

THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES


This is a genuine ABC production  authored by *Bob Coffey* and may not be reproduced or transmitted in any manner for financial profit

TABLE OF CONTENTS

*The broken sinful estate of Man
Mr Worldly Wiseman has fun on offer
Eternity and the Law of Moses are related
Prayer can lead from prison to power
Give and be grateful
A lesson from the still-born baby and the humble believer
In brokenness one man can make all the difference
Prophecy changes everything
Divine sovereignty is so re-assuring
Training and Skill bring success
A life of faith and generosity is the way forward
Early relationship with God is fundamental*

THE CONCEPT OF VANITY

ECCLESIASTES 1: THE PREACHER ACKNOWLEDGES BROKENNESS AND THE SAD ESTATE OF MAN CONTINUES WITHOUT PUNCTUATION

1. THE FIRST UTTERLY MEANINGLESS THING-LIFE WORLDWIDE IS A CYCLE WITHOUT APPARENT PURPOSE

SOLOMON BEGINS AT THE END 1-4

The words (LXX has ρηματα translating the Hebrew yrbd which are at once "words" and "matters" to act upon. Kings deal in decrees which require action and the Preacher (*Septuagint term*) is of course King Solomon, son of David. His opening gambit is "vanity of vanities" (*Habel habelim*) *I like to think about it as "death of deaths" "darkest of mists". Solomon is dealing with a major mystery; like the serious preacher he has become in later life he is calling on his audience to look at the mystery of death itself-of their end. Everything is expiry he continues. It all ends in death. What is left (or) remains that belongs to a man or to the whole race in all his wearisome labour? (Hebrew l m[) Why will he labour under the burning sun? (or) which he will weary at under the sun? Solomon opens with a great subject and in a Socratic style asking pertinent questions of his audience. A generation journeys along and a is gathered to it fathers whilst the earth stands to minister (or) is constituted for a long age.*

THE PERPETUAL CYCLIC ORDER OF NATURAL LIFE 5-7

The sun rises and is gone; to the same place panting (or) hastening it continues to rise there. The *wind* (Hebrew j m[The "wind" mirrors the vital work of the "Spirit" which is at work alike in each generation ceaselessly moving the heart just as the Saviour rejoicing as a "strong man to run a race" is active to save in each new era- ceaselessly seeking) travels to the sunny south and turns back to the north. As it continues to turn *the wind* (Poel of bbs) turns and goes away and to its rounds or orbits the wind turns back. Solomon paints a picture of the sun in a race against time and of the wind as mysteriously moving in all directions. All *the rivers* continue to go to the sea and the sea has not been filled; to the place where the rivers came from there they return -to get going again.

NOTHING NEW vdj 8-11

*It is vital not to stumble over the hypothetical question, "Is there anything of which one can say, "Look! This is something new"? It is not just a Philosopher's routine as in Athens to quest for new answers to old problems. It is man's ancient search since the fall for a way back to God and for peace (Shalom). There are glimmerings of the gospel approach in this book but what is called for in the presentation of this Koheleth or preacher is a vital message-the New Testament message of Forgiveness through faith in Christ. Imputed righteousness and joy in the Holy Ghost not "fading joy"(Hebrew *j j m c* used for "pleasures" "gladness" "joy"-a common term of Solomon's) All 14 or more declarations of meaninglessness pinion on this one question which today can be answered with consummate ease but in Solomon's time the revelation was individual and by the gift of the Holy Spirit to those who sought the LORD*

Everything is exhausting; man is not able to put it into words or accomplish it all. The eye will not be satisfied by views and the ear will not be satisfied with listening. (a)That which has been is that which will be and that which has been customary (*This is the effect of the reflexive verb*) to do will be done. There is nothing entirely (*Hebrew *l k* meaning "all new"*) new under the sun. Does anything exist of which it is said, "This is new"? It was there continually for ages which were before it presented to our faces. (b)There is no memory or record of the first men of our race (*there is of course a scriptural record-but strictly there is no memory live in the present age apart from that*) and even those who are yet to come will not be remembered by those who will be after them. *The point Solomon is making is that event he very forefathers of the race are forgotten and it will be no different in future. Man lives for the Present.*

THE SECOND MEANINGLESS THING - AN ENDEAVOUR TO RELATE -STUDY SOLOMON'S TESTIMONY 12-14

I, the one who teaches (*or*) preaches, was made king over Israel in Jerusalem. I gave my heart to follow doggedly and to search out (*Hebrew *r w t**) with practical wisdom on the subject of all that was done (*earth's business*) under heaven. What hard labour God has given to the sons of Adam to be afflicted or **humbled** by it. *Here the preacher reaches a crucial point. One of God's great purposes is to create character-Christ-like character in mankind. So this first chapter brings us to the point where man is humbled by his affliction and cried out to God. He is scared by the apparent purposelessness at first but then the discovery of his own miserable state as a sinner brings him to acknowledge his need of God. I have looked prophetically at all the things done under the sun and "behold"(i.e. look yourself) the whole is expiry and hurts or breaks the Spirit. This is true in two senses. First man's acts grieve God's Spirit and second man's own deeds bring sorrow and brokenness to him.*

PROBLEMS THAT DEFY HUMAN SOLUTION 15

What is perverted in ruins or multiple iniquities cannot be set in order or composed. What is not there cannot be portioned out. *The only way to deal with what is needed is Abraham's method - prayer. Jesus made the crooked straight and God calls things that are not as if they were. The verdict of faith sees nothing as impossible to God but Solomon is stating another principle that where there is no conviction there is no hope and where a life has been irreparably marred by gross sin judgement awaits.* I spoke with my heart and said, "Behold I have performed greater things and I have gathered more practical/spiritual wisdom than all who were before me at Jerusalem and my heart has seen a great deal of practical spiritual wisdom and personal experience (of God)"

SOLOMON PROBES DEEPER INTO APPLIED WISDOM 17-18

And I gave my heart to knowledge of God and spiritual wisdom and knowledge "**laying open**" (such **knowledge of God**)(*Hebrew *l l h*-the same word is used for "piercing open" and "folly" or "prostitution"-which alternatives though chosen by the NIV do not accord with the LXX nor do they suit the context*) and "**turning of the mind**" (*to such knowledge*)(*Hebrew *l k c* "looking at" or "giving*

attention to") [The LXX has "parables" and "understanding" rendered by the words παραβολας and επισημην] and I became personally aware that this is **a bigger heap of brokenness** (Hebrew mmg -this "piling up" which he discovers ironically three times(a)in going deeper into the practice of faith 1.17 (b)in discovering the wise & the fool have the same end 2.15 and (c)in discovering that the wicked gets what the righteous deserve and the righteous what the wicked deserve) of spirit because great practical wisdom **increases sadness** a great deal and increased personal experience (of these things) brings **added pain** or mars the more. Solomon's highly commendable adventure into what is called "folly" but what is the lot of others in dire and grieving circumstances reveals that life has greater burdens than he ever understood before. He probed deeper into the application of wisdom and gained deeper experience of the sorrows of the human soul in so doing. All of this as the history of redemption develops leads to critical brokenness where the **most searching application of wisdom** and the **most profound interest in man's end** and the **most far-reaching acceptance of the guilt of the wicked** climaxed at Calvary and dealt with the intractable question of brokenness.

CHAPTER 2: EXPLORING PLEASURES 1-3

(2) THE THIRD MEANINGLESS THING 1

I spoke to my own heart, "Please come, I will keep proving (Hebrew JSn "pour it into a mould" for you to) to you by joy or cheer and I must be looking into the best". And behold **this also was expiring or unto death (meaningless)**.

HILARITY-LAUGHT AND THE WORLD LAUGHS WITH YOU! 2

To give yourself to laughter is foolish and what does it do for you to give yourself to gladness/loving pleasure/banquets?

THE PLEASURE OF WINE 3

I explored in my heart drawing my flesh out **by wine** (The LXX has "explores if my heart would excite my flesh" i.e. if the experience of imbibing could become regularly exciting; it would appear that it fell short of expectation) and I led (Hebrew ghnn) my heart **like a horse to the water** with skill or carefulness to take hold of it in the house of follies until I saw whether this was good for the heart of man (i.e. to supply mirth) that it should be **generally done** in view of the limited number of days of man's life. Solomon appears to have endeavoured to assess or calculate the beneficial and detrimental effect of wine over the life-span.

(A) FOURTH: MEANINGLESS PROJECTS BUT WITH A DESIRE TO RELATE 4-11 THE PLEASURE OF SEVERAL PARADISES 4-6

There were my great projects; I built houses for myself; I planted vineyards for myself. Among Solomon's projects were his palace in the Forest of Lebanon; his Halls of Justice; his own palace and the temple. He also made a place of worship for Chemosh and one for Molech on the mount of Olives-which things angered the LORD 1Kings 11.7-9 I made gardens and paradises (areas furnished with suitable animals) and planted all sorts of fruit trees in them. I constructed pools of water to water those copses of growing trees honeycombed around

THE PLEASURE OF WEALTH IN LIVESTOCK, GOLD AND SILVER & ANTIQUES 7-8a

I bought male and female slaves and there were servants who were sons of my house. I also had larger herds and flocks than all who lived well before my time in Jerusalem. I also collected together for myself silver and gold and treasured property of kings and governors. Solomon had a portfolio of wealth in cattle, coins and precious metal items and a large collection of rare objects of art and antique value

THE PLEASURE OF CHORAL SINGERS 8b

I created male and female choirs.

THE PLEASURE OF INTIMACY ON THE GRAND SCALE 8c

And the delights of the sons of Adam a wife of delightful breasts and women with beautiful bosoms (*Hebrew hdy*) *The LXX adds "a butler and female cupbearers instead of the Hebrew Harem.*

GREATNESS ACHIEVED 9-11

I added to my greatness beyond all who were in Jerusalem before my time and my wisdom lodged with me. *Solomon is telling us that "his Wisdom" is like a person who did not forsake him. He is not so much boasting of his wisdom but recognising that this is what he implored from God. The Lord in His grace stayed by Solomon through his adventures outside the parameters of accepted good practice for a theocratic monarch. There was a "ministry" of wisdom that supported Solomon and that was the ministry of the LORD Himself.* All that my eyes desired I did not withhold from them. I did not keep back any joyous pleasure (*Hebrew tjc*) from my heart; my heart rejoiced in all my productive labour and this was my portion in all my exhausting labour. *Solomon was ever looking for an end-product. He sought enjoyment of pools and paradises; of his women folk and singing choirs. The main product was that "joy" which he was ever seeking.* And I continued to decline like the westering sun in all the work I had done and the exhausting labour of my hand and behold the entirety was **meaningless, like friendship with the wind**; nothing remained under the sun. *The houses vineyards paradises songsters and harem were still there but as far as Solomon was concerned the sun was setting on these pleasures- and every new day's joy turned to nights of concern and regret.*

And I turned myself to the "demonstrating" wisdom and the folly (*Hebrew lwh meaning "lack of modesty" or boastfulness*) and fruitless plans (*Hebrew lks-used eight times here and also in Jeremiah 4.22 & 5.21-signifying "living independent of" God*) for what can a man do who succeeds me as king than what has already been done. *He thinks ahead and comes to the view that his successor will follow his footsteps. He is going to make clear to his successors that there is no other way than God's way. He wants his life to become a lesson in how to choose the best -in the (vain) hope that others will begin where he ends without walking the route that got him to where he began to live aright.*

(3) THE FIFTH MEANINGLESS THING SOLOMON'S VERDICT 13-16

I saw that wisdom outlasts or excels folly and fruitless living as light excels darkness. The wise man "has eyes in his head" but the fool walks in darkness. *The expression "have you no eyes in your head?" derives from this picturesque phrase of Solomon.* I knew that one happening overtakes them all. And I said the same happening that meets the fool will meet me and what will my wisdom gain for me? Since then it has lasted (*as a lasting impression*) and I promise you in my heart **this also is expiry vapour empty**. There is no remembrance for the wise much less the fool of former time for the age ahead. In the days to come all will be forgotten and is not the death of the wise close to the death of the fool?

(4) THE SIXTH MEANINGLESS THING 17-19 VERDICT ON TOIL!

I hated life or the living because the work that was done under the sun was evil or harsh (*Literally crushing for me*) for everything was expiry and crushing of the spirit. *Solomon sees life as "a mist" that appears for a little and is gone. His verdict is not different from that of James in the N.T. who takes up this phrase in James 4.14.* I hated all the labour in which I had toiled under the sun because I will make them rest with the man who succeeds me and who knows whether he will be wise or a man without purpose? He will have dominion over all the toilsome work I have executed with weariness and skill under the sun and **this is expiry (meaningless)** *Solomon means "This is death! This is what you can expect-others enter into your labours or the fruits of them but with no promise to develop or even appreciate them.*

SOLOMON MUSES ABOUT THE DEEP DESPAIR OF LIFE 20

I turned (to confer) with the man of my heart because of all the labour in which I had toiled under the sun.

Comment on "under the sun" I believe Solomon is coming to the view that his work needs to have an eternal and lasting dimension. The "man of his heart" is not just his conscience or inner thoughts but the LORD who has promised to guide and equip him by His word and Spirit

(5) THE SEVENTH MEANINGLESS THING IS THE CHIEF BROKENNESS 21

For it may be that a man's labour is with skill and experience and in his succession he gives it as an inheritance to a man who has not worked for it. ***This also is "expiry" and the chief brokenness or a great evil*** Death delivers into another's bosom, however undeserving many great gifts. One gets the distinct impression that Solomon has great fears for the incompetence of Rehoboam

(C) THE EIGHTH MEANINGLESS THING - AN ENDEAVOUR TO RELATE 22-24

What is there for Man in all his toil and shepherd concern (*Hebrew h[r]*) of his heart in which he labours under the sun? *The advent of this pastoral thought lifts the story into the major key.* There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink and look ahead to the good of his soul in his toil. *Solomon is not saying "eat drink and be merry" like the fool-He is saying that "when you put in toil let it forward matters of the soul".*

EIGHT DETAILS ON RELATIONSHIP TO GOD 24B

Also I have seen this prophetically that it is from the hand of God. For who can eat or be excited without him? *Solomon is stressing now that real joy and ardour of spirit is prompted by the part God plays in our lives* For **to** a man who is pleasing **to** His face he gives spiritual wisdom and personal experience of him and joy but **to** the sinner He gives the humbling labour (*Hebrew hn[]*) **to** increase **to** assemble **to** give **to** the pleaser who is **to** the face of God. This also is expiry and brokenness of spirit. *The Hebrew is fascinating .I have transliterated it into poor English to highlight the eight prepositions that show the wise first possessed the LORD and His gifts of wisdom and experience of God and the "sinner" possesses labour" and increase and treasures but all to disperse them to the God-pleaser who in the final analysis is the gainer. God provides abundantly for those He loves and who love Him! To this testimony of Solomon I must add my own.*

CHAPTER 3: THE PREACHER STATES THE MYSTERY ETERNITY & PLACE OF THE LAW

A TIME FOR EVERYTHING 1-8

There is an "appointed length of time" (*Hebrew nmz-a later word*) for everything and a moment or "now" or opportunity (*Hebrew t[-a more ancient term]*) for every "inclination towards" or "doing favour to" or "by love delighting in" under the sun. *Solomon is speaking of "duration" and of "right/fit / opportune"- which last term is characterised by the Greeks as a runner with wings on his feet and flowing strands of hair that one must be quick to grasp.*

There is a fit time to be born and there is a fit time to die

There is a suitable time to plant and a time suited to taking up by root what is planted

There is time to slay in one act and a time to heal bit by bit

There is a time to break down and a time to build

There is a time to weep and a time to laugh

There is a time to beat the breast in grief and a time skip and dance

There is a time to overthrow stones and a time to gather them in a heap

There is a time to embrace and a time to repel embrace

There is a time to search for the lost and a time to reckon as lost

There is a time to keep and a time to throw off or get rid of

There is a time rend or cut up and a time to sew together

There is a time to be silent and a time to speak

There is a time to love and a time to hate

There is a time for war and time for peace.

In all these instances there is a "right time to act" and in the contrary case there is equally a right and proper time to act in exactly the opposite manner. No.11 states that there is a time to cut up clothes or garments and a time to sew clothing together. When they are worn out clothes can either be discarded or used to make rugs or something else. New clothes are bought when the old garments are worn thin or torn.

WHAT GAIN IS DERIVED BY THE LABOURER? 9 -14

What profit does the worker gain from his wearying labour? I have seen the affliction God has given the sons of man to exercise themselves (*The Hebrew word חָמַל may mean "till the ground". Compare the derivative "furrow" Hebrew תָּמַל in it.* He has made everything beautiful in its proper time *one thinks of flowers and children's faces* and put the long age or eternity in their hearts. *Though the alternative translation "The world" is feasible the word normally respects the length of "a life-time" or "an era" of history or "the age to come."* besides or despite which man is not finding out or will not find out the creative work God made from the beginning (Hebrew וָרָא) to the uttermost part of heaven (Hebrew פְּסָס) I know by experience that there is nothing better for them than if they are happy in life **and do that which is ethically good in life.** Also (it is good) that every one "whoever he be" (*Hebrew prefix וְ frequently used by Solomon -who is thinking of mankind*) to eat and drink and see the good or the ethic of all his work -that is God's gift. I know by experience that all that God does will last for the duration (Hebrew מְלֵא) nothing is to be added to it and from it nothing is to be diminished (*The Hebrew רָג suggests "laying up for oneself" so that Solomon operated the principle of tenancy not of possession*) God creates so that man whoever and wherever he is should fear before His face. *The worship of the creator was intended for all men.*

DIVINE JUDGEMENT 15-20

What is now *whatever or wherever* it is has been (*there*) in the past and what belongs to the future has been before and God will continually seek or require at your hand or ask about that which is driven away or which is past. *The principles of the past work now and will always work and in principle God is judge of what our hands have done -whether it be good or little and also of the acts of persecution of man against man. Potentially within this statement there is room to understand that God will judge the righteous and the unrighteous. His bar of judgement may well be set in different eras ultimately but He is interested on an ongoing basis in our deeds and in our mistreatment of good persons.* And still I saw prophetically **under the sun** a place of judgement; wicked impiety was there, and a place of the righteousness and the wickedness was there. I said in my heart, "God will judge both the righteous and the impious wicked." for there is time for every favour and a time **for** or (of wrath **against**) every deed there. *This may be one and the same place and if it should be a foresight of Calvary there certainly was righteousness there and there was impiety too: there was the righteousness of God in our crucified Saviour and there was the impiety of men in the thieves and persecutors.*

DIVINE JUDGMENT COMPELS US TO CONSIDER OUR LATTER END 18

And I said in my heart, "God separates or examines or chooses or purifies or loves (Hebrew רָבָא) the sons of Adam on these words that **they may see ahead** that what happens to the dumb animal belong to them." *Men are given commandments and a basis of judgement which differentiates them from beasts so they can prepare for the future. It may not be entirely apposite to inveigh into these comments the words of Psalm 22 which read, "Rescue me from the mouth of the lions save me from the horns of the wild oxen" David describes a death of one encompassed as by beasts-and he follows those words with "I will declare your name to my brothers in the great congregation I will praise You" and further concludes, "all who go down to the dust will kneel before Him" At this stage we can say that Solomon's spiritual insight is not on a par with that of David. He must have been aware of the work of his father for it was publicly sung but he is not showing like confidence.* What happens to the sons of Adam happens to the animal and it is one and the same; as this man dies so this beast dies and the one spirit

belongs to all. There is no pre-eminence over the animal for the whole (*of creation*) is expiry. All go to the same place. All are from dust and return to dust.

PERTINENT QUESTIONS: 21-22

(1) *Who knows that or if the spirit of the sons of Adam goes up to a place above* and the spirit of the beast is the one that goes down to extend (*its life*) on earth. *This question begs for an answer. It is clear that Solomon has thought of heaven and the hope that man would join hi maker. He has thought that the animal in its death may still live on at an earthly level. His question means he has contemplated both ideas but ends up saying, "Who knows?"*

(2) And I saw prophetically that there is nothing better than that man should be cheerful in his work for this is his lot and ***who can bring him to see prophetically into the house of whatever will be after him?*** *Solomon is a prophet of the present day giving his advice on what men had best do "under the sun". He has not as of yet related the full implications of what he has already seen. On matters of "heaven when we die" and of the "continued life of animals on earth"(though this is a matter of lesser moment) he is equally agnostic*

CHAPTER 4 THE PREACHER SETS OUT THE EXAMPLE OF JOSEPH AND THE USE OF PRAYER AMID LIFE'S VISSISSITUDES

VIOLENCE WITHOUT COMFORT 1-2

And it was *my Sabbath* (Hebrew *yṭbv*) ***I looked with the prophetic eye*** at all the violence& injustice (Hebrew *qs[*) which was promoting itself (Hebrew *Niphal of hv[*) under the sun and look at the tears of the oppressed and they have no comfort and the hand of the oppressor was strong and there was no comfort for them. *The Hebrew word "comfort" sjm is a Piel participle with the significance "Nothing that consistently or permanently consoles or perhaps "no-one that sighs for and has compassion on them". Behind this caring thought lies the God of Sabbath who cared for mankind in providing rest. Solomon*

BETTER TO BE BORN IN A FUTURE ERA 3

I pronounced as happy (*resting*) the dead who had formerly died rather than the living who are living lives of pleasure. But better than both are those who are resting/abiding till now (Hebrew *hnh d[*) who have not seen the evil that is self-perpetuating under the sun. *Solomon sees a bright "tomorrow" with the aid of prophetic insight.*

(D)THE NINTH MEANINGLESS THING INVOLVES A DESIRE TO RELATE SUCCESS CREATES ENVY AND IS TRANSITORY 4

I saw all the toil and all the success (*LXX has "inspired work" and Gesenius also ahs "emolument of"*) of the work which was the envy of his neighbour; ***this also is a transitory breathe and seeking relationship with the wind (or Spirit)***

CURBING OF GREED 5-6

The great fool folds his arms and consumes his own flesh. Better is one full hand with rest than two handfuls with toil and pursuit the wind in search of pleasure. (*The term tṯ[r is a romantic word for "relationship with" or "intercourse with"[in this case "the wind" being the paramour]*)

(6)THE TENTH MEANINGLESS THING IS A DEEPLY DEPRESSING OR HUMBLING ONE THE CASE OF A SINGLE MAN WHO WAS WEALTHY 7-8

On my Sabbath ***I saw*** a mist (*something meaningless*) under the sun. *Solomon like David sees in the natural world the transitory mist and sees the transitory life set alongside it. There was a single wealthy man* and he had no one else either son or brother belonging to him. There was no end to his toil yet his eyes were not satisfied with his wealth. Why am I slaving and diminishing the good of my soul? This is ***a mist and grave depression***

The question is put by the NIV in the mouth of the man whose story is told but the LXX follows the Hebrew and does not amplify -although the NIV states the obvious. As ever Solomon is widening the issue to any such who will listen to his story or read it.

WORK AND COMPANIONSHIP 9-12

- (a) Two are better than one because there is a good profit in their work. For if the one falls his partner will lift him up and if peradventure the first lonely man falls there is no second to make sure he is lifted.
- (b) Also if two lie asleep on a bed there is warmth, but how can one keep warm? *Solomon is speaking of comfort and help and he recognises the benefit of co-operation and the partnership marriage in that connection*
- (c) And if one be overcome or oppressed the second may help and (*support*) over against him. A cord of three strands does not easily break of itself. *Solomon has three effective illustrations of the value of co-operation in work and in life. He is now proposing ways in which life can be enjoyed at its best.*

THE WILLINGNESS TO HEED WARNING 13-14

Better is a wise youth who receives the bounty of others than an aged king and a big fool who does not know to take heed of repeated warning. ***For from the house of prisoners he issued forth or proclaimed a decree to rule as king*** *This case is uncannily like that of Joseph whose story Solomon would have known well or he may even have been born poor into his rule. Solomon is well aware that kings can be stripped of wealth by overlords as was the case under the Babylonians and Assyrians in later days. Behind all wise rule and leadership is the willingness to be guided by good counsel and to take suitable action on first signs of danger.*

(E)THE ELEVENTH MEANINGLESS THING INVOLVES A DESIRE TO RELATE

A THINLY DISGUISED COMMENT ON ABSALOM! 15-16

I saw all who lived and went about their lives under the sun were with the youth who was second minister under the king. There was no end to all the people-to all who were before them but afterwards they were not cheered or nor did they express joy with him (*the successor*) for ***this also is mist and chasing after the wind (or Spirit)*** *This is almost certainly a comment on the rule of Absalom who came from being banned from Jerusalem to proclaiming himself king. It would appear that in later years Solomon expressed here the view that King David his father was beginning in later years to take unwise and indulgent decisions. The kingdom did need generational change but also wisdom. He must have felt that even at his enthronement for he sought wisdom specifically.*

SOLOMON ON WORSHIP 17

Guard your steps as one that goes to the house of God and ***draw near (to God)*** to listen and obey rather than to give the offering of fools for they have simply no conception (*Hebrew [dy "personal understanding"]*) that they have done wrong *Solomon did not believe in glib offerings -but rather in attention to the word of God and a proper understanding of one's own heart and its sinfulness. Where this was lacking no toll of sacrifice could bring benefit.*

CHAPTER 5 THE PREACHER ADVISES TO GIVE TO GOD'S WORK AND LIVE GRATEFULLY

BE CAREFUL NOT TO PROMISE BEYOND YOUR INTENT TO DELIVER 1-3

Do not haste through alarm (*Hebrew lhb*) to mouth words; do not haste (*Hebrew rhm as a man to pay the bridal price*) to issue a statement before God's face for God is in heaven and you are upon earth, on that account let your pronouncements be little (*The Hebrew word f[m often connects to "what is given" so we should consider this a statement in respect of offerings*). For as a dream comes when there are many concerns so the voice of a fool when there are great pronouncements.

THE SOLEMNITY OF VOWS 4-7

When you make a vow to God do not be late to complete it for He has no pleasure in fools. ***Complete that which you vowed.*** It is better not to make a vow than not to fulfil that which you have vowed over and over again. ***Do not give your mouth to sin or falling short on your declarations*** (Hebrew *myrcb*) Do not say to the messenger (of the temple) "It was an error" for why should God break into anger (Hebrew *pxq* "as a rock splintering") at your voice and destroy the work of your hands *There is a play on "binding one to his pledge" and "spoil or hurt or destroy" which phrases come from the same root word lbj. The thought is, if you short change God He will take what you promised to your cost.* For a lot of dreams and great words are vapours or mists; therefore fear God.

FRAUD AND TIERS OF AUTHORITY 8

If in the future you see the poor treated with violence or defrauded and justice and rights stripped away (Hebrew *lq* "like the skinning of a beast") do not wonder (Hebrew *hmt* which means "surprise" and comes from the root "to be dumb" or speechless *hmd*) at such measures or the extent of this on account of the preciousness (of people) for one majesty oversees another and there are others above them all.

(7) THE TWELFTH MEANINGLESS THING

STATE FUNDS AND ENTREPRENEURIAL INVESTORS

The yield of the field is the king's; the residue of profit of the land is for all. Whoever loves money will not be satisfied with money and whoever loves wealth or plenty (Hebrew *mmj*) will not store it up. This ***also is a morning mist.*** The principle in the latter case is that the love will lead to advancing wealth by trade and using what is possessed even to hazard. With the increase of what is good consumption also increases and what success does the owner have except seeing them with his eyes? The sleep of the serving man is sweetness itself whether he eats little or much and the satisfaction or Sabbath of the rich has no rest in it you would call sleep.

RICHES AND WEALTH ARE NOT CONVEYED TO ETERNITY

I have seen with the prophet's eye a grievous disease sore or calamity under the sun. Wealth guarded by its owner to his harm and his riches destroyed by some distress or affliction and when he has a son there is nothing in his hand-O what O what! As he who comes from his mother's womb is naked; he returns to go as he came and what and what -he can lift nothing from the toil to take it in his hand. *Solomon was not like the Pharaoh's a believer in depositing personal effects with the body in death. Man travels light to heaven and as Rev Glyn Morgan one of my predecessors in the New Cumnock ministry to a coal mining community said, "You may take your family"-that's all.* This is a painful evil; everyone departs as he comes and what is the residue that he has. He toils for the wind. *Accepting this central truth as relevant to work we should best be about the master's business toiling for the Holy Spirit and seeking the lost.* Also all his days he eats in darkness and with great irritation or grief, pain or sickness and anger.

THE RESULTANT REALISATION

Look carefully at what ***I saw with the prophet's eye.*** It is good to the end of excellence to eat and drink and to see good things in all his labour that man labours under the sun as he counts the days of life that God gives him for that is his portion. Also every man to whom God gives wealth and treasures he has permitted him or given him authority to eat from them or use them and to make interest on his lot and ***to rejoice in his toil, this is a gift of God.*** In which connection we as Christians must observe that the gift of God we most appreciate is Christ. He does not remember much of the days of his life for God exercises or humbles or makes him meek in the joy of his heart.

CHAPTER 6 THE PREACHER CITES THE LOT OF THE STILL-BORN AND THE HUMBLE BELIEVER

THE SUCCESSFUL TOIL TO NO AVAIL 1-6

I have seen another evil that exists (Hebrew *vay* meaning "is present" or is "a substantial factor") under the sun and it has increased among men. It was God who gave man the wealth possessions and honour he has so that he lacks nothing that he wishes (Hebrew *hina* "breathes after") for his soul but God does not give him mastery or dominion to devour them for a stranger tastes and enjoys them. This is a mist and an evil disease. *Solomon considered that this was a growing reality in his time. Men were growing rich but were not able to live long to enjoy their wealth.* A man may father one hundred offspring and have numerous wives and regardless of the number of days of his years his soul will not be satisfied from his success and also he has no burial. I say the "untimely still-born" or "fallen in battle" (Hebrew *lpm*) is better than he. *Solomon pronounces that some internecine tragedy affecting the family renders a man who is virtually a patriarch less happy than a child that never saw the light for it comes in a haze and it goes in darkness and its name is hidden in darkness. In earlier times such children might be named but no public ceremony of burial was accorded to them.* Though it did not see the sun or have any personal experience its rest is better than that of this man. Though he has "two goes" (Hebrew *mip* meaning "blows") at a thousand years he does not see success. Do not all go to the same place? *The thinking behind this philosophy is that however great his possessions or however many pleasures or however many years of life he enjoys the plutocrat arrives where the stillborn goes but with more toil because the child was born without pain.*

THE SPIRITUAL PURPOSE AND DESTINATION REMAINS UNCLEAR!

All the toil of man is for his palate but his soul is not filled. *Solomon is concerned not just with the properties of the soul but with the inner satisfaction that comes from higher and better things.* For what residual surplus has the wise or spiritually wise beyond the fool? ***What does the humble or poor possess who has personal experience to walk before God? or "the lives"?*** *The LXX has "to walk in the direction of life!" The first of these questions under the Christian ethos would be answered in the affirmative, "The spiritual man has eternal life!" The second question we would answer by saying, "The poor has assurance of divine support and the Christian hope of resurrection."*

(8) THE THIRTEENTH MEANINGLESS THING AND PAINFUL EVIL 9

The sight of the eyes is better than the ***wandering of the soul; this also is a dim soon disappearing mist and a desire for or embracing of the wind-meaningless and a painful evil*** *The LXX speaks of the "outward panorama" being better than the "inward conquest of the soul by passion or concern". For the inner heart of man to be overrun by a ruinous controlling passion in the secret life of heart and conscience is a disaster psychologically. It is preferable for a person to live in the real world and be fulfilled with realities not fantasies of the mind to the point of pathological ruin.*

MEN ARE NAMED MEN ARE KNOWN BUT THERE IS SUPERIOR POWER

Whatever has life has already been called by its name; what a man is becomes known; and no-one is able to strive with one stronger or more authoritative than he is.

THE MISSING PIECE -AWARENESS OF THE FUTURE!

There are many things that increase the mist or vanity *The LXX makes this a new section for who knows what is good for a man in life? The Hebrew for "life" has always a plural form as if man has a physical and also a spiritual dimension. This may help us understand verse 8 better* During the number of days of his mist of life and he accomplishes them as a shadow. Who can explain to a man what will be after

him under the sun? *The somewhat philosophic musings of Solomon, however acute in observation of life and prophetically incisive are seriously deficient in truths which God was pleased to reveal more fully in Christ Jesus. There are luminous sections in his discourse by which **the Spirit of God** shows that man has sufficient revelation to walk with God and know Him personally but there is also sufficient shadow to show that unless the Son of God had come and **the Spirit of God had further illumined** us much of the story of man and of the life we live would have continued to seem meaningless.*

CHAPTER 7 THE PREACHER HAS A ROMANS 7 EXPERIENCE BUT FINDS "ONE MAN" WHO IS EXCEPTIONAL

A GOOD NAME IS BETTER, THE DAY OF DEATH IS BETTER bwf ...f 1-2

The Hebrew text of Chapter seven begins with a large Tau (F) which the scholarly Paul would have well understood. He uses the idea in his writing on "death" in 1Corinthians 9...15 "It is better for me to die than to live". Also in Philippians 1.23 Paul writes, "To depart and be with Christ is "very far better" The LORD Himself uses it of "entering into life" Matthew 18 8-8 & Mark 9 43-47. cf Song 1.2 "Thy love is better than wine"

A good name is better than oil (Hebrew *mmv* "spiced or perfumed oil") and the day of death better than that of one's birth. It is better to go to the house of mourning (Hebrew *lba*) than the house of feasting (Hebrew *htv* "drinking or carousing") *The comparison is not between sorrow and joy or even between love and appreciation yielding tears and downcast head as opposed to giddiness and dissipation approaching debauchery at its worst and stupid inebriation and a false jocundity. The comparison is between being carried away by the spirit of aged wine and being carried upwards to God. In which mourning is the fulfilment or "carrying away" (Hebrew *pws* not *twm* "death") of all men and the living will take this to heart. The picture is of "sea weed" which is torn by turbulence at sea and is borne to the land and shore by the waves. So the soul is torn from its moorings at death and drawn to the eternal shoreline. Behind this expression lies a personal knowledge of the LORD and re-assurance of which we are given glimpses in this book with its **Romance of the Wind** (or attempt to embrace the wind) and better pictures in the **Romance of the Song** (where the LORD'S banner over his bride is love)*

(9) THE FOURTEENTH MEANINGLESS THING 3-6 THE SONG OF "THE LAUGHING FOOL"

Grief or irritation is better than laughter for spontaneity of countenance is good for the heart. *Solomon is saying that instead of laughing at something which is provocative one should show one's true feelings. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning and the heart of fools in the house of joy. People of affection and real loving and emotional attachment are quick to comfort and slow to seek their own pleasure. It is better to listen to the restraining rebuke of a wise man than to keep listening to the song of fools for that is as the voice of fast-growing thorns under a bubbling pot. This image depends on a similitude. The word for "thorns" and that for "bubbling pot" are the same word in Hebrew, viz.: *rjs* so that the speed with which a pot boils and the speed with which thorns grow are significant of trouble brewing. Timely rebuke will enable one to avoid such trouble. Of the same basic sort is the laughter of fools; **this is another meaningless thing or mist.***

KNOWING GOD PERSONALLY DOES WHAT NEITHER EXTORTION BRIBERY NOR WISDOM CAN DO 7-12

Extortion by fraud (Hebrew *qv[*) makes a man a **fool** (Hebrew *l h* a word related to "morning star" or "Lucifer" and also "praise") and a bribing gift destroys (Hebrew *dba* "ruins" related to Abaddon or the Abyss of destruction) the heart. Better the last of a matter than its beginnings; better longsuffering of spirit than pride of spirit. Do not be agitated in your spirit to provocation for the "taking of offence" or "anger" rests in the bosom of great fools. Do not say, "Why were the rich or fat former days (Hebrew *myyth-v*) better than these days now for it is not wise to ask about this. Wisdom with a heritage is good

and continues to benefit those who see the sun (*that is, those who "delight in their lives" for the Hebrew **har** has the meaning "see with delight"*) **Wisdom is a shelter and silver is a shelter but the eminence or residual excellence of personal acquaintance or experience of someone or something is that it keeps giving life or gives continual life to its possessor.**

THE WORK OF GOD

See what God has done; for who is able to "set in order" "compose" or "straighten" (*Hebrew **nqt***) what He has made crooked or "has been helping to curve"? (*Hebrew **twl***) When days are good live in the house of prosperity; when days are bad look at this bad with the good for God has made (both) On account of these matters a man who is now living will not find out **what is what** (*Hebrew **hmam***) after him. I have seen everything in the days of my breath. (*Hebrew **lbh** "mist" or "vapour"*) The righteous will perish in his righteousness and the violent or wicked will live long in his evil.

AVOID EXTREMES 13-17

Do not grow very righteous; do not become so wise there is residue for why should you astonish yourself. Do not be wicked (violent) big time and do not be a fool (as to frustrate counsel) for why should you die before your time? It is good that he should hold on to the one and yet that he should not let his hand rest on the other. *The believing man should cling to righteousness with both his hands but not allow his hand to rest from the other. The need to "embrace" righteousness is paralleled with the need to "let down the hand" like Moses in Exodus 17 when he slackened in respect of the war with Amalek. The translation seems to suggest that Solomon is recommending his readers to engage in evil and violence-but this is a travesty of the truth. Previously in v17 Solomon has said that "To be very wicked is tantamount to being a fool and throwing away your life!"* A man who fears God will **escape** all (dangers)

UNIVERSAL SINFULNESS OF MAN 19-21

Wisdom makes one man stronger than ten city rulers. Nevertheless there is not a righteous man on earth who does well and does not sin. *This verse is one of six references to Ecclesiastes in the NT and is quoted in Romans 3.10-12 by the Apostle Paul who says, "As it is written, "There is none righteous no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way; they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one."*

SOLOMON'S ROMANS 7 EXPERIENCE

Also do not give your heart to all the matters that people say lest you hear your own servant cursing you. But you also know in your heart there are many blows when you cursed people in the past. All this is I have continually put to the test in the past. **I said** (*Hebrew **rma** "I thought"*), "I will be wise"(or *spiritually wise*) and this was far from me or "thrust away from me" *Solomon finds himself in exactly the position of Paul in Romans: Paul expresses it thus, "What I want to do I do not but what I hate I do" [Romans 7.15] "When I want to do good evil is right there with me" [Romans 7.21] Paul's analysis is... "I find another law [the law of sin] waging war against the law of my mind". Solomon also sees the conflict-he feels the sadness-he knows that his spiritual desires are being corrupted by sinful thoughts which like seed appear and grow in the heart. Whatever the wealth (of wisdom) is it is far away and depth of depth. Who will or might discover it? Solomon is comparing wisdom to treasure to be mined and advising that it lies at great depth and requires search.*

SOLOMON'S BIG TURN-AROUND

I turned right round (or) I transferred my heart to personal experience of God and to investigate or explore (*Hebrew **rnt***) compelled to seek (*Hebrew infinitive imperative singular of **vqb** "to seek"*) wisdom. *The imperative here gives the lie to the vast change of tack. Solomon is going deeper into God*

*and not the world around. In God lie the depths and who but the Spirit of God can enable this exploration? and the plan (of God) (Hebrew bvj complex tapestry) and to know or expect the violence of a great fool (Hebrew lsk) and the fruitless frustrating folly (Hebrew lks) of proud celebration or Lucifer-like glory (the opposite of humble praise-although there is just a Hebrew # of difference between Hallel and Hodel [l|h...l|h]) Solomon certainly is now dealing in profundities. I find the woman who is hunting or lying in wait with traps more bitter than death; her heart devoted to destruction (Hebrew mrj "contracted" is the opposite of "consecration l|j); her arms bonds or a prison. The **good man who pleases God** will slip away from her but she will take **the sinner** for herself. Solomon is reflecting on such conduct as the book of Genesis approves in the life of Joseph. He is turning to scripture for the answers as the Spirit leads him.*

THE PREACHER CALLS FOR ATTENTION

"Looking" says the preacher (*Qoheleth*) "one (woman) to one (woman) to find the curious tapestry or plan- **I have found this** (man); the one whom my soul still sought to worship (*Hebrew vqb*) and I did not find **the only Adam of his kind** among a thousand and a woman among all these I did not find (to worship). **I see this (man) alone**; I have found, though God makes man upright ("straight" or doing what pleases God in his heart cf Psalm 7.11) yet they continually seek out great plans or schemes or systems of their own devising. This "One" is depicted most vividly in the Romance of the Song as "the One whom my soul loveth." The Romance of the Song calls this One "the fairest among ten thousand" (Song of Solomon 5.10) and the equivalence is too exact for us to miss the fact that we are dealing with a delightful spiritual truth right at the heart of this book of hazy mists which I call "The Romance of the Wind" (otherwise translated "chasing the wind")

Chapter 8 THE PREACHER COMMENDS PROPHETIC THINKING

SPIRITUALITY AND THE DIVINE PRESENCE 1-6

Who is like the spiritually wise who knows the interpretation (Hebrew rvp cf Daniel "explanation of dreams) of a matte? Wisdom lends radiance to the face of a man and changes the hard appearance of his face. *A spiritual person will automatically show his happy relationship to God on his face.* I must obey the mouth of the king and I must watch or guard the promise of the oath of God. Do not hasten yourself from His presence (when) you go (to Him) to stand for or work in an evil cause for he will do that entire which he pleases. In this situation the word of the king rules or is powerful; who can say to him, "What are you doing?" The one who keeps his command will not experience any evil and the wise heart knows the right time and privilege or the way justice works. For to all favour (Hebrew xpj) there is a time and a right way to administer it because the shepherd care of man is a great responsibility laid on him.

SPIRITUALITY AND THE SIN OF HIGH RELIGIOUS FIGURES 7-10

Because none knows what will happen according to the present, who can inform Him about it? No man rules as a magistrate over the Spirit (or wind) or has had power to restrain the Spirit and none has the power of a magistrate over what day he dies and no-one is sent from the army in war and terror or guilt or oppression will not let the one who is united to it slip away. All this I saw when I gave my heart to all the work which was productive under the sun. There is a time when man acts as a magistrate over man to do him evil. And in my station (as protecting shepherd) I saw wicked ones buried; and they came and went from the holy of holies and they were praised in the city where they did this (evil) This also is meaningless or vanity. *Solomon is now speaking of high religious officials who were anything but good guides to the flock.*

JUSTICE DELAYED 11- 13

When the edict (Hebrew mgtp) for an evil deed is not effected speedily upon that base the heart of the sons of men is filled (*with boldness*) to do evil. Although a sinner does a hundred crimes and his life is prolonged yet I know that it is better for those who fears God who are reverent before his face. And it will not be good for the wicked nor will their days lengthen as a shadow because they fail to fear God.

(10)THE FIFTEENTH MEANINGLESS THING 14-15

THE RIGHTEOUS SUFFER ALONG WITH THE WICKED

There is a meaningless or vain matter that is working away on earth; it is that righteous men are smitten by plague or inflicted with the calamity from the deeds of the wicked. (*It would seem as by divine design*) and the wicked benefit from the deeds of the righteous (*equally as if by divine design Hebrew [q] has the notion of "attached divine fiat"*). I say "**This is also meaningless**" *Quite unintentionally Solomon has touched an area linked to the atonement. It is indeed true that the sins of many wicked were heaped on the righteous Saviour in NT time and the wicked come to benefit by divine design. I continue to praise "joy" for there is nothing better for man under the sun than to eat and drink and be cheerful (Hebrew jmc "as a candle") and he may continue in that state in the house of his toil during the days of his life which God has given him under the sun*

THE CONUNDRUM OF SOLOMON ON GOD'S WORKS 16-17

As when I gave my heart to gain experience of spiritual wisdom and to see the humbling affliction constantly going on earth for his eyes are keeping watch day and night and **he is not a prophet or a seer!** But **I saw the whole work of God prophetically** because man is not able to fully find out the work which goes on of itself under heaven however much a man labours to search he cannot find out and if he says he is wise enough to know he is not able to arrive at full discovery. *The work Solomon speaks of is not the entire bulk of knowledge within the created order but the work of God in respect of man's salvation-for that is spiritually the work of God alone and the alone work of God when the worlds shall have passed away.*

Chapter 9 THE PREACHER IS RE-ASSURED BY "ELECTION"

THE EMERGENCE OF "ELECTION" IN THE PREACHER'S THEOLOGY 1-4

Then I gave all this to my heart and (*also gave*) the search (*into*) all this because the righteous and the wise and their service (*employment and divine service*) are in the hand of God. No man knows everything-what love and hatred lies ahead (*literally "is before their faces"*) Everyone is like everyone else-destiny(*Hebrew hrq "what we go to meet"*) is one for the righteous and wicked violent; for the good and separated ...(Literally "unalloyed" Hebrew rwhf) Here the LXX has "the bad" maintaining the balance of the expression. Since the book may have been finally compiled about 135BC and the LXX was compiled 285-130BC the LXX is an important guide to the text of Ecclesiastes in particular. Here it is of the least possible significance because "all mankind" includes both of these groups ...and the unclean; for those who offer sacrifice and those who do not offer. As it is with the good so with the sinner; as with him who swears so with him who fears to swear. This is the evil or "bad thing" about all that happens under the sun for the one destiny awaits all. And besides the hearts of the sons of Adam are full of evil and there is Lucifer-like folly in their hearts while they live and their "afterwards" is "unto the dead". For whoever will have been selected (*we would say "elected" since it refers to a past act of God*) among all **the living** has hope. *This is an almost surprising development in the book but it is clearly part and parcel of Solomon's teaching. In 2Timothy 1.12 Paul can say, "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed unto Him against that day". The destiny of man is very different for those whom the apostle describes as God's elect (Romans 8.33, Col3.12, 2Tim 2.10, Titus1.11-cf also Peter's usage in 1Peter 1.2) for the life of a dog is better than the lion that is dead.*

DEATH: A THOROUGH-GOING END OF PHYSICAL MENTAL & EMOTIONAL PROCESSES 5-6

For the living know that they will die and the dead know nothing (or) "know what was not" (or) "have personal experience of the emptiness" or "unreadiness" (*Hebrew nja may mean any of these things*) of what is what and they have no wages bribe or hire to receive. For even their memory leaves them or is forgotten by them (*The strict Hebrew Niphal suggests they have no memory. It is clear if Solomon is not speaking of evident memory loss running up to death since mytm in verse 5 contrasts "the (now) dead" with "the (now) living". It may be that the loose translation, "they are forgotten" is the best rendering.*

*The LXX drives us closer to their present state rendering it, "their memory is lost" and when the other "looses" that follow are added it would appear the intent is to declare all physical and mental faculties and emotions null and void) Also their former love and hatred and jealousy is perished and **they have no remaining lot or portion for the era ahead** in all that is going on under the sun. There are no necessary implications for Christians to whom later promises and commissions belong as to the manner of their involvement in the rule of Christ in another era*

LOOK YOUR BEST. ENJOY LIFE ARIGHT. SHEOL PROMISES NO ACTION 7-10

Go eat your bread in the house of joyful voices (*Hebrew j j m c*) and drink your wine in good heart for now or in continuance from former days God looks with favour on your work. At all times let your clothing be white. *This would seem to be a term for "clean living" and never be without (Hebrew r s j "to fail" to put on) oil on your head. Both expressions accord well with the spiritual good of the Christian for we should "walk in white" and "live under the anointing of God"* Enjoy the light of your transient (*Hebrew l b j often rendered "meaningless" but here clearly "transient" would be a better term for the "mist" or "vapour" of it passing days*) life which God has given you under the sun-all your transient days o f life for this is your lot in life(or) the house of lives (*I have often mused on the word "Life" which has a plural form like that of Elohim and Cherubim and registers the "life" fellowship for which man was designed)*and in your labour at which you toil under the sun. All that your hand finds to do, do it with all your strength for there is no work nor devising of plans nor intimacy and practical wisdom in Sheol -it is there where you are going.

THE UNEXPECTED FAILURES AND DOWNTURNS OF LIFE 11-12

I turned around and saw under the sun that the race is not won by the swift (light-bodied) polished performers and the war is not won by the strong warriors; nor does food come to the wise; nor silver to those who neither understand themselves; nor grace too the knowledgeable, for time and blows of circumstance are the destiny of all. For man does not know his time as fish get themselves caught in an evil net (*laid for them*) and as sparrows are imprisoned in a snare. As these the sons of Adam have been ensnared by times of evil that fall upon them unawares (*Hebrew m a t p*) as a series of blows

THE CLASSIC STORY OF THE POOR WISE MAN 13-18

And I saw this wisdom under the sun and it was magnificent (*The Hebrew h l d g is used of the majesty of God*) to me. There was once a small city and a few men in it and a great king came against it and surrounded it and built great siege forts against it. And there happened to be or arrived in it a poor (*Hebrew n k s meaning "a man of reduced circumstance" (or) a "man living on bounty" or "a kings steward"*) wise man and he delivered that city by his wisdom. And no man remembered that poor wise man. So I said, "Wisdom is better than the strength of the warrior but the wisdom of the man dependent on bounty was despised and none shows himself attentive to his words. The words of the wise (*given in*) quietness are more to be listened to than the shouts of a ruler among fools. Spiritual wisdom is better than weapons for contest but one sinner destroys much good. *This little epic tale defines the providence of Almighty God who places people where they are to achieve his ends. He is the God who disposes all things according to the counsel of his good and holy will. We must always bear this in mind.*

CHAPTER 10 -THE PREACHER LOOKS FOR TRAINING & SKILL

THE WIDE IMPACT OF ORDINARY FRUSTRATED PEOPLE 1-4

As dead flies render precious oil of perfume putrid and stinking so a little folly sours wisdom and glory. The heart of the wise inclines right; the heart of fools inclines to the left. As he is a fool he walks just like a fool in the road. There is poverty in his heart (or) he is deficient as to his life and affections and thoughts and actions and will and purpose or even intellect and says to all (*or conveys to all*) that he is fruitless or "frustrated" If the anger of the ruler rises against you do not leave your appointed place for a settled (*attitude*) heals great errors.

WISDOM DOES NOT PUT SQUARE PEGS IN ROUND HOLES 5-7

There is an evil I have seen under the sun (*i.e. universally present*) as the unintentional error that routinely arises from the before the face of the magistrate *.i.e. by favouritism* Fools are given many high positions and the rich stay in humble posts. I have seen servants on horses and princes walking as servants on the earth.

WISDOM DOES NOT SHIRK FROM DANGEROUS WORK BUT USES SKILL 8-11

The one who digs a pit will fall into it and he who breaks through a wall or fence will be bitten by a snake. Whoever breaks stones will injure him by them and whoever splits wood will endanger himself by them. If the iron axe is blunt and its faces are not sharpened abundant force steadily applied will prevail; skill (*or "practical wisdom"*) gives success. If the snake bites before it is charmed nothing remains of the man who muttered charms with his tongue.

WISDOM IS CAREFUL WITH WORDS 12-14

Words of a wise mouth are gracious but the lips of a fool destroy or swallow him. The opening words of his mouth are the folly that is frustrated purpose (*Hebrew lks*) and what come after of his mouth is Lucifer like evil. The fool multiplies words (*of promise*) Nobody knows what will be and who can explain what will come after him? *In other words the promises of the fool about the future are fatuous.*

WISDOM GAINS EXPERIENCE AND APPRECIATES EXPERIENCE AND INTEGRITY IN RULERS 15-17

The toil of fools is continually wearisome because he does not know to go to the city *an easier life beckons and more money can be made in the city*. Woe to you O land whose king is a servant (*literally "one who drives out cattle"*) and your princes feasted in the morning Blessed O land whose king is the son of nobles (*from the Hebraic-Arabic root rrj meaning "free-born" or "bright and pure"*) whose princes eat at the set time for their nourishment and not drunkenness.

INDUSTRY PROPER ENJOYMENT OF LIFE AND CAREFUL SPEECH ARE COMMENDED AS EXAMPLES OF WISDOM 18-20

In the house of the lazy the beams sag or decay (*Hebrew Jkm*) In the house where the hands are slack the roof leaks or "weeps" (*Hebrew pld*) A banquet is made for laughter and wine adds radiance to life and money will answer all purposes. Even in your understanding (*of the real acts*) do not criticise the king and in the inner chamber where you live do not curse the rich for a bird of the air may carry your speech on his journey and a man with wings on his cloak inform about the matter.

CHAPTER 11 THE PREACHER CALLS FOR A LIFE OF FAITH

LIVE GENEROUSLY; LIVE BY FAITH 1-4

Send your bread or food on the face of the waters *by ship* for in great days you will find it *or find it sufficient*. *This is not the philosophy of a child at a duck pond but the advice of a concerned merchant-king about sending corn abroad to feed others. The thought is generous. When there are great years of bumper harvest feed other nations and peoples-you will not lose by such generosity. Joseph in Egypt stored bread for the world and reconciled his family in the doing.* Give a distribution or portion (of your surplus) to seven others and stretch to eight *if you can* for you do not know what evil or famine may come on the land. If clouds are full they will empty heavy rain on the earth. If the tree is planted to the sunny south or to the dark north there it will lie. *The importance of planting location is absolute for the botanist. If we are planted into Christ we may by watering and attention of the Spirit of God bring forth fruit. This has application to death so that the life cut off may be cut off amid good or bad circumstances -amid joy or in the midst of sorrow. Equally it may not ingeniously be applied to the*

hereafter and to permanent light or permanent darkness of abode. With this latter application there would be some hint of the afterlife. The one who watches the wind will not sow and he who looks in the clouds will not reap. Wisdom acts in faith and runs counter goes about its duties in season.

OPPORTUNITY SHOULD BE USED WITH DEPENDENCE ON GOD 5-6

As none knows what is the path of the wind (or) Spirit. *In September of 2004 hurricane Ivan veered inland to Alabama as 2 million people fled inland to escape its previously plotted path.* and as you do not know how the bones in the womb (come to) fullness or completion so you do not know or have experience of the work of God the maker of all things Sow your seed in the morning and in the evening do not rest your arm for you do not know which will prosper-whether this (morning sowing) or that (evening sowing) and whether both will be alike good.

(11)THE SIXTEENTH MEANINGLESS THING 7-8

GREAT DARKNESS /BLINDNESS

Light is sweet. *It may be enjoyed as something sweet that is sucked* and it is good for the eyes to see the sun. So whatever the (number of) years a man have let him enjoy them all. But he will or should remember the years of darkness for they will be numerous..***ALL THAT IS COMING IS MEANINGLESS (here below)*** (or) a mist *the effect being that it is "unseen" it is "unknown".* *Everywhere in this old book we have James 4.14 in our sights, "What is your life? It is even as a vapour or mist which appears for a little and is gone!"*

YOUTH MUST REMEMBER JUDGEMENT AND THE UNSEEN YEARS AHEAD 9-10

Be happy or shine young man in your youth and let your heart make you cheerful or happy in the days of your best or choice years (or) of your begetting. *Enjoy them as a child enjoys "sucking" candy;* and be as one who wanders like a stream or has intercourse in the ways of your own heart and according to the sight of your eyes but know that on account of all these things God will bring you into judgement.(or) be aware that over all these is God *The Hebrew has a connecting hyphen in this set of words thus, "OVER-ALL-GOD" as a stout reminder that God is over all and sees all and judges all and God will bring you into judgement.*

REPENTANCE

So remove as a degenerate branch irritation and moroseness or feeling hurt from your heart and move from the evil of the flesh for families (generating children) and the early dawns of light are a mist. *There must be a will to deal sternly with the evils of the flesh and there must be change and willingness to change-of Luke 15 and Acts 2*
A less effective translation would run So be devoid of or be without displeasure (or) irritation (or) grief in your heart and pass over or overwhelm or go beyond the ill or famine of the body for the youthful years and the cravings or quests (that go with it) or it's dawns is vain or a mist *-what is to come is yet unseen*

CHAPTER 12 THE PREACHER IMPLORES EARLY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND TRUSTS TO THE SPIRIT OF GOD TO CLEAR THE MIST FROM UNDER THE SUN

RELATE TO YOUR CREATOR EARLY WHEN THE LIGHT OF REVELATION IS CLEAR 1-3A

Remember He who created you from nothing in the days of your youth (*Hebrew $\text{r}\text{w}\text{j}\text{b}$ meaning "beauty of form" and "fitness for war"*) when the evil days are not come as yet and affected or plagued-the years when you say, "I have no pleasure in them". Until then the sun and the light and the moon and the stars won't grow dark nor will the dense clouds return after the heavy rain. *Later says bring less clarity of vision and the cold weather is severe and produces pains* in the day when the keepers of the house

shake or tremble. *The body shakes as muscles and nerves cause trembling and the strong men bow with pain. The limbs and joints cease up.*

SANS TEETH-THEY WEAR OUT, EYESIGHT DIMS, THE VOICE FADES 3B-4

And the grinders are hindered (*Hebrew lfb "cease form labour"*) because they are few. *This is a clear reference to the teeth which are prevented doing their work effectively because few are left in the mouth.* And those looking through the windows are dull. *Eyesight notices serious deterioration with age.* And the doors are closed in the street *Age demands a quieter life and more recluse as age ushers in impotence (cf Hebrew "The doors of the thighs")* The voice of grinding is low *Which may be a comment on chewing or a comment on the loss of sexual appetite.* They rise up at the sound of the sparrow. *Early rising and ease of disturbance characterise the later years of life.* All the daughters of song are brought low *the voice pales and the high notes become impossible.*

HEIGHTS ARE OUT OF RANGE, HAIR IS WHITE, MOVEMENT SLOW 5A

Also they fear heights and there are terrors in the road *Climbing is out of the question and walking itself is fraught with danger of tossing and a heavy fall.* The almond tree is despised or insulted *the hair is white as almond tree blossom and the bald head comes in for humour and smirks.* The grasshopper has become a heavy burden *even moving the slender frame presents difficulty.*

DESIRE FAILS, DEATH ENSUES-A VIVID DESCRIPTION 5B-7

And the desire or need (*Hebrew myba*) for joining together also *sexual desire fails* for man goes to the home of his age-long stay. *The eternal rest of man is to be understood* Mourners go about in the streets. *Funeral mourning brings life to its dramatic end in society.* Until when(a) **the silver cord** or measuring line is not bound (i.e. loosed) and (b) **the golden bowl** (*Hebrew hlg "fountain" or "reservoir"*) is broken (*Hebrew xxr*) and (c) and the **drawing vessel** shatters itself (*Hebrew rbv*) to pieces at the gushing wellspring (*Hebrew [bn]*) or (d) **the wheel** breaks itself down (*Heb xxr*) at the cistern (*Hebrew rwb*) And the dust returns to the earth as it was and the spirit returns to God who gave it. *A very precise almost clinical description of what occurs at death is afforded here. The spinal cord carries no more messages; the brain cortex ceases action; the heart pumps no more blood and blood circulation comes to an end. As in the famous pronouncement of Christian ministers, We commit the body of our beloved here Departed to the ground, Earth to earth, Ashes to ashes, Dust to dust" God has separated body from spirit and the committal testifies to that death gently in phrase and solemnly in code. Further the committal goes on, "in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our LORD Jesus Christ who shall change our lowly bodies and make them like unto His glorious body according to the mighty power by which He is able to subdue all things to Himself" Thus Christians give witness to our faith not alone in the residence of the Spirit with God but in the reconstitution of the body in its glorious form.*

(12) SEVENTEENTH UTTERLY MEANINGLESS THING

"THE DEATH OF MAN"

THE PHRASE "MEANINGLESS MEANINGLESS" 8

"Meaningless of meaningless things" says the preacher, the whole is meaningless *Solomon does not use the Hebrew word habal (destruction) but the word hebel (mist or vapour cf James 4.14) in this often repeated phrase. The LXX has "trifling" ματαίος and "a choice or preferring of the wind" προαίρεσις. I prefer the word "mist" for the Hebrew hebel. The LXX has πνεύμα "strong or gusting wind" and not καταιγίς which means "gentle breeze". A faithful rendering might then be "This is impossible to see through-utterly impossible and a choice or preference of the agitating wind"* Solomon's phrase, as the use by James shows, certainly owes something to the weather and it would seem he is not utterly frustrated but re-emphasising the one hope which he himself must have espoused, *that the wind will blow the mist away-that God's Spirit will clear and illumine the mystery.*

THE END OF THE MATTER 9-14

The preacher on the one hand was exceedingly wise still teaching the people personal knowledge (of God) and on the other pondering or weighing up and investigating or searching he straightened out or restored (*Hebrew* *ṣṭt*) many proverbs. The teacher searched to find out words that would please and wrote straight words of truth. The words of the wise are as ox-goads (*Hebrew* *ṣbrd* -sharp prods to the ox to hasten a sluggish animal while ploughing the land) as nails (*Hebrew* *ṣmsm* "tent pegs") given by masters of assemblies or gatherings from a single shepherd. *These pegs were to secure the homes of the whole people and these principles were like tent pegs distributed in tribal Israel from one leader for the home welfare and security of all the people.* Be cautious or dissuaded my son of any over and above them. To the making of books there is no end and ***much study of letters to make books (Hebrew* *ghl*) *is fatigue to the body.*** *With this principle I am in utter compliance but the converse is, "the entrance of Thy word gives light" and "Man shall not live by bread alone" and "how (otherwise) shall a man learn to cleanse his way?"* It is the end of the matter (*Hebrew* *ṣ* has an initial enlarged Samech which tells us that the concluding statement was a "great support(*S*) perhaps even to the writer and certainly to the early rabbis"); all is heard (or) let us listen to (it) all; **fear God and keep His commands** for this is ***the complete man*** we have here the call to maintain a reverent or godly relationship with the LORD and an obedience of heart. *This was exemplified by the Saviour who alone could live to this directive and by his perfect life unravel the whole "dark mist" of life by his atoning death and bring hope and holiness by His Holy Spirit. Jesus said, The first commandment is "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart with all your mind and with all your strength" and the second is like unto it, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself"* For God will bring every act into judgement and every accompanying matter that conceals itself, whether good or bad. *God will judge actions and their whole environment with utmost fairness and thoroughness.*

The End

Bob Coffey
A Bible Companion