individuals are not necessarily godly, but they

have a proper attitude. Some in the world live a rather noble life; they are decent people who try to live according to moral standards as best they understand them. Their lifestyle in the present life will benefit them when they are awakened from death in the Kingdom Age, for they will quickly be amenable to instruction.

In reading Ecclesiastes, I am glad to see the change in Solomon, and more and more it is apparent why this book was included in the canon of Scripture. Our Lord and the apostles quoted fragments of some verses but very few, and not much is written in the *Volumes* or the *Reprints* on Ecclesiastes, Proverbs as a book, or the Song of Solomon. Generally speaking, the Pastor looked on these books with sort of a reserve, probably because of the vow he took to lead a celibate life. In addition, he advised the brotherhood to take another vow that he composed for Christians, and some may have taken that vow too hastily and suffered thereby. The Scriptures tell us that when we make a vow to the Lord, we are to live by it, so whenever we are going to make an additional vow, we should carefully think it out before giving assent. I have taken that vow: “Daily will I remember at the Throne of Heavenly Grace the general interests of the harvest work....”

**Eccles. 9:1 For all this I considered in my heart even to declare all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them.**

In the beginning verses of chapter 9, Solomon used a roundabout, philosophical, typical Mideastern type of reasoning that will take several verses before we know what he was getting at. A statement in verse 2, “There is *one event* to the righteous, and to the wicked,” pertains to the question he was leading up to as a climax: *death*.

“The righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God.” Solomon was talking about the relatively good element of humanity. When all is said and done, they are all dead, and there is no outstanding, visible event that would disclose whether God favored one or another of them or even heard them. Infidels believe in a God, but they think He is so great that He is not interested in mankind personally. Ostensibly Solomon, throughout his life, observed both the people who were decent and honest by what would be considered good morals and standards and the people who were wicked. He concluded that no outstanding reward especially favors the one class above the other—*unless the matter is examined very closely*. Solomon did pursue such an examination, but it took considerable time for him to come to the conclusion presented at the end of Ecclesiastes.

“No man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them.” Solomon was saying that no man knows whether God loves or hates with a special manifestation, for no response appears on the surface when we look on humanity as a whole. Solomon was purposely just drawing broad conclusions.

**Eccles. 9:2 All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath.**

“All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; ... as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth [an oath], as he that feareth an oath.”

**Comment:** The sun arises and the rain falls on both the good and the evil, but Solomon was focusing on death. Everyone was dying, the good and the bad.

**Reply:** The sun coming out on the good and the evil shows God’s mercy in providing life,



health, and food to all His creatures, including the animals. But here Solomon was saying that instead of the righteous being rewarded and the wicked being punished in a special sense, there appeared to be no particular manifestation in that direction.

**Eccles. 9:3 This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead.**

Here we get a hint of what Solomon was leading to. In verse 2, he put a little more emphasis on the righteous. Now the emphasis was especially on those who were doing evil. They were mad and full of evil while they lived, but eventually they went into the tomb.

**Eccles. 9:4 For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion.**

**Eccles. 9:5 For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten.**

Verses 4 and 5 are two of the few verses in Ecclesiastes that brethren allude to in their witnessing. As a whole, this book is not given much recognition either in the works of the Pastor or by the brotherhood as a whole. But these verses are used because they are powerful to show the condition of the dead. “The living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing,” for even their thoughts perish. Verse 5 is very helpful in proving that the soul is not immortal—it can die—and that it is not in flames in hell agonizing and being tortured.

**Comment:** Another helpful Scripture is Ezekiel 18:4, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.”

“A living dog is better than a dead lion.” A living dog can bite us, whereas a dead lion is no threat at all. When we witness to a person who is not spiritually minded, this type of reasoning or logic can be grasped much easier. Therefore, it should be used for those who are not begotten of the Holy Spirit.

**Q:** Would the “living dog” refer to Gentiles and the “dead lion” be King Solomon himself? There is a big difference between a dog and a lion.

**A:** Possibly Solomon had that thought inferentially. In the New Testament, dogs ate the crumbs under the table, and the lion is known as the king of the beasts. When we consider verses 3 and 4 together, Solomon was drawing the same comparison, but instead of using the wicked when they are alive versus when they are dead, he now focused on the live dog and the dead lion. When the wicked are alive, they make an impression, but once they go into the tomb, there is silence.

Incidentally, in many of these couplets where there is a duality of comparison, it is common with the Arab and the Jew that instead of making the comparison exactly the same, they somewhat reverse the picture while still conveying the same comparison. The sequence is purposely reversed.

“For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten.” On the surface, verse 5 seems to be strange reasoning, and many think that Solomon did not know about any hope for the future; however, that is not the case. What is the real comparison? Generally speaking, individuals may be very wicked, or they may be very good, but as time goes on after their demise, they are forgotten. Time seems to erase any memory of them in any exemplary fashion.

Solomon was speaking in the usual sense of the word. He was trying to show that just as a person who is mortally wounded goes into the grave and no longer feels his wounds, so an individual who dies an agonizing death has no feeling or sensation in the tomb. Accordingly, those who are thinking of a loved one when he is under great pain and distress sometimes feel at his decease that at least he is asleep in death and out of his misery. There is rest in death, as it were. Solomon was speaking more from that perspective—that the same fate of silence befalls both the good and the wicked. However, he was not talking of the real long term, of eternity. In other words, Solomon was not saying that there is no hope in the distant future. When we realize this perspective, there is no contradiction in what he was saying. Solomon was speaking of a *temporary* long time in death, rather than the eventuality of what happens to the dead. Thus he did not mean that the memory of the dead was everlastingly forgotten but that it was forgotten by those of the living generation who witnessed the demise. During their generation of life, they see no special manifestation of reward or punishment.

**Comment:** Solomon was not saying that God forgets the dead but just that man forgets them.

**Reply:** The living generation does not see any special change.

**Eccles. 9:6** Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun.

Verse 6 seems to verify that the wrong thought of the previous verse is the real thought, so how would we reply? In Hebrew the term “for ever” is *olam*, which literally means “for an age”; that is, it does not mean for perpetuity. The thought is that it will be a long time before there is any marked change. Moreover, the expression “for an age” is not necessarily any particular fixed period of time. In some cases, it means a fixed period of time that the Lord wants us to know, but it can also mean a fixed period of time we do not know and are not expected to know.

Love, hatred, or envy can be perpetuated by an individual, but when he goes off the scene, his personal love, hatred, or envy perishes. “Neither have they any more a portion for ever [*for an age*] in any thing that is done under the sun.” Thus in many places in the Old Testament, *olam* does not mean “forever” in the sense that we think of, for it is frequently used to mean “a long time.”

**Eccles. 9:7** Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works.

Verses 7-10 give constructive advice even for us. The Apostle Paul summed up this good common-sense reasoning and logic with six words: “Godliness with contentment is great gain.”

Verse 7 implies that, as far as Solomon was concerned, not only does God know a person’s works, but there are no works in the grave. From this reasoning, we can see that Solomon inferentially believed in an awakening from the tomb. God accepts or recognizes works in the present age, but individuals may not get a promotion in the current life. Solomon’s words imply that there will be some cognition in the distant, distant future. Thus with us too, God recognizes and is aware when we do a hard day’s labor, and although we may get only bread and crumbs, it is a living, so we should be happy and satisfied with our labor.

Because of the lack of sanitation, wine was like water back there. Being an alcoholic beverage, wine kills harmful bacteria, and thus it was used where the water was unsafe to drink.

**Eccles. 9:8** Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment.

“Let thy garments be always white.” Wasn’t Solomon giving good, constructive advice? In verses 7-9, he was saying, “Eat, drink, and be merry,” but he did not add the expression “for tomorrow we die.” The wicked love this latter expression because they feel it allows them to live with abandonment. From the positive or favorable standpoint, one has to know Scripture to have more hope, whereas the wicked, who feel the grave ends all life forever, reason, “Why should we try to be good? Why not just do what we want?” People have different attitudes, but, thank God, we know about the future. With the evil we are seeing today, it would be very, very depressing to have no hope.

“Let thy head lack no ointment.” We usually think of only kings and priests being anointed with oil, so what is the thought here?

**Comment:** Solomon was saying, “Be righteous.”

**Reply:** Yes, be righteous and do good unto others. Not only are we to live a good life with a white garment, which pertains to our own behavior, but we are to be good to others. In this case, the “ointment” emphasizes *healing*. Just as ointment is used to heal bruises, infections, etc., so we are to have a good influence on others, as well as ourselves. We are reminded of the parable in which the good Samaritan poured oil and wine, as an antiseptic, into the wounds of the man who was attacked by thieves and left half dead (Luke 10:30,33,34).

**Eccles. 9:9** Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun.

“Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity.” This advice was to be faithful to one’s spouse.

**Comment:** How strange that this advice came from one who had 700 wives and 300 concubines!

**Comment:** Perhaps Solomon was expressing a wish that he had taken his own advice and been faithful to his wife in the days of his vanity.

**Reply:** Many of Solomon’s wives were taken as political hostages, for whenever he dealt with other peoples, the wives were part of a contract or agreement. A common practice back there was for a king to give up his own seed royal as security, and of course when a wife was taken as hostage, sometimes the king who married her would release her by mutual consent to go back and visit her parents. Afterward she had to return to her husband. This practice was done mostly among kings, rulers, and leaders of an army or battle force.

As discussed in another study, of all the wives and concubines Solomon had, he could not trust one. Thus we see that this type of political marriage was not a natural relationship of choice. When a king got a wife under that circumstance, he was not as interested in looking for the love of his life, for many female compatriots were already under his jurisdiction. Therefore, the common man, who was not under this type of bondage, had a different circumstance. David also had multiple wives, but they were more faithful to him than Solomon’s wives because they were not all politically obtained.

**Eccles. 9:10** Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.

Verse 10 concludes the line of thought Solomon had been pursuing. Again he gave good common-sense logic: “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.” Verses 7-10

present a different slant, for Solomon was saying, “Live the life you have now with a right spirit of contentment, joy, and happiness, even though there is a lot of vanity in the present life under the best of circumstances.”

**Eccles. 9:11** I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.

**Eccles. 9:12** For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them.

Verses 11 and 12 express the situation that is seen when one looks at life with human wisdom and observes things with practical common sense. Solomon did say earlier, in a previous chapter, that sometimes the wicked live a very long time and the righteous not so long. But here he was saying that whether or not one has a long life, when death comes, it comes unexpectedly, for who knows? The fish being caught in a net is a good illustration of what we would call happenstance. As Christians, we try to say that anything untoward which happens to us is not happenstance but is permitted by Divine Providence for a good reason, either to teach us a lesson or to develop our character, so that we will get a more favorable reward in the future when our change occurs.

Notice, “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.” With regard to people in high places, the best man does not necessarily get the best reward in the present life. With a race, that is also true, for sometimes races are fixed, or the runners are handpicked. Therefore, those who can run swiftly are not allowed in the race because of a prejudicial circumstance. For instance, in the past, some type of ethnicity may have barred certain runners from a race. The people who are put in positions of decision making are not necessarily the wisest. Along another line, very few people are thoroughly happy with their profession for earning a living. Most would prefer something else, but time and circumstance seem to be the determining factors—except with God’s children.

**Comment:** With regard to time and circumstance in a race, the one who could be the champion might either get sick or fall and hurt himself, and then someone with less ability takes the lead.

**Reply:** Yes, in either a horse race or a human race, time and circumstance dictate. And sometimes that is true in even getting into something. For instance, in sports there was a time when a black person could not get into Major League baseball. Prejudiced feelings against one another based on environment, training, or genetics are quite common in all nations of earth.

“For man also knoweth not his time: ... as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time [or circumstance], when it [death] falleth suddenly upon them.” The situation is the same with the consecrated, for we know not what awaits us. God graciously hides future trials from our eyes. If we knew that we were going to die a week from now, it would radically change our life, and in some cases, there would be great fear and trepidation, so it is better not to know.

**Eccles. 9:13** This wisdom have I seen also under the sun, and it seemed great unto me:

**Eccles. 9:14** There was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it:

**Eccles. 9:15** Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the

city; yet no man remembered that same poor man.

In verses 13-15, Solomon related an illustration of wisdom that he had personally noticed in a particular incident. Also, he knew who the “poor wise man” was, but the individual was not publicly known. Therefore, his name is unknown, but the incident seems to be the following. When Joshua entered the Promised Land, he was given great victories, and the Lord told him, “The victories will not be because of your army. When you see high walls and great people, do not worry, for *I* will go before you and give you the victory.” As a result, Joshua had one success after another. After a while, an emissary group came to Joshua with worn clothing and stale, moldy bread in their baskets, and they pleaded for mercy, saying they had come a long way (Joshua 9). Joshua succumbed to their pleadings, whereas actually, the tribe they came from, the Hivites, lived nearby in Gibeon. Knowing about the slaughter of King Sihon and King Og on the far side of the Jordan River and then seeing the fall of Jericho, these men felt their defeat was next, so they went along with the plan devised by the “poor wise man” to deceive Joshua and obtain peace.

We think Solomon knew the “poor wise man,” but nobody remembers his name because it was not recorded in history. He was just an ordinary, common person, but whoever the leader was felt that the advice made sense and followed it. After the Hivites made a covenant of mercy, they became workmen underneath Joshua and followed through on their covenant for many generations. Thus, through the counsel of this ordinary person, they were spared from being put out of existence. Solomon was saying that those who get the recognition are not usually the swift, the wise, or the strong.

Incidentally, when Joshua entered the Promised Land, he had a big army that consisted of all Israelite men 20 years old and upward who were able to go forth to war. Thus there was a fighting force of at least half a million men, and Joshua was considered a “great king,” or power. The Hivites could see that nothing would be able to withstand this mighty army, so they used wisdom to preserve their lives.

David used similar subterfuge when he went to the Philistines, an enemy, and pretended to be a mad man (1 Sam. 21:10–22:1). In saving one’s life, therefore, a little wisdom can go a long way.

**Eccles. 9:16** Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength: nevertheless the poor man’s wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard.

“Wisdom is better than strength” is a true statement, as demonstrated by the illustration of the “little city” (verse 14). “Nevertheless the poor man’s wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard.” If wisdom does not come from higher up, it is often ignored. In other words, there is a prejudicial arrangement in all strata of society.

**Eccles. 9:17** The words of wise men are heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools.

**Eccles. 9:18** Wisdom is better than weapons of war: but one sinner destroyeth much good.

All of the concise statements in verses 16-18 make sense. In many cases, discretion is greater than valor. For example, God called Gideon a “mighty man of valour” when he was threshing wheat and hiding from the Midianites, that is, even before he had destroyed the altar of Baal and cut down his father’s grove (Judg. 6:12,25,26). But God, knowing the genetics of Gideon, could foresee his valor and courage when given proper advice. Nevertheless, Gideon questioned and used discretion to be sure he understood the Lord’s providence.

“Wisdom is better than weapons of war: but one sinner destroyeth much good.” For this verse, some King James margins contain several good cross-references, which we will consider.

1. *Genesis 3:6* refers to the Garden of Eden. “And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.” What destruction was wrought by *one* individual! Through Adam’s disobedience, *one* act, the death penalty came on the entire human race.

In addition, Eve, *one* woman, also caused much harm. She partook of the forbidden fruit and got Adam involved by her action of eating the fruit. However, the injunction was on Adam: “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:17). Thus one woman, let alone Adam, caused a lot of harm.

There was also *one* serpent, which Satan, *one* being, used to beguile Eve in much the way that the Lord used Balaam’s ass; that is, God’s angel spoke through the mouth of the animal that Balaam was riding so that it began to talk and reason with the prophet. By this method, the Lord wanted to bring Balaam to his senses.

2. *Joshua 7* pertains to Achan, who caused Israel to sin by taking some of the spoil of war and hiding it in his tent. Thus the foolish act of *one* individual from one tribe brought a penalty from the Lord upon the whole nation. It is unusual that Achan’s lineage was enumerated in connection with his disobedience (Josh. 7:18). Not only did this one individual cause great harm, but the effort taken to go into detail about his lineage shows that Achan was the great great grandson of Judah. Therefore, when the Urim and Thummim were used to find out who the guilty party was, the process started with the tribe of Judah. Then the Urim and Thummim went down the line four more times (Zerah, Zabdi, Carmi, and Achan) to identify Achan.

The account is interesting from the standpoint of our modern technology with the use of computers. Computers have no understanding of their own but just bring forth information based on what is put into them. Basically, therefore, a computer is like the Urim and Thummim with a yes or no, but it can administer a million yes or no answers in a second and right away come up with an answer based on the simple methodology of the Urim and Thummim of the high priest’s breastplate.

3. *Romans 6* is basically the same theme in regard to Adam. The frailty of the human race has caused many problems, but that frailty of the flesh is due to *one* man’s disobedience in the final analysis. Indeed the folly of one sinner can destroy *much* good.

**Comment:** Another example is the account where Phinehas intervened after an Israelite man openly committed fornication with a Moabite woman, thus staying the plague in which 24,000 died (Num. 25:6-9).

**Reply:** Yes, the Israelite man sinned in the sight of the whole camp, but Phinehas, the son of one of the priests in the Aaronic lineage, did not waste a moment.

**Eccles. 10:1** **Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour.**

“Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour.” The emphasis here is probably not appreciated as much today as it was back there. An apothecary was like a pharmacist, and the pharmacist trade was considered special in ancient times, for skilled apothecaries really knew the healing qualities of the substances they used and how to

mix them together. Today's pharmacists may be skilled to some extent in the Latin terminology that is used to describe various medicines so that they know what is being said, but basically they utilize the computer for the thousands of medicines that are prescribed. Of course most people have common ailments, so pharmacists can memorize some of the medicines, but in ancient times, an apothecary was a very choice profession.

Verse 1 is saying that if a dead fly gets entrapped in the ointment, or salve, which the apothecary has prepared for a certain medicinal purpose, a stinking savor is sent forth.

**Comment:** The cliché about a fly in the ointment comes from this Scripture.

**Reply:** A number of pithy statements in the Bible are found in English and other languages.

**Q:** Is verse 1 a continuation from verse 18 of the previous chapter? Just as one sinner can destroy much good, so a dead fly, a small insect, can destroy the ointment of an apothecary.

**A:** That is true. The separation of chapters 9 and 10 is artificial, so in this case, the two verses are related.

The term "dead flies" (plural) just means that a dead fly is in the ointment and that in many cases down through history, a single insect has gotten into a precious, valuable ointment. The thought is not necessarily that the fly literally causes a bad odor, a stinking smell, but that *figuratively speaking*, it causes a stench in the nostrils of the beholder.

**Comment:** It is something like seeing a fly in a bowl of soup. After seeing the fly, we do not want to eat any of the soup.

**Reply:** Yes, that is true whether an ointment is involved or something to eat or drink.

"So doth a little folly [do to] him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour." A comparison is being made with the apothecary, which was an esteemed position in ancient times. Therefore, the comparison is intended to be emphatic and startling.

**Q:** Is the theme along the lines of someone who was upright all his life but is remembered for one sin that he committed? Similarly, a wise man who suddenly commits folly has a stained reputation.

**A:** Yes, *one* foolish, improper act can damage the reputation of a person. This is an abnormality because of the *smallness* of the deed compared to the reputation of the individual, which comprises *many, many* deeds.

**Comment:** This type of thing frequently happens in politics. The opposition delights in bringing up something irrelevant or scandalous from the past.

**Reply:** Yes, there is a lot of mudslinging and misrepresentation.

**Comment:** As Christians, we can lose all credibility if we are not circumspect in our walk.

**Reply:** That is the implication, for a little folly can do a lot of damage. Of course in studying Ecclesiastes, we are looking for a spiritual application, but in order to appreciate the spiritual, we have to know the natural application.

**Comment:** "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (1 Cor. 5:6; Gal. 5:9).

**Reply:** Yes, that quotation from the Bible teaches somewhat the same lesson.

**Eccles. 10:2** A wise man's heart is at his right hand; but a fool's heart at his left.

**Comment:** A wise person carefully watches his words so that there is no misunderstanding.

**Reply:** A little discretion should be used, for our words come out of our heart. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matt. 12:34).

Usually the "right hand" is more skilled than the left hand, so it is purposely used for certain tasks. This comparison between the right and the left reminds us of Jesus' words in Matthew 6:3,4, "But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly." For example, if a person donates a generous sum of money for the truth's sake, he should not publicize the gift. The comparison is between the proper behavior of a wise man and the inappropriate behavior of a fool.

**Comment:** The right hand is a position of honor, favor, or prominence. In the parable, the sheep were on Jesus' right hand, and the goats were on his left (Matt. 25:31-33).

**Reply:** That illustration from the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats helps to explain verse 2. A relationship of degree is involved, for usually the right hand indicates more favor, and the left hand shows less favor.

**Comment:** Actually, everyone's heart is on the left side of the body, so verse 2 is obviously figurative language.

**Reply:** Yes, it is figurative just like the stench in the nostrils in verse 1.

**Comment:** It is interesting that the words "right" and "left" are used in politics, the right being conservative values and the left being more liberal.

When a person takes an oath, he raises his right hand. Also, a person raises his right hand when he wants to be heard.

**Eccles. 10:3** Yea also, when he that is a fool walketh by the way, his wisdom faileth him, and he saith to every one that he is a fool.

**Comment:** When a fool's wisdom fails, he does not literally say, "I am a fool." Rather, his words and/or actions reveal him to be such.

**Reply:** Yes, verse 3 is also figurative. A fool's deeds often speak louder than his words. Sometimes by refraining from a comment, a person can be deemed wiser than the one who verbally expresses his thinking. There is a famous saying: "This, too, shall pass away." When people made comments to a king about either bad or good times, he repeatedly gave that same reply, and the public thought he was very wise.

What is a key word in verse 3 besides "fool" and "wise"? It is "walketh"; that is, "a fool *walketh* by the way." In other words, a person may habitually do something foolish because he is careless in his comments or his actions. During the ordinary affairs of life and human behavior, this individual is saying to everyone that he is a fool because he does not weigh his words or deeds. He just walks and is loose with his mouth and does not use discretion. Such a careless attitude betrays a person as a fool, whereas one who carefully considers his words and actions is using discretion. Again we will quote James 1:19, "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let



every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.”

In summation, a wise man is careful, and a fool is not. We use the right hand when we see its need, and the left hand is relatively useless for most of life’s deeds, generally speaking.

**Eccles. 10:4** If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place; for yielding pacifieth great offences.

**Comment:** The Revised Standard reads, “If the anger of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your place, for deference will make amends for great offenses.”

There are two ways of understanding this verse, and both are profitable. Which meaning was specifically intended remains to be seen by each individual. Another principle is involved too.

“If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee.” The “ruler” is not speaking in a commendatory manner to the one who is appearing before him as a subject. The latter is supposed to be in obedient subjection to the ruler. “Leave not thy place; for yielding pacifieth great offences.” The clause “leave not thy place” is what causes the problem in understanding this verse, for it can be taken two different ways. I interpret the meaning to be that the ruler may be a fool, but he is in a position of power and authority. If we were remanded to come before him as a subject, we would be expected to listen and hearken to him as the ruler. Scripturally we are to be obedient to the higher powers except in rare cases where conscience against God is involved. When a matter pertains to trivia, to things of minor importance from a moral standpoint, we should be subject to the ruler and not turn our back. We should stand there and hearken and take note of what is being said. Then we would reply, “Yes, your Honor,” even though we were not in agreement—as long as the matter is not against God. The reason for obedience is that “yielding pacifieth great offences.”

This last clause is probably the most helpful in clarifying the meaning of verse 4. We would understand it to mean that we should “yield” to the instruction of the ruler. As long as the situation is relatively trivial, wisdom dictates that we honor the position or office of the ruler.

**Comment:** A practical application would be for an employee to apply this principle with his employer. If the employer has an opposing attitude, we should not get up and confront him but should yield. In other words, we do not have to fight for everything.

**Reply:** Where conscience is not involved, wisdom would dictate obedience lest we lose our job.

**Comment:** A marginal note is to “be not hasty” to leave the ruler’s sight, but in addition, a reference is made to Abigail, whose husband wronged David.

**Reply:** Abigail yielded to David’s need in order to save her own household. Yes, that is one illustration, and there are others.

Generally speaking, the thought is that sometimes fools are in very high places, but wisdom indicates that we should be prudent in our behavior—as long as a principle is not violated.

**Q:** Is Matthew 5:25 pertinent here? “Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison.”

**A:** Yes, that Scripture presents the other way of understanding verse 4 as a general rule.

There was an interesting comment in the newspaper about a rather attractive young woman in

the nominal Church who had given her life to Jesus. When she was abducted from a public place by a man in a car, it was known later that he had done this type of thing before. When the police realized who the abductor was, they expected the worst for the woman. However, she was taken by him to a hotel room in a city where he was captured before he did any harm to her. The police marveled that she was with him for a full day without having a real problem. She said that when she was taken, she could see from his behavior that he meant business, but when he spoke very roughly to her, she replied, “Jesus loves you.” He was startled by her comment when it was obvious to him that she knew what he was threatening. The situation ended up with him not harming her, admitting his past deeds, professing his guilt, and becoming a changed man. It was as if the Holy Spirit overruled the woman’s comment at the right time. Therefore, sometimes unusual results come from a simple statement.

**Comment:** The same thing happened to Sr. Mary DiMuzio years ago. When a man entered her apartment, threatened to steal her money, and grabbed her by the neck, she started to pray for him and said that she would ask the Lord to help him get over this problem that he had. He left the apartment building crying and promising to send the money back to her.

**Eccles. 10:5** **There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, as an error which proceedeth from the ruler:**

Verses 4-6 are all related.

**Comment:** If the “evil” is minor, then even if the ruler is wrong, we would yield to pacify him.

**Reply:** Pacifying the great offenses might be done by the one who is in the position of power.

It would be easy to write a treatise on these verses if one had the time and could write down exactly what he meant and all the conditions, but that is not possible in this type of study. Solomon’s pithy statements are the results of many incidents, for he codified into simple statements what he had seen over and over again in different situations but with the same principle being involved. What was Solomon saying here? The Lord sees that it is wise for us to behave prudently with regard to the providences He permits to come into our life.

**Eccles. 10:6** **Folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in low place.**

Sometimes there is folly by a person of great authority or influence—whether he is a king, a ruler, or a rich person. “The rich sit in low place.” In other words, many of the wealthy should not have gotten their riches, for they either inherited the riches or got them through ill gain. Much is involved in these statements, so in this kind of study, we could easily spend an hour on each verse and use a number of different illustrations. However, verses 4-6 show that from God’s standpoint, those with power and authority in the present life are frequently not fit for their positions of responsibility. Solomon continued along this line in succeeding verses as he had done earlier with vanity, using one illustration after another of the principles involved.

**Eccles. 10:7** **I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth.**

Notice the contrasts: riding on horses versus walking on foot, and servants versus princes. Solomon, as well as others, observed that things are often backward in the present life. Those who are worthy of administration and office are in a lowly estate, and those who do not have much understanding are in positions of authority. Such situations are an anomaly.

Much has to do with who one knows or what level of society a person is born into. Honor and esteem are often bestowed on individuals for a superficial reason and not because of

worthiness. As we will see, Solomon gave advice based on these observations.

**Eccles. 10:8 He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him.**

“He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it.” The implication is that the person digs the pit to entrap others, but sooner or later he will become the victim instead. In principle, this example can include many other situations in life.

“Whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him.” In other words, if a mischief maker sees a well-cultivated and pruned hedge and puts his hands into it to destructively snap off some branches, a serpent in that hedge can bite him. What also frequently happens when a person reaches into a hedge is that a thorn pricks him. That thorn is just like the bite of a serpent, and the injury can be painful.

In both cases, then, the person with ill intentions will eventually get stung in one form or another in doing mischief.

**Comment:** The principle is that what a man sows, he will reap (Gal. 6:7).

**Comment:** What happened to Haman in the Book of Esther is an example of the principle in verse 8. As he premeditated a plan to have Mordecai and all Jews killed, he expected to be honored himself, but the plan backfired (Esther 6:4-11).

**Reply:** Yes. Haman thought the king would honor him, so he suggested that the “man” be put on the king’s horse and walk through the city with honor and esteem. But the king honored Mordecai instead, and like a servant, Haman had to lead the horse carrying Mordecai, who received the praise.

**Eccles. 10:9 Whoso removeth stones shall be hurt therewith; and he that cleaveth wood shall be endangered thereby.**

Like verse 8, this verse is in couplet form. Two different subjects are employed to draw the lesson.

“Whoso removeth stones shall be hurt therewith.” Stones were used as boundary markers for a person’s property. Under the Law, moving boundary-marker stones was forbidden, and anyone who committed this serious criminal act was stoned to death. Thus the removal of these stones was the act of a thief, and the thief was worthy of death. According to the Law, the property was to be handed down from generation to generation, so not only did changing the boundaries adversely affect the present tenant, but it jeopardized the property rights of succeeding generations.

Stones were also used to indicate roads so that one could travel with safety. If a person in the desert saw sequential stones that were separated by regular intervals, he knew that they marked a road. In addition to the stones being a directional signal that showed the way, they assured the traveler that the wadi route would not come to a dead end. People traveling a long distance in the desert were confronted with decision making when they came to a fork in the road, but if they saw a stone on one side of the fork, they knew it marked the proper route to take. Thus stones were used as both route and property markers.

For the second half of verse 9, “and he that cleaveth wood shall be endangered thereby,” we have to read verse 10. Perhaps these two verses should have been divided a little differently, for the last half of verse 9 complements verse 10.

**Eccles. 10:10 If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength: but wisdom is profitable to direct.**

“He that cleaveth wood shall be endangered thereby. If the iron [ax head] be blunt, and he do not whet [sharpen] the edge, then must he put to [that is, put forth] more strength: but wisdom [or skill] is profitable to direct [that is, it brings success].” In other words, when a person goes out to chop wood, two things are possible: (1) he will injure himself, or (2) he will readily accomplish his goal without great fatigue and exhaustion.

Usually an abrasive stone wheel or a carbide stone or other type of metal with moisture was used to sharpen an edge. An old-fashioned method of sharpening sickles and ax heads was to have water in a wooden trough that was lined with tin. Half of a big limestone wheel was submerged in the water, so that as the wheel turned, it was moist. A person sharpened the edge of his sickle or ax head by holding it against the limestone or the abrasive stone. The water was a beneficial agent in sharpening. This method was also used with regard to battle.

**Eccles. 10:11 Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment; and a babbler is no better.**

Does a serpent have to be enticed to bite? No. In fact, if a person accidentally comes across a serpent, it will strike without warning. Usually only the larger snakes give a warning, for example, the rattlesnake. Also, some vipers hiss, but when a person walking along the way suddenly startles a serpent, it will strike without an inducement through enchantment. These facts give meaning to the second half of verse 11 about a babbler; namely, neither does enchantment have to be used to make a babbler talk. To the contrary, he is only too willing to talk. Therefore, “a babbler is no better” than a serpent.

If a person listens to a babbler long enough and considers the words to be wisdom, he usually gets in harm’s way by following the babbler’s advice. By normal standards, therefore, it is more judicious to be slow to give advice or talk. Once again the prudent general advice in Ecclesiastes is to be quick to hear and slow to speak.

**Eccles. 10:12 The words of a wise man’s mouth are gracious; but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself.**

“The lips of a fool will swallow up himself.” If one talks too much, sooner or later he puts his foot in his mouth. Moreover, the words of a troublemaker are like thorns and thistles; that is, they are harmful and tend to destruction.

“The words of a wise man’s mouth are gracious,” but in what manner? His words are edifying, constructive, and beneficial. In short, they are profitable to the hearer.

**Eccles. 10:13 The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness: and the end of his talk is mischievous madness.**

With regard to a fool, “the beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness,” and as he continues to talk, his words get increasingly worse. His talking becomes more and more foolish—to the point that he seems to be mad. Strangely, empty barrels make the loudest noises.

Solomon was giving little quips or tidbits of information based on his observations throughout life of the distinctive behavior of a wise person and a fool. That seems to be the comparison thus far in many of these verses.

**Eccles. 10:14 A fool also is full of words: a man cannot tell what shall be; and what shall be after him, who can tell him?**

As the King James margin says, a fool “multiplieth words.” “A man cannot tell what shall be; and what shall be after him, who can tell him?” Solomon was saying that a fool babbles so continuously that another person cannot get a word in edgewise. The listener is waiting for the end of a sentence, and when he thinks it has come, the fool starts right into the next sentence. Therefore, the listener cannot make any statement after the fool begins to speak because the words go on ad infinitum. He talks all the time—there is no end. A person cannot answer what the fool is saying because the fool is not interested in hearing what anyone else has to say. The sum of the matter is that it is better to be slower in speech.

Oscar Magnuson was a brother I particularly appreciated because he spoke slowly. Many brethren did not like to hear his talks for that reason, but his slower speaking allowed the words to sink in, and he had something worthwhile to say with those fewer words. Those who speak fast may be very quick in their speech, but when their words are weighed, there is often little that we can retain because nothing really substantial was said. Thus it is better to listen to the one who is slower of speech *if* his words are meaningful than to the one who is more eloquent but not substantive.

**Eccles. 10:15 The labour of the foolish wearith every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city.**

The way, or direction, to a city should be well known. However, the fool is not a very good guide in directing one to a meaningful destination because he labors in the explanation instead of stating it in a few words. Sometimes a person speaks 25 or 30 words that could be summed up by someone else in about five words. The hearers get the point from the latter individual.

**Eccles. 10:16 Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning!**

**Eccles. 10:17 Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness!**

Verses 16 and 17 are a little theme by themselves. No doubt Solomon had observed many kings because one of his problems was that many of his marriages were political; they were marriages of convenience. A king would give his daughter to an alien king, and the alien king would give his son. That way a covenant was made so that neither king would devise mischief against the other. In other words, a treasured child sealed the covenant. Stated another way, politically arranged marriages were the method used when the parties feared treachery. Instead of shaking hands, this practice was followed in many royal marriages in those days. However, according to the Law, a handshake sealed a contract, and the contract was supposed to be kept because of the nobility of character in an organized moral society.

Notice that verses 16 and 17 are making a contrast. Verse 16 starts, “Woe to thee, O land,” and verse 17 begins, “Blessed art thou, O land.” Thus a woe that befalls a land, or people, is contrasted with a blessing that befalls a land, or people. First, we will study the woe in verse 16.

The woe comes when the “king is a child,” and the “princes eat in the morning!” Of course verse 16 was adapted to an agrarian society, but there are similarities today. Since Solomon was only the *third* king of Israel, he was speaking not of Israel’s kings but of kings of other lands with whom he was in communication. When the king died, his son came on the throne, and the son was sometimes only a minor. Here Solomon was speaking of his observation of situations where a king died and he was succeeded by a young royal heir. During that king’s

youth, mischief was going on of which he was not aware. The princes in the land under “woe” were having a good time in the “morning”; that is, they ate in the morning when they should have been doing the king’s business. Instead of responsibly carrying on the government of the land to profit the people, the princes were feasting and having a merry time. The laborers had to work from sunrise to sunset, a 12-hour day, but the princes, who were supposed to govern the land on behalf of their young sovereign, were thinking only of themselves. They used the situation to their advantage—a behavior that any adult king would abruptly punish them for. It is a little difficult for us to understand some of the things Solomon mentioned because of the customs of the land back there, for today we live a more sophisticated city type of life.

**Eccles. 10:18** *By much slothfulness the building decayeth; and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through.*

A building takes on the characteristics of the owner. If the owner is slothful and slovenly, the building is neglected.

**Q:** Was Solomon talking about the owner of a building or the builder, or were they one and the same?

**A:** We think they were the same individual. In olden times, the builder was usually the occupant of the building, for when a person got property of his own, he constructed a building on it. The point is that the building took on the character of the owner. Even an estate that was handed down for several generations could get into a run-down condition by the current occupant. The building was good if it was kept up, but otherwise, decay set in. It is a strange fact that a person does not have to walk much on a floor to make it sag, for the sagging can come just through neglect.

**Comment:** Proverbs 24:30-32 reads, “I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction.”

**Reply:** Of course when we, as Christians, read these verses, we should be drawing spiritual lessons. All that is being spoken of here pertains to character development. As far as lieth in us, we are called to be an example to others of the proper behavior of a Christian. Christ is our Head and model, and we try to emulate him to the best of our ability. Hence a character “house” is being built. While we first apply these statements along natural lines, it is easy to adapt them to a spiritual level that tells us what our behavior as new creatures should be.

**Eccles. 10:19** *A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry: but money answereth all things.*

This verse is more difficult to understand. Certainly “a feast is made for laughter,” and wine makes one merry of heart. These words bespeak gladness and joy, but what is the thought about money? “Money answereth all things.”

**Comment:** Money is needed to buy food for a feast and wine for merriment.

The italicized word “things” is supplied, so we can delete it. “Money answereth all.” Of course a person who has money can provide for a feast. For example, King Ahasuerus could easily afford a feast for all his princes, nobles, and servants that lasted for 180 days (Esther 1:1-4). Without money, it is hard to provide a feast, but it is our observation, after living a fairly long life, that sometimes the people who do not have too much money sacrifice spiritually and do the most. Although this oddity seems to be contrary to nature, it seems to prevail in the

spiritual application. Therefore, sometimes the best examples are individuals who have a modest means, but they go all out in what they do. How remarkable! And in some cases, those with considerable temporal means tend to be very conservative. However, we have to be careful in our observations, for sometimes things are done where the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing.

Along natural lines, a king who has just inherited the throne is almost expected to provide largesse not only to prisoners but also with a great feast, which money can accomplish. Thus verse 19 seems to be speaking about the natural realm. One who has the means can do all these things.

**Eccles. 10:20** Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter.

Verse 20 is wise advice. “Curse not the king.” Of course the word “curse” is strong language. If one is given to such cursing and he tries to do it secretly but vociferously, he can make quite nasty remarks about the one in power. Of course conditions today in a democracy like America are a lot different than those in, let us say, Iran. If we cursed the ruler there and he got wind of it, we would be arrested, tortured, and possibly even put to death. In Old Testament times, the king was a monarch, for he did not have a legislature to modify his decisions.

**Comment:** Solomon was referring to cursing the king in one’s private residence, but that was not advisable because a servant or someone else could overhear what was said and report it to the king.

**Reply:** Yes, rich people often have many servants. The servants may be very obedient, but that obedience could be based on prudence or other motivations rather than on respect for and loyalty to their employer. If the rich employer puts his trust in the servants and then curses the king, one or more of them might tell the matter to the king. A correspondency today might be going to the press and receiving a large sum of money for narrating confidential information to a writer who plans to publish a book.

Therefore, prudence dictates that even if one is praying in his bedroom, he should refrain from making unwise statements. Generally speaking, God has providentially overruled so that regents, lawgivers, and others in authority are “good” in the average sense of keeping things in order, for there would be anarchy and all kinds of mischief otherwise. Sometimes even a dictator is appreciated along certain lines because the people say, “Well, at least when he is in power, we can do such and such, and do not have to worry.” For the most part, rulers have been a protection for those who are trying to live a decent life under normal circumstances. Therefore, any hardships should be received cheerfully, not grudgingly.

Solomon used a little humor in saying that “a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter.” We do the same thing with various sayings. What are some of them?

**Comment:** “The walls have ears.” “A little bird told me.”

**Reply:** Yes. Such sayings are rather cute, but they can be very meaningful and serious under certain circumstances.

**Comment:** Verse 20 says, “Curse not the king, no not in thy thought,” so even our countenance should not show disapproval.

**Reply:** Yes, that would also be prudence. One who has a sharp tongue will get some kind of backlash. Solomon was giving general advice.

Spiritually speaking, this advice is a very serious matter because a person's thoughts and words can affect his eternal destiny and welfare.

**Eccles. 11:1 Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.**

In the past in our lifetime, many old-timers felt that the Book of Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon were placed in the Bible as a test upon God's people. As a result, they purposely avoided studying these books as if they were a plague. However, we find that the opposite is true. Actually, *all* Scripture given by inspiration of God is profitable to the Lord's people. Therefore, the very fact that Ecclesiastes is in Holy Writ means that something about it is helpful to those who seriously set their mind to understand God's purpose or intent in having this book included, especially since Solomon, throughout his life, pursued knowledge and encountered a sad state of affairs.

Up to this point in our study of Ecclesiastes—that is, in the previous ten chapters—most of what Solomon said consisted of advice on *what not to do*. He tried this and he tried that, and over and over again he said, “This is vanity,” and gave warnings. Even the Pastor spoke very little on this book except for certain pointed Scriptures, particularly if they were alluded to in the New Testament. However, the reward for studying this book comes especially in chapters 11 and 12, for here we get Solomon's advice on *what to do*, and it is sound instruction and more positive in nature. Moreover, we think that the real “golden gem” is in chapter 12, the last chapter of the book.

Before starting to examine chapter 11, we will make an observation about verses 1-6. One common theme is inherent in all the verses, namely, the *sowing of seed*.

“Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.” Notice that there is a *reward*. If we cast our bread upon the waters, we will be rewarded with finding it after many days. In other words, the effort seems to be fruitless, not leading anywhere, but actually, if the principles are pursued that Solomon was about to enunciate, the principles he wanted us to realize, they will bring very beneficial afterfruits. To his sorrow, he wished he had known and realized this truth earlier, before he started to go astray.

**Comment:** We should be willing to let our understanding of Scripture go forth on many people, even though we are not sure how much they are absorbing.

**Reply:** Of course we are not to cast our pearls before swine, but we should send forth here and there bits of truth that have been a blessing to us. Of course our desire is to get someone else likewise enthused with the truth, even though at times it might seem that our efforts are going down the drain. Many brethren have witnessed to others they hoped would come into the truth, but to their sorrow, the efforts were in vain. In retrospect, the brethren wondered about the efforts that were put forth. However, Solomon put a different twist on such efforts, saying that the effort does pay in the final end.

The seed that was cast upon many waters in the picture Solomon was talking about was rice seed; that is, the seed of a food was being sown. Rice is sown in a field that is quite filled with water in a muddy type of soil. When the seed is thrown on those waters, it does not come down in neat rows like most seed. For example, corn is planted in an orderly fashion, and the rows are spaced a certain distance apart. However, rice is different. The sowing of rice seed in a muddy field is unpleasant, tiring work. The sower just throws the seed on the water, and the seed momentarily floats. When the seed sinks, the sower does not see where it goes, but in



time the field becomes a rice field. The point is that for a long time, the sowing of the seed does not seem to have any effect.

What happens is that the sower takes his oxen or cattle and has them tread back and forth through the mud. The treading of the soil causes the seed to go down deep so that the fruitage will be more plentiful. Thus Solomon was likening the sowing to an indiscriminate casting of the seed. It was like a habit or something that is done in a natural way. The same is true when we, as Christians, give out tracts. We hand out a tract in a natural way, and we do not know whether or not it will prosper. However, the sowing does us good, and God may bless that effort—sometimes to our knowledge and sometimes not. Nevertheless, the sowing will bear fruitage, particularly for the individual who is sowing the seed of truth.

Rice is to the Eastern world what wheat is to us. In times of famine, wheat has been sent to the Asiatic countries. The people there are starving, yet the piles of wheat remain and are not eaten. Because of the development of the people, wheat is repugnant and foreign to them, and they cannot properly digest it. Lo and behold, it takes time for those in the donor countries to realize that the wheat they thought was good can even get moldy and spoil.

**Eccles. 11:2 Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.**

Verse 2 follows the same theme of sowing, but as we progress, we will find that the sowing of seed to the public is done in different ways. For instance, the poor in spirit can include those who have a death in their family or those who need temporal food. Solomon's advice was given along earthly lines, and therefore, a blessing would accrue along natural lines. If we understand correctly, the Lord was saying through Solomon that spiritually speaking, we are to follow the same procedure in sowing the seed of truth to those we feel are in need whether or not they know it.

The peculiar instruction "Give a portion to seven, and also to eight" is like an afterthought. Sometimes the little extra effort is what prospers. Speaking along earthly lines, sometimes we are moved to do certain things, and then an occasion comes along that sours us. For example, a newspaper report said that while unemployment is rife in the state, some who are begging make more money than they would with a job. The newspaper report put a sour grape in our mouth because we felt that the beggars were putting on an act. Then we heard that a sister had given a donation to a beggar while she was out on an errand. When she returned to her car, she saw the same beggar sitting in the driver's seat of a very expensive car. Not only was he not in want, but he had his own vehicle. The sister's experience verified the newspaper report. In other words, begging was that individual's "employment."

Solomon was saying that while this may be the case with seven and the experience may sour us, we should continue, for it may be that the eighth person is the very one who is in need. Thus many Christian writers have said that it is better to give to those who are not in need lest we pass by one who is truly in need. This is a hard lesson, especially now because we live in a fast world where everything is done hurriedly. For example, we drive and seldom walk. Therefore, it becomes more difficult to do these reflective things, but Solomon was saying that helping the one really in need will bring a blessing and a reward that we may or may not ever be made cognizant of. At any rate, the thought is not that we always have to give, but it is better to be more giving and to be prepared to give than to be soured on the subject.

**Comment:** We should do good to all men as we have opportunity and in so doing let our light shine, for something may happen in people's lives where they reflect on our kindness and see that the Lord was good to them.

**Reply:** Even if they do not accept the truth, the kindness may give them needed courage for their troubles.

**Comment:** The number seven usually refers to completeness, so “also to eight” would be something extra or additional. Along that line, the Lord, through the Law, provided for the poor in the field by commanding that the corners of a field not be reaped.

**Reply:** Yes, it is obvious that the giving of the eighth was supplementary to the seven, and it meant the giving of a little extra effort.

**Eccles. 11:3** If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth: and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be.

**Comment:** The statement “where the tree falleth, there it shall be [or lie]” is used to show that there is no consciousness or change of character in death.

**Reply:** That is true, but Solomon was also speaking in another peculiar sense.

Notice that the clouds are full of rain and that the tree falls in the direction in which it is bent. Moreover, when the clouds are full of rain, they are more apt to drop water. But what was Solomon saying here? Habit produces a certain action either for good or for evil. If a person is brought up and instructed in good habits, the result is good fruitage—and contrariwise in the other direction. Thus Solomon was emphasizing the importance of creating good habits, for good habits lead to something constructive. A person without good habits is a ne'er-do-well, who goes through life without benefiting others. The gist of a famous saying is something like the following: “I pass through this life but once. Therefore, I will do all the good I can. I want to be of some benefit to others and not be selfish to my own end.” That saying is true, for the testing period is down here. When our life on earth ceases, we will have come to the end of our Christian course. That walk will determine the result in God's sight.

“If the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be.” If a large tree is leaning in one direction and heavy rain loosens the soil, it is apt to fall in that direction. The reference is to an *old* tree, not a sapling, to a tree of *habit*. Solomon was continuing the theme of verse 1: “It is good to sow good habits. Therefore, sow your seed. You do not know what the results will be, but the sowing will prosper one way or another.” Many of our deeds in life seem to be to no purpose. We like to see results, something concrete, but the Lord knows what is going to happen. Thus the sowing of good habits of thought, especially along spiritual lines, will result in a favorable end. Whether one receives divine nature or everlasting life, the net result is good, rewarding, and worth the effort.

**Eccles. 11:4** He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.

Again Solomon followed the same theme. Here he was saying, “Do not let nature deter your sowing, for then you will not reap.” The person who waits for the prudent moment, the judicious time, will not act because he waits too long. We should try to overcome this tendency. This is a revealing verse to us along both earthly and spiritual lines. It is better to be active and to be sowing and doing what we can than to sit down and do nothing. Of course if a person is 90 years old, he will not go door to door distributing tracts, so some prudence is involved, but people can be so cautious that they never get anything done.

**Comment:** There is a saying, “Do you want to be a spectator in the parade of life, or do you want to get off the curb and join it?”

Verse 4 shows an indecisive person—a person who is so prudent that he does nothing at all because the expeditious time never comes. And if the expeditious time does come, he is not prepared, so it passes him by.

**Eccles. 11:5** As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all.

“As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit [how the wind blows] ... even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all.” We do not know the way of the wind. In troublous times, it gives the appearance of being very fickle. Except for trade winds, man cannot chart the course of the wind too well. Trade winds are a little different because they are more or less continuous for days at a time, but with turbulent weather, the wind can shift back and forth. Even on a calmer day when we are sitting outdoors in a chair, for example, the wind can suddenly change direction. But God knows because He makes the winds His angels, and He “walketh upon the wings of the wind” as if they were a sidewalk (Psa. 104:3). Moreover, He gives direction when He wants to, so that what may appear to us as not bearing fruit may, through His providence in our life, have prompted us to do something. We do not know why we took that action, but the net result is that it is a blessing to somebody else, unbeknownst to us. Therefore, verse 5 is saying in effect, “Sow thy seed upon many waters.” This theme about the seed is continuous in verses 1-6.

“Nor [dost thou know] how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child.” Man has only recently become more aware of what genetics will do. Today the knowledge of genetics is more accurate than at any time in the past. For thousands of years, people knew that genetics and environment were factors, but now science has developed to such an extent that we can see there is an arrangement, and when we look into the molecular world, it is as complex and has as much variety and numerousness as the stars of heaven. The deeper man goes with the microscope, the greater the number of electrons, quarks, quanta, etc. We cannot see this universe except through a microscope, but if the microscope is turned around and used as a telescope to look at the heavens, there are billions of stars—more than man can see or comprehend. God has *complete* control in the maximum world as well as in the molecular world. All the molecules of the universe are at His command. He can do anything He wants at any time and in any place. “With God all things are possible” because He can control and overrule everything He has made if He so desires (Matt. 19:26). Everything is subservient to Him, for He is the Creator of all things. We thank God that we know a little bit about Him, His dear Son, and His purposes in the Divine Plan. What a wondrous miracle it is not only that there is a God but also that He is love (1 John 4:8) and that He is powerful, wise, and just! Indeed the Creator exists, and He is the manifestation of everything good to the *supreme* level. At any rate, genetics determine the growth of bones in the womb.

All these things are *habits*. Habits are in the atmosphere, in genetics, and in the environment. We cannot comprehend them all, but God, who is over all, can see the end, the result. Meanwhile, we are getting advice from Solomon on what to do.

**Eccles. 11:6** In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.

Verse 6, pertaining to sowing seed, could follow verse 1 right away, for they complement each other perfectly. (“Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days. In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.”) However,

the Lord saw fit to insert verses 2-5 in between verses 1 and 6. Thus verses 1-6 are one complementary whole, and we are thankful that God, through Solomon, put in the additional information so that we can grasp a little more of what is being said.

“In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether [the first or the last] shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.” This is the philosophy of Christians; namely, they should be optimistic as far as is possible in their nature. Especially for those who are born too much of an introvert, verse 6 helps to make them a little more constructive in their thinking.

**Comment:** These verses seem to say that we cannot spend our time looking for reasons and excuses not to do things we know we should be doing. We are to do them with our might and leave the results with the Lord.

**Eccles. 11:7 Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun:**

Verse 7 can be paraphrased: “Truly the light is sweet, for it is pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun.” With even the natural weather, if the sun is shining and the birds are singing, we start the day with a happy frame of mind and disposition. If the day is dark, rainy, and chilly, we begin the day with sort of a cloud. In other words, we are influenced by environment. Therefore, verse 7 pertains more to environment and not so much to genetics and what we inherited. *External* factors do influence us. When we came into the truth, didn’t we have the sunlight of favor on us? What a wonderful message we heard—that there is a God, that He has a plan, that we can serve Him and see His largesse of nature, and that He hopes to see people of their own free will choose the good so that they might inherit either everlasting life down here on the earth or spirit life in heaven! In any event, when we came into the truth, we were on fire wanting to spread the message of truth to everyone. We needed that initial enthusiasm, just as a child needs to start with a happy life. We do not want to burden a child with a man’s head—with all our troubles and thinking and analyses. Even in the midst of poverty, little children are oblivious to the problems of life as long as they have food. Of course as time goes on, more sobriety comes into people’s lives, as shown in verse 8.

**Eccles. 11:8 But if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity.**

“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.” This portion of verse 8 is telling us something that Solomon seems to have observed. He was saying that if we are of a happy, exuberant disposition, we should sober up, for we need to be balanced.

**Comment:** Otherwise, we would be less apt to observe the sadness, trials, and troubles in other people’s lives, and we would not be sympathetic.

**Reply:** The Apostle Paul gave advice that to the weak, he was weak; to the sad, he mourned; to the strong, he was strong; to the Jew, he was a Jew; and to the Gentile, he was a Gentile. Yet many brethren do exactly the opposite. If someone has a sad face, the comments are to the effect, “Cheer up. The Lord will take care of you.” We should be observant of the sad person who has real sorrow and trials in his life—be they mental, physical, or whatever. Some brethren who are cheerful by nature think those who do not respond with a cheerful greeting are not rejoicing like a true Christian. Their attitude is, “You should be happy,” but that is not always true. There is much to learn in life, and the present life is the time for developing character. The Lord teaches His people what they should do and what they should not do. He knows the trials that we need. As Paul said, “Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness

unto them which are exercised thereby” (Heb. 12:11).

Incidentally, I remember a man I met in Massachusetts many years ago. He was on the porch and was smiling and in good humor, and he had good teeth, even though he was no youngster. During the conversation, he remarked, “I’ve never had a pain in my life, not even a toothache.” We can be sure that before he passed off the scene, something happened.

In his observations, Solomon saw that all these lessons were meaningless to mankind. However, he was hoping that he could pass on the lessons of his own experience, with his lack and his need, to benefit future generations. He hoped they would learn what not to do from his experiences so that they would be better prepared in life. He spoke along natural lines, and this was proper, for nature teaches many profitable lessons. When we give his practical lessons and observations a spiritual application, we get a wonderful education.

**Eccles. 11:9 Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.**

Childhood and youth are vanity if they are pursued throughout adult life. An adult life where everything is superficial and happy with dancing, sports, etc., is an utter waste. But we need that happiness to start with, in early youth, to look back on. And so, when Christians are in doubt, wondering if they are pleasing the Lord, the advice given in the New Testament is to look back on the past leadings in our life when the Lord first called us into His marvelous truth. It is good to reflect on how He did indeed deal with us. Tracing what we can of the highlights and joys in our past life will help to ease the burden that we are temporarily bearing. Taking spiritual inventory can be constructive.

Solomon was saying, “Do not pursue youthful things in adult life. When I was a child, I thought and acted like a child, and that was fine. But when I became a man, that was another matter.” An adult pygmy is only three or four feet tall, and that is an abnormal situation, for he should be between five and six feet tall to be relatively normal in size. In addition, there are Christians who, spiritually speaking, remain pygmies throughout their life. They are dwarfs who do not develop. Thus Solomon is giving helpful advice.

**Comment:** Solomon was saying, “Follow your heart and do whatever you want, but just remember that you have to give an account to the Lord.” We should be sowing seed and doing with our might what our hands find to do—and not always looking for an excuse to be inactive and then following our heart and doing foolish things. Either way we all have to come before the Lord and give an account for what we have done.

**Reply:** There is a saying: “Sow a thought, and reap a deed. Sow a deed, and reap a habit. Sow a habit, and reap a character. Sow a character, and reap a destiny.” Chapter 11 pertains to *habit*, for we are the product of our thinking and habit of life. Therefore, if we sow good thoughts, deeds, and habits of generosity, kindness, etc., we will reap a character that is approved of the Lord, all things being equal. Earlier Solomon gave much advice along the other line, showing that there is a time for extremes—a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to love and a time to hate, a time to kill and a time to heal, etc. The *habit* of thought should be along helpful and constructive lines, but there is a time for righteous anger. “Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil” (Eph. 4:26,27).

**Eccles. 11:10 Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity.**

“Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and [but] put away evil from thy flesh: for

childhood and youth [dancing and the good-time mode] are vanity.” There are more sober things for the Christian to pursue. Solomon continued to give good, solid instruction.

**Comment:** For “sorrow,” the King James margin has “anger.”

**Reply:** Yes, the Hebrew word *kaas* can mean “anger,” but “sorrow” is also one of the meanings and is a better rendering here.

**Eccles. 12:1 Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them;**

Chapter 12 is like a summation, for it epitomizes in a substantive way the lessons that should be gleaned from the previous 11 chapters. Those chapters mention the vanity of human knowledge and experience and the need to look upward.

Verse 1 is saying several things. In regard to “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth,” what is one point Solomon was making?

**Comment:** Individuals should seek God early before they are too old.

**Reply:** There are several reasons for this advice. Sages have said something like the following: “The way the twig is bent, the branch will grow.” The Catholic Church used to say, “Give me a child before he is eight years old, and he will be a confirmed Catholic for life.” The point is that it is important to get started on the right track. The search for true knowledge should begin very early when one is not disposed to take the time for serious investigation. For those who are young and in the prime of life, health, and vigor, pursuits such as sports and pleasure are more attractive than thinking about the Creator. If a person does come to his senses, the change usually takes place in declining years when death is not too far off. To then start with the ABC’s of proper understanding is difficult, for a person has foolishly wasted most of his life.

There is an additional thought in verse 1. “Remember now thy Creator” implies that as created beings, we have an obligation to worship and seek the Creator and to know why He created us. The questions should be: From whence did I come, and where am I going? What shall I do? Where is the Creator? These are logical questions for created beings to ask their Maker. In other words, there should be a *serious search* for the Maker. An early chapter of the *First Volume* entitled “The Existence of a Supreme Intelligent Creator Established” shows that pondering this subject before reading the whole *Volume* impresses upon the reader the value of this book. The Bible gives evidence that if there is a Creator, He would want His subjects to know about Him, and we should be looking around for some word from Him.

The second half of verse 1 is saying, “Do not wait until you are about ready to enter the grave.” “Remember now thy Creator ... while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.”

**Comment:** Even those who consecrate in young or middle life need to take time for their consecration and not say, “I will wait until my family is raised [or until I retire, etc.]. Then I will have more time for the Lord.” If we are not faithful with the few minutes we have under any circumstance, we will not be faithful with a lot of time.

**Reply:** Yes. The old man has all kinds of reasons for what to do first and is at enmity with the new creature. This battle exists even before we consecrate.

**Eccles. 12:2 While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain:**

“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth ... While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain.” We believe verse 2 refers to the mental faculties of a person. When we are young, we enjoy the sunlight of favor, the excitement of lightning flashes, the soft and romantic moonlight, and the stars. Even the natural man can perceive that the heavens declare the existence of a Creator. In our younger years, we enjoy all of these things, but the question is, What do we do about that enjoyment? When we are young, we are very impressionable, and if the impressions we receive are fostered and nurtured, they will remain with us throughout our life and will tend to create in us a reverential attitude toward the Creator. The impressions even seem to urge us on to pursue and investigate the knowledge of who the Creator is. Very often these individuals, who are of a kindred spirit, or mind, are the ones the Lord answers by drawing them to Himself.

The “clouds” are the trouble after the rain, the emphasis being on the rain. Especially in our youth, we enjoy the freshness and the excitement of the rain with grass growing, water rushing in the brooks, etc.

These phenomena of nature pertain to the attitude of the mind with regard to the natural senses. We are told to remember the Creator while the sunlight, the moon, and the stars “be not darkened,” that is, before our brain is not as keen and observant as in our youth. The elderly have a different outlook—for example, winter is too cold, and summer is too hot. Therefore, in our pursuit of the knowledge of the Creator, whom we are obligated to serve, we should take advantage of the sun while it shines and the rain while it refreshes.

**Eccles. 12:3 In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened,**

Verse 3 gives the same perspective but with regard to another slant of examining ourselves. As to who originated the thinking that we will pursue for the next several verses, I do not know where to give the credit because so many are involved going all the way back to the sixteenth century, shortly after the Bible was made available to some of the Lord’s people. These early students of the Scriptures, all consecrated Christians, gave an interpretation of verses 3-5 that is proven by the context. The explanation is remarkable, and as we proceed, we will see a few words that are the clues.

“In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble.” The “house” is the human body, and the “keepers,” or helpers, of the human body are the hands and arms. For instance, with our hands and arms, we wash our body, eat food, lift heavy items, etc. These are the “keepers” (plural) that defend and nurse the body. This unusual interpretation is helpful in understanding chapter 12 because there is a solemnity here. After we get the picture, certain things will stand out in a more remarkable fashion.

“And the strong men shall bow themselves.” Who are the “strong men”? A person in his youth and early manhood is strong, and his legs uphold him. However, as he ages, he begins to stoop and to bow, and his legs and muscles get weaker. The person was formerly staunch, strong, and upright but in age, how he changes!

In one of our tours to Egypt, we investigated an underground tomb. We were allowed this wonderful privilege when the keeper of the Pyramids opened a subterranean passage for us. The tomb belonged to one of the individuals who were related to the three Pyramids. What we found in there were sculptured statues—about six of them in a row. They showed the human skeleton in a body starting with a baby and growing to manhood and finally to decrepitude. As old age neared, the body was shown bent over, then it was struggling, and finally it deceased.

This panorama was done with three-dimensional sculptured figures.

“And the grinders [the teeth] cease because they are few.” In old age, it is painful to chew because the teeth are weak and are few in number.

“Those that look out of the windows be darkened.” In other words, the eyes begin to dim and fail.

**Eccles. 12:4 And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of music shall be brought low;**

“And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low.” This statement reverts back to the teeth. The “doors” are the lips, which are paired and close the mouth. “The sound of the grinding [teeth] is low” because there are so few teeth. I remember the days when I could chew kernels of wheat, which were hard like stones, and I broke them with my teeth. The reward was a most delicious kind of gum that could be chewed for an hour or two without losing its flavor.

Now the thought changes to the person himself. “And he [the person] shall rise up at the voice of the bird.” A characteristic of old age is difficulty in sleeping soundly. When we are young, we go to bed and fall asleep and do not wake up until morning, but when we get older, the least sound can awaken us. Because we are more sensitive to sound, our sleep is not as restful. When younger people sleep, they are oblivious to what is around them, and they get the benefit of their rest, whereas older people sleep longer hours and feel less rested. Therefore, the “voice,” or chirping, of a sparrow or small bird is sufficient to disturb the sleep of an older person, for he is alerted to unexpected and strange, unfamiliar sounds.

“And all the daughters of music shall be brought low.” The “daughters” (plural) are the two vocal cords by which notes and language are distinguished. A person both sings and speaks with the “daughters,” the twin vocal cords. As a woman gets older, she cannot hit the high notes as she used to. She may have had a beautiful voice in the past, but changes take place in old age.

In summation, verses 3 and 4 describe various parts of the human body, whereas verse 2 pertains to the perception of the mind.

**Eccles. 12:5 Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets:**

The clause “Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high” refers to the high notes that a person can no longer sing in old age. “And fears shall be in the way”; that is, an old person is more sensitive to fear. Any unidentifiable sound causes the person to say, “What’s that?” The sound can be alarming or disturbing to the elderly, whereas those in their youth just go into a peaceful, deep sleep.

In other words, everything becomes different in the aging process. Solomon was continuing his theme: “Remember your Creator in the days of your youth when your senses of perception are keen and sensitive, and you are able to retain experiences in memory for later recall.” It is important to absorb the information when we are young, for information just brushed over cannot be recalled when we are old. Stated another way, the information and the experience need to be put into memory with a sufficient depth of consideration. Elsewhere, this consideration is likened to chewing the cud.



“And the almond tree shall flourish.” When an almond tree is fully mature, it is covered with white flowers. Accordingly, when a person ages, his hair is gray or white. Solomon was using highly symbolic language.

As a youth, I was familiar with some very intelligent Arabs who spoke in this philosophical way. Their way of thinking was much different than our thinking in the Western world. They delighted to speak in this vein to show off, but it was interesting and educational. Listening to people like that improves our own vocabulary. While the present generation can get all kinds of knowledge at the touch of a button on the computer, it is not the type of knowledge that is really a part of us. Knowledge that comes too easily goes away just as easily.

“And the grasshopper shall be a burden.” If we understand correctly, the “grasshopper” is the locust. Like other creatures, some of these insects leave their outer casing, so that we can actually see their hollow, light, transparent outer framework. The body is gone, and the remaining shell has no substance.

“And desire shall fail.” Desire failing means that the older person has aches, pains, and disease. He lives a discomforting existence and no longer has pleasures. These are the signs of going to the grave. “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth,” that is, before conditions deteriorate to this point in old age. If one is not diligent to some extent in earlier life, he does not have the comfort in old age of former knowledge. Also, when one gets to be quite old, his current memory is short, and he can forget things that happened five minutes ago. Therefore, he needs repetitive enunciation in order to remember the things he wants to do that day. In contrast, his memory of way, way back in his youth can be quite clear. Such are the experiences of old age.

In writing about the failings of old age, Solomon was recording his own experiences. The inherent implication is that he was conscious of the fact he had wasted some of the weightier things of life in his search for wisdom. He had misdirected that search and carried it too far. He was interested in studying human knowledge—all the facts—and he excelled in having an encyclopedic memory. Jesus commented about the tremendous wisdom of Solomon but said of himself, “A greater than Solomon is here” (Matt. 12:42). Jesus’ memory and experience were superior because he was the Logos before coming down here.

“Because man goeth to his long home.” A natural person hopes this “home,” the grave, will be a long distance down the road. When he is young, he thinks people are old at age 35. As he gets older, he keeps pushing the threshold further ahead, hoping he will have a long, fruitful, and pleasant life. In time he considers 90 to be the threshold. The story of history is that all go into the tomb. No matter how many people are born, the grave swallows them all in due time.

“And the mourners go about the streets.” The “mourners” are either the family members of the deceased or paid mourners.

Chapter 12 summarizes all the vanities enumerated in previous chapters. Solomon excelled in exploring these pursuits, or vanities, to a great depth and found them all to be empty.

**Eccles. 12:6 Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.**

**Eccles. 12:7 Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.**

The Bible scholars of more than a hundred years ago were very deep thinkers. In fact, the

depth of their pursuit in understanding the Scriptures puts us to shame. The new Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias have the advantage of including what others did before them, but the reasoning of the old-timers is another matter. Their reasoning is largely being lost today, but the written facts can be recalled.

In view of all that has been said thus far on verses 1-5, it is the multiplicity of harmonious references to the human body that convinces us the explanation is proper. With that introductory statement, we will now consider verses 6 and 7. Our interpretation of these verses is quite different from the standard interpretation, but we will begin our consideration with the usual explanation.

The “silver cord” is usually thought of as the spinal cord. It is true that the spinal cord has a whitish color that could be spoken of as “silver,” but the imagination kind of helps with that interpretation. Also, there is no question that the spinal cord is a very vital part of the body because all the messages of touch, pain, etc., are translated through the blood and the lymph glands. These two circulatory systems are encased in the backbone as nerves, and the brain does the interpreting as to how each part should react.

The “golden bowl” is usually explained as the cranium, which resembles an upside-down bowl. This likeness becomes more apparent when we see a completely bald head or a skull.

The “pitcher be[ing] broken at the fountain” is normally thought of as the heart. The blood either enters or exits the heart through the circulatory system. If the blood stops flowing, the person dies.

The “wheel [being] broken at the cistern” is more or less the same thing. It refers to when a person is cranking a wheel at the cistern to bring up water. If the connection with the water bucket breaks, then life ceases. That is the usual explanation.

In the past, we gave a long talk on verses 6 and 7. Based primarily on verse 7, we stated that when a person dies, the body remains wherever it is deposited at the time of decease but that the “spirit,” or the soul, is a separate entity. As set forth in the *Fifth Volume*, Bro. Russell thought that the body plus the breath equals the soul. However, the Scriptures plainly state that the “spirit,” the soul, the Hebrew *ruach*, goes back to God, who preserves a person’s integrity as a being. Whether that person is of the world or of the Church class, whether he is wicked or is trying to be faithful, his identity as a person is the soul.

The brain is not the soul, for the brain is actual substance that turns to worms and dust when a person goes into the grave. And the soul is not the breath, for when one expires with a death rattle, he exhales the breath into the air. Therefore, neither the body nor the breath is the soul. Rather, the soul is a separate entity.

In his endeavor to show that the soul is not immortal, Bro. Russell went to great lengths in explaining that the soul is indeed mortal, that it can die. To combat the thought of immortality of the soul, he pursued this other line of reasoning, but actually, the Bible gives us a very simple explanation.

The “silver cord” and the “golden bowl” pertain to the outcome of a Christian. The soul of a worldly person goes into the memory bank of God for later restoration down here with a different body. But the Christian is another matter. The “silver cord” is the Great Company class, and the “golden bowl” is those who will be partakers of the divine nature.

When Christians die, the soul goes to God, and the body turns to dust. Christians have spiritual hopes because they have made a commitment, a vow, to serve God or Jesus for the remainder

of their life. Therefore, their inheritance will be spiritual, either silver or gold.

Now comes a sad part, verse 8.

**Eccles. 12:8** **Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity.**

Solomon was saying, “Any person who is aware of my search for wisdom certainly knows that it was vain.” Moreover, he wanted the book to be titled “Ecclesiastes,” which meant “Preacher” in the early Greek and the late Latin. His original name, Solomon, signifies “Peacemaker,” and his reign was characterized by peace. Being now in a repentant mode, he was saying that he was sorry and that he was giving advice by preaching on the subject “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.” He was more or less saying, “I have been amiss in this matter, and I no longer deserve the term ‘Solomon, the wise and peaceable one.’” As the leader of the sages, he was the writer of this book, and he was purposely saying, “Learn from my experience. I am preaching to you this book, Ecclesiastes, the Preacher of righteousness. What is righteousness? It is not my former pursuit, which was vanity until I came to my senses.” Thus it was a repentant Solomon who recorded this book.

**Comment:** Righteousness is studying “to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).

**Reply:** Yes, and the sooner that consecration (or pursuit) is made, the better.

**Comment:** With the “silver cord” in the natural sense being the spinal cord of the nervous system, if that is loosed, a person becomes paralyzed, and old people sometimes lose the ability to move their limbs. The “golden bowl” being broken could be senility. With the “pitcher” being the heart, an old person can have heart problems. The broken “wheel” could refer to the kidneys and the bowels shutting down.

**Reply:** We purposely did not want to go into great detail at this time. We are rushing through this book so that we can go on to some other subjects, Lord willing.

Incidentally, in Hebrew, “Ecclesiastes” implies a group of sages who are assembled to hear the instructor. Others have interpreted this book as the product of sages, but that is not a correct thought. This book is the product of Solomon’s experience, and he wrote it. What usually happened back there is that when there was a discussion period on different subjects, the sages were brought together, and they listened to a primary teacher, who was “the preacher.” In principle, therefore, the preacher instructed the sages in their earlier days, just as Gamaliel instructed Paul as a young man (Acts 22:3). Thus Solomon himself was the Preacher, and he gave instruction to benefit the sages.

### **Review and Additional Thoughts on Verses 5-8**

Ecclesiastes 3:20,21 states the problem that was on Solomon’s mind. “All go unto one place [*sheol*]; all are of the dust [Gen. 2:7], and all turn to dust again [Gen. 3:19].” Now comes the question: “Who knoweth [that] the spirit of man ... goeth upward, and [that] the spirit of the beast ... goeth downward to the earth?” While the Book of Proverbs was written throughout Solomon’s life, Ecclesiastes was composed during the latter part of his life—perhaps during the last 20 years. This book is the burden of his thinking. In it Solomon summarized his experiences in life. If we understand correctly, he wrote the Song of Solomon (or Canticles) earlier.

Ecclesiastes 6:12 was written considerably later. Here Solomon stated in a pithy fashion, in just one verse, his quest for knowledge and the hereafter and the destiny of man. “For who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a

shadow? for who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?” This theme, which is much in harmony with what was read in the third chapter, seemed to engross Solomon’s attention, namely, the severity and the seriousness of life.

Ecclesiastes 8:8 reads, “There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that [or this] war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it.” Again this is the same theme, the irrevocability of death. Death is waiting as a yawning grave to cover man in the latter days of his life. But now a little different element was added. Solomon observed that the fact the wicked have enjoyed life at the expense of others and filled their days in the pursuit of happiness and good times really does not change the situation. He was beginning to bring a greater depth to his reasoning on the subject that had so engrossed his attention. As we read Ecclesiastes, this theme pops up its head time after time.

Ecclesiastes 8:12,13 states, “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: But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he [the wicked] prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God.” If we understand the matter correctly, this text shows a change—sort of an evolution—in Solomon’s own judgment and in his hope from what they were a little earlier.

Ecclesiastes 9:5 has, “For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is [soon] forgotten.” Solomon was embracing the thought that the days of men, even if they are prolonged, are really but a watch in the night. Then he added, “The dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward [that is, on a temporary basis].” Solomon did not believe at this juncture that there was no hope, no afterlife. That is not the thought. Rather, he was saying that in their current situation, the dead have no reward because they are lying in the tomb. Solomon was not speaking about eternity; he was not saying the dead would never have a reward.

Ecclesiastes 12:5 reads, “Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home [the grave], and the mourners go about the streets [after the person’s demise].”

Now we will consider two interesting verses again. Ecclesiastes 12:6,7 reads, “Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.” Because of the age we are living in, we can now begin to realize what this verse signifies. By using the simple illustration of a cassette recorder, we can see with greater clarity what the soul is.

The recorder is the human body. The electricity that powers the recorder is like the oxygen that is breathed into the body. The “silver cord,” the cassette tape that is in the recorder, basically contains the soul. Life starts with a sensitized tape. When a baby comes out of the womb, it is like the tape in a recorder, a human body. The baby breathes—it gets oxygen—and inside is a film that is sensitive to both receiving and emitting light and sound. But what does all this? It is the sensitized tape, which is like the silver cord. In this case, the silver cord is the life of the soul itself, which is different from the body. That tape is what God is concerned about.

To carry the illustration further, when we listen to others, our brain receives sounds through our ears and analyzes them, but the brain is not the soul. The brain is just an aid to convey information to the inner soul. How do we know this? When a person dies, the brain also dies as part of the body. The point is that the silver cord that is loosed from the body is the soul.

For the Christian, the “golden bowl” is the hope of immortality, but the life goes back to God. When anyone dies—a Christian or a worldly person—the “spirit,” the soul, goes up to the bank in heaven that stores in its memory all living beings, whoever they are and wherever they have been. Thus a permanent record of all living beings is kept in heaven, and that record is what will be restored in the resurrection—instantaneously for those of the Little Flock, shortly thereafter for the Great Company, and throughout the Kingdom for all mankind. We believe that the Little Flock will be rewarded with immortality as their wedding gift from the Heavenly Father.

“And the spirit [the soul, the silver cord] shall return unto God who gave it.” The silver cord is very precious, for it represents life. Stated another way, it is the hope of life on whatever plane that might be. Life is contained in the soul, and judgment is being made as to its destiny, no matter who that being is: from Old Testament times, the Gospel Age, or the Kingdom Age.

When the son of the widow of Zarephath died, Elijah resuscitated him to Adamic life by lying on his body three times and breathing into his lungs. But notice what the account says about the *soul*: “And he [Elijah] stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, I pray thee, let this child’s *soul* come into him again. And the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the *soul* of the child came into him again, and he revived” (1 Kings 17:21,22).

Therefore, what is the answer to Solomon’s quest? “And the spirit [the soul, the silver cord] shall return unto God who gave it.” As to how and the means by which he came to this understanding we do not know, for Ecclesiastes was written from a pragmatic standpoint. It isn’t as if Solomon had a vision or the Holy Spirit spoke mechanically through him. Rather, Ecclesiastes consists of common-sense reasoning from beginning to end.

Solomon had now grown. After having lived a long life, he finally got the answer to his question, the solution to his problem, but it was too late for him to change his way and go back and relive that life. That is why we read his advice in this last chapter: “Remember *now* thy Creator *in the days of thy youth*.” He was saying, “Do not wait like I did until you are an old man.” “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” (Eccles. 12:1). As one gets old, he has nothing but aches and pains, generally speaking. Very few are fortunate enough to die in their sleep when they pass away.

Thus Solomon was trying to make amends for his shortcomings and to pass on to posterity sound advice and common sense as to what man should do. In the days of one’s youth, he should seek to know God and not study, as he did, animals, flowers, etc. One should make an immediate and early quest for contact with his Creator. Solomon’s life is a rather sad commentary, but we thank God for many of his statements in this book. After having given this advice, he said that the destiny of one’s soul—no matter what plane he might be on—rests in God’s judgment. In the final analysis, God makes the determination of whether or not one gets life. The Lord Jesus enters into this situation, but that is not the subject matter at this time.

Ecclesiastes 12:8 reads, “Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity.” Solomon had just said in effect, “Why do we want to go back in the days of our youth and remember our Creator?” Now Solomon, the *Preacher*, answered, “Because life is just filled with vanity of vanities.” Even the title of this book is “Ecclesiastes; or, the Preacher.” He was passing on the advice of this book to all who would come after his demise. This record has been handed down through history for man’s benefit.

**Eccles. 12:9** And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people

**knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs.**

Here Solomon was not minimizing what he had done in his personal quest for knowledge. Rather, he was confessing that he had done his best during life, but he wished that he could live his life all over again with the knowledge he now had. At this point, the best he could do was to pass on a summation of this quest, which had seemed natural when he was young. A young person has high ideals and is relatively naive in his understanding, and how the twig is bent, the branch will grow.

Solomon said that he had “sought out, and set in order many proverbs.” This statement shows that the Book of Ecclesiastes was written after the Book of Proverbs and that both books are profitable. They consist of good advice that is not necessarily along spiritual lines but is along common-sense lines. By birth many of us do not possess common sense and, therefore, are in need of helpful advice along natural lines. We think that inherently Solomon hoped his advice would help others. Job stated specifically that he hoped his experience would be preserved in a book for posterity. By implication Solomon, too, wanted his advice preserved, and God honored this desire by including Ecclesiastes as part of Holy Writ.

**Eccles. 12:10 The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth.**

Solomon’s upright words of truth will benefit the “silver cord,” the soul, if they are properly considered and heeded (Eccles. 12:6).

**Eccles. 12:11 The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd.**

When a person plowed with an animal in Old Testament times, he used a goad, a stick with a sharp prong at the end, to push on the hindquarters of the animal to wake it up and move it along with the plow.

Also, the word “goad” reminds us of the Apostle Paul. On his journey to Damascus to persecute Christians, “suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven.” He fell to the earth and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” He replied, “Who art thou, Lord?” Then the Lord said, “I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks” (Acts 9:3-5). Although Paul was blinded from the bright light, Jesus partially restored his sight. Paul was very thankful for that experience because it helped him change his life in another direction. He had put to death many followers of Jesus and had even assisted by holding the coats of those who stoned Stephen to death (Acts 7:56–8:1). Not only was the partial restoration of sight sufficient for Paul to repent, but it was a constant reminder of his previous deeds in persecuting Christians. Years later he wrote to the Corinthian Church, “For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God” (1 Cor. 15:9). On the other hand, he also wrote, “For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles” (2 Cor. 11:5). Paul thanked God that the “goad,” the pricking of his conscience, remained with him and invigorated him to continue his pursuit in preaching the gospel to others to make amends for his lack in the past. In other words, Paul’s experience promoted his zeal and helped to make him extraordinary as he tried to compensate for what he had done previously.

The situation with the woman who washed Jesus’ feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair is similar (Luke 7:44-47). Jesus said the following to the Pharisee whose house he had been invited to: “Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to

kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.” In other words, greater love is the product of that which was done wrong in the past, but which now, while there is opportunity and life, one makes up for. Those who are forgiven the most have the potential for loving the most.

This principle seems to be a factor. For instance, Paul persecuted Christians before consecration but subsequently became the chief apostle. Peter denied the Master three times, yet he is second to Paul. Thus these two, who were forgiven the most, were uppermost when they repented and applied zeal to their consecrations. This was real reformation. Solomon, too, repented but late in his life—almost like a deathbed confession. Nevertheless, what he passed on to posterity through his confession is very valuable, and we thank God for the Book of Ecclesiastes.

“The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies.” This statement reminds us of a carpenter fashioning his works, whether they are furniture or something else. As the craftsman nails and assembles the works together with great care, he is concerned for their beauty and finish and hopes they will be lasting. Thus some permanence is involved. And so, Paul prayed on behalf of his ministry; for instance, he prayed that his letters would help others. His letters were like nails, going out to remind those he had formerly preached to of their needs, as well as their good points. He was not bashful or negligent to encourage them. Like a master craftsman and a shepherd, Paul pursued his ministry of helping new creatures in Christ to make their calling and election sure, but he always considered himself an apostle of Jesus Christ. He was sent out by Jesus, the Shepherd, as a workman, representative, and ambassador. But here Solomon likened the one Shepherd to the Creator, for no matter who we are—and whether we are natural or spiritual in our aspirations—we have one Shepherd, one Creator, to whom all reverence and honor are to be rendered.

**Eccles. 12:12 And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.**

“And further, by these [the goads and the nails], my son, be admonished.” The Apostle Paul, who was the wisest of the apostles, realized from his training at the feet of Gamaliel and from his training by the risen Lord Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit that he was a master craftsman. Paul was not ashamed to profess his apostleship. Although it was humbling on his part to do so, he had to call attention to the fact that he was an apostle, and not just an elder or another person giving good advice. He had to say that Jesus Christ had sent him to minister to us, and that we should heed his words as though they were from the Master himself.

Back in Old Testament times, Solomon did not know about the ministry of Christ, but he did recognize that God is the Shepherd. In the Old Testament, God is likened to the great Shepherd on occasion and the Bishop of our souls, and Jesus is so likened in similar fashion in the New Testament (1 Pet. 2:25). Therefore, although Solomon was speaking along natural lines, he was very much like Paul along spiritual lines, giving good, sound advice to the new creature.

Who is the “son”? Paul spoke of Timothy as his son (1 Tim. 1:2,18; 2 Tim. 1:2; 2:1). He also spoke as a mother to those whom he addressed, and he even likened himself to a mother giving birth (Gal. 4:19). In fact, he had the feeling of both a mother and a father in his custodianship of the truth (1 Thess. 2:7,11).

Many years ago there was a brother who did not understand the spiritual, invisible presence of Jesus. He was a very consecrated person, but he was looking forward to a sudden physical appearance of Christ to the Church at the end of the Gospel Age. His name was Bro.

Kirkwood, and I heard him give two talks. One was a splendid practical talk entitled “The Land of Milk and Honey,” and the other was “The Mother Love of God.” At first, the latter title seemed shocking, but when he finished that talk, I was very thankful to have heard it. Even though we have a spiritual hope and calling, both talks were very helpful to the new creature.

“Of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.” Solomon was speaking from the standpoint of his own experience. Reading was “a weariness of the flesh,” but verses 13 and 14 provide an interesting conclusion to the Book of Ecclesiastes.

**Q:** Didn't Solomon have an extensive library?

**A:** Yes, because he searched many subjects on all kinds of science. Job, who was also very knowledgeable on science, was a much nobler character. Evidence of his approval by God is the mention of his name in Ezekiel 14:14,20, “Though Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, as I live, saith the Lord GOD, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness.”

**Eccles. 12:13 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.**

What Old Testament Scripture does verse 13 remind us of? “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams” (1 Sam. 15:22). This obedience is prompted by a deep reverence for God and the keeping of His commandments. Of course the Jews could not keep the Law perfectly, but this advice on trying to please God and follow His commandments was very wholesome advice, even from a natural standpoint.

In his first epistle, the Apostle John repeatedly emphasized keeping God's commandments. “And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments” (1 John 2:3). “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment” (1 John 3:22,23). “And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also” (1 John 4:21). “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:2,3).

On the night that Jesus instituted the Memorial and was betrayed by Judas, he gave advice on the love of the brethren. I like to think of that thought as the *love and sanctity of the brotherhood*, and that term is not to be diminished in any manner just because sometimes there are false brethren, whom we are not to love. The sanctity of the office and the call of the new creature are not to be sullied in any fashion. The calling should be honored and respected throughout our entire Christian life, and this is the whole duty of man, spiritually speaking.

From the natural standpoint, Jesus stated the whole duty of man by summarizing the Ten Commandments as two commandments: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matt. 22:37-39). Such practical applications are helpful.

The Apostle Paul told us, “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain” (1 Cor. 9:24). We know there will be 144,000 prizes, or crowns, but Paul said we should run as if only *one* will get the prize. The point is to have the focus of attention to win and to do our all-out best to be a winner. He described that same focus a couple of verses later as, “I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one



that beateth the air” (1 Cor. 9:26). And he said, “This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13,14). Ever keeping in mind what awaits the faithful Christian will help us to be successful with some of the trials of life. Another helpful Scripture is 1 Timothy 1:5, “Now the end of the commandment is charity [love] out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.”

**Eccles. 12:14 For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.**

Solomon was saying, “Fear God, and keep his commandments” because “God shall bring every work into judgment.” In the New Testament, we are told, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10). It is always well to keep our purpose in life in mind, namely, to make our calling and election sure. God will bring every work into judgment, and that judgment will be revealed by what He says.

“God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.” There are secret things in all of our lives that we would not want exposed, but when we realize our “downsittings” and “uprisings,” we can make them stepping-stones in forward progress (Psa. 139:2). We hope for mercy in the divine censorship of our conduct when there are aberrations in our spiritual life.

“Whether it be good, or whether it be evil” means that we should wake up and realize there is a destiny, and our destiny will be determined by what we do now. Thus the stool is three-legged. Not only is it being zealous and witnessing, but also it is taking time to be holy.

The last verse of the hymn “All the Way My Saviour Leads Me” is especially beautiful.

All the way my Saviour leads me;  
 Oh, the fulness of his love!  
 Perfect rest to me is promised  
 In my Father’s house above;  
 When my spirit, clothed immortal,  
 Wings its flight to realms of day,  
 This my song through endless ages—  
 Jesus led me all the way.

The thought is, “When my *soul*, clothed immortal, wings its flight to realms of day.”