

A STUDY ON

The Book of Ecclesiastes



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NOTES

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The NIV has been used as the primary English reference in this study since NAS is not now available. This is unfortunate since the NAS is a better translation for detailed Bible study.

While many references have been used in the preparation of this study, the primary reference is the Bible. To be more specific, this study is based primarily upon the Nestle-Aland *NOVUM TESTAMENTUM Graece* (1962 Edition). The Old Testament references are based primarily on the *Biblia Hebraica, Seventh Edition (1951)*, edited by *Rudolf Kittle and others*. The cross references between the Old and New Testaments is based on the *Septuagint* as published by Samuel Baxter and Sons Limited.

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CHAPTER ONE

The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem:

Ecclesiastes 01:01

Verse 1 introduces us to the author of this book. We have already commented on the name of the book. The Hebrew word means a collector (of sentences) and hence a preacher (KJV) or a teacher (as here). The fact that the book opens in this manner is an indication that its contents are meant to teach us something. That is what a teacher sets out to do. For this reason we must seek to learn the lessons which are contained in this book.

The author further identifies himself as a son of David and as a king in Jerusalem. David had a lot of sons, but only one was king in Jerusalem. This was, of course, Solomon. So this, like Proverbs, is a book by Solomon.

"Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless."

Ecclesiastes 01:02

The book begins with a word that is the theme of the book. In the KJV it is vanity. Here it is meaningless. The word is used five times in this one verse. It is used over 60 times in the Old Testament, half of these being in this book. The Hebrew word is **hehvel** (הבל) and its root meaning is vapor or breath. It comes to refer to that which is of fleeting value since it disappears like a vapor. In fact, James expressed it quite nicely.

Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

James 04:14

Some have used the word emptiness to translate the word and this is quite fitting. We shall continue with the word in the NIV, meaningless. In the Greek text the word is **mataiotes** (ματαιότης) which is found in the following passages.

For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope

Romans 08:20

So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking.

Ephesians 04:17

For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error.

2 Peter 02:18

As noted above, the word is found five times in verse two. It needs to be translated only three times. The Hebrew language has a somewhat peculiar characteristic in that it has few words to be used as superlatives. If a Hebrew speaking person wanted to express a condition very strongly, he would double the word (hence "vanity of vanities"). The word should not really be translated twice into English.

One might properly translate verse 2 as "*Utterly meaningless!*" says the Teacher. "*Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.*" Now this is a very strong sentiment to begin this book on. It is also a very negative sentiment. Is all meaningless? Is Solomon really correct? This is one of the reasons we will be studying this book.

What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun?

Ecclesiastes 01:03

In verse 3 we are introduced to another sentiment that is expressed throughout this book. Note the expression under the sun. It is used 27 times in this book, but nowhere else. Since this expression is used so frequently, we need to know what it means. Since the term is not used elsewhere in the Bible, it is a little difficult to extract the exact meaning.

Looking at the many O.T. references to the sun, many of them refer to the setting of the sun. There is a job to be done and it must be accomplished before the sun sets. They did not have Swing and Graveyard Shifts in Bible times.

When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up--one on one side, one on the other--so that his hands remained steady till sunset.

Exodus 17:12

If you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, return it to him by sunset,

Exodus 22:26

He hung the king of Ai on a tree and left him there until evening. At sunset, Joshua ordered them to take his body from the tree and throw it down at the entrance of the city gate. And they raised a large pile of rocks over it, which remains to this day.

Joshua 08:29

Then, of course, there was that miraculous day . . .

On the day the LORD gave the Amorites over to Israel, Joshua said to the LORD in the presence of Israel: "O sun, stand still over Gibeon, O moon, over the Valley of Aijalon." So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, till the nation avenged itself on its enemies, as it is written in the Book of Jashar. The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day. There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the LORD listened to a man. Surely the LORD was fighting for Israel!

Joshua 01:12-14

As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is

coming, when no one can work.

John 09:04

Under the sun, then is a reference to the work that we have here on earth. It speaks of the day-by-day chores one must do. The significance is that what we will be reading is the impression that Solomon has as he views life from an earthly perspective. It is expressed in somewhat different form by Paul.

For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

1 Corinthians 15:16-19

As we begin this study, we begin by looking at man's position apart from Jesus Christ. This is the source, then, of the question, *What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun?* It is a rhetorical question. It's expected answer is "Nothing!"

The teacher asks what does a man gain. The Hebrew word for gain here is **yithrohn** (יִירוֹן) and is used in this book 12 times, an nowhere else. The Greek word is **periseia** (περισσεια) and is found in several places in the N.T.

For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

Romans 05:17

Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.

2 Corinthians 08:02

Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

James 01:21

The meaning of the Greek word is quite clear in these verses. It has to do with obtaining that which is over and above what one would normally receive. The root of the Hebrew word refers to an appendage such as the fat on an animal. Again, the idea is excess over the norm.

The Teacher is not saying that nothing is gained by hard work. The question is, why work hard if you gain no more than those who do not. It is a fatalistic attitude that says, "It doesn't really matter what I do, it will all come out the same anyway."

Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises. The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course. All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again.

Ecclesiastes 01:04-07

Aside from the philosophical content of this passage, there is a very startling physical concept. He points out three important physical cycles. These are:

- (1) The revolving of the earth with respect to the sun.
- (2) The circular nature of wind patterns
- (3) The hydrological cycle.

The first is not startling. Man has known that the sun rises and sets since Adam. It has only been in recent years that the global wind patterns have been observed. It has only been in recent years that there has been general knowledge of how the sea evaporates, forms clouds, rains in the mountains, runs down the rivers and returns to the sea. Here Solomon points to all three of these cycles.

Philosophically, he is saying, "What's the use, we are just going around in circles?" He says that generations come and generations go. We tend to be very limited in our perspective of time. We forget that our lifespan is short compared with the age of the earth. We think of the earth as here and now. But Solomon, very wisely (in human wisdom) notes that people come and go and yet the earth continues on in its basic cycles.

We have been concerned about war, poverty, evil, and the like. Man through the centuries has been concerned about the same things. I can help but wonder, however, if Solomon had been alive today if he would be so quick to say that nothing changes!

All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing. What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one can say, "Look! This is something new"? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time. There is no remembrance of men of old, and even those who are yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow.

Ecclesiastes 01:08-11

The Teacher continues his complain about life under the sun. He is tired! It is a feeling that I can appreciate. It is a feeling that most of us can appreciate. We all get very tired at times - it seems like the harder we work, the further we get behind. He follows this with some interesting observations:

- 1) *The eye never has enough of seeing*
- 2) *The ear never has its fill of hearing*
- 3) *What has been will be again*
- 4) *What has been done will be done again*

There is great significance in each of these. First the eye. Printing presses and computers spill out more reading material in one day than one could read in a lifetime. No matter how much one reads and studies and looks into things, there is always more. In a similar manner, there is always more to hear.

It is interesting that the words used to describe the state of the eyes is different than the one for the ears. They are more-or-less synonyms but there seems that Solomon intended to make a distinction. There is a difference (and more so in Solomon's time). What you don't read today, you can read tomorrow. What you don't hear today, you will never be able to hear (unless it is recorded).

Today, with TV, radios, and all of the media, one might wonder if there is a difference. One need not wonder, for Daniel has already made note of this.

But you, Daniel, close up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge."

Daniel 12:04

We are living in end times. One of the greatest manifestations of this is the rapid increase of knowledge. In Solomon's day, there was no such large scale increase in knowledge.

What has been will be again. Today we are in a bad draught. We are in a bad recession. But there have been draughts and recessions before. There will be draughts and recessions in the future. It is correct that things go in cycles. Historians tell us that the main point in learning history is that history repeats itself and, by knowing what has happened in the past, we can prepare for the future.

What has been done will be done again. Instead of working on this lesson, I ought to be out mowing my lawn. On the other hand, if I do, I know that in a week or so I will just have to go out and mow it again. Indeed, there is much repetition to life. I have driven to work and back, following the exact same route some 2000 to 3000 times now.

No wonder Solomon is weary. The more I think about it, the more tired I become.

There is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one can say, "Look! This is something new"? What does Solomon mean by this? would he have said this if he were alive today? Even in the Old Testament, there are some 38 things which are described as being new. In the New Testament (itself being new) there are 44 new things described. Most important of all are Paul's statements:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

2 Corinthians 05:17

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Ephesians 04:22-24

Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

Colossians 03:09-11

As we have noted before, Solomon is writing from an earthly perspective. He is looking at life as man under the sun, not as man under God. Obviously, had Solomon lived today, with the great technological revolution, he might had thought differently. However, the underlying human experience does not change. Man had the same needs, wants, and ambitions in Solomon's day as men have today.

Solomon says, in effect, that each generation lives unto itself. It has no knowledge of what was done in previous generations and future generations will not recall what we have experienced. This seems somewhat contradictory since we are now reading what was written thousands of years ago and learning about the past. This is true, but it is also true that man seem to learn very little from the past. Man makes the same mistakes today as have been made in the past. Future generations will make the same mistakes we have made.

I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven. What a heavy burden God has laid on men!

Ecclesiastes 01:12-13

We have looked at the prologue in which the theme of the book is expressed. Now, The Teacher introduces himself and what he has done. We have already noted who the Teacher was. Here he states that he studied and explored everything connected with wisdom. I believe there is a connection here with the previous passage which dealt with the eyes and the ears. The two terms here are so related. The Hebrew word which is translated studied has, as its root meaning, the notion of asking questions. Hence it refers to what one hears by asking questions. The Hebrew term which is translated explored is found about 20 times in the O.T., 13 of them in the passage in Numbers where the men were sent out to spy out the land of Canaan. This has to do with the eyes. It is what one learns from looking.

He seeks out wisdom. The Hebrew word is **hochmah** (חכמה) and is found in about 120 passages of the O.T. It is of interest to note that about a third of these are in the Book of Proverbs! In that book, Solomon praises wisdom. Here he calls it a heavy burden. Wisdom is wisdom. Why is there such a marked contrast between this book and the book of Proverbs?

The books are meant to indicate contrasts. The difference between man's wisdom and God's wisdom is involved. Paul wrote concerning these two wisdoms:

For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

1 Corinthians 01:19-24

I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind. What is twisted cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted. I thought to myself, "Look, I have grown and increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me; I have experienced much of wisdom and knowledge." Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom, and also of madness and folly, but I learned that this, too, is a chasing after the wind. For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief.

Ecclesiastes 01:14-18

To the list of things which seem inevitable, he adds two more.

- 1) *What is twisted cannot be straightened*
- 2) *What is lacking cannot be counted*

He might have added that toothpaste squeezed from the tube and not be replaced. I suppose he didn't have toothpaste. It is an interesting observation regarding the twisted. The Hebrew word for twisted has a negative connotation to it. It is sometimes translated perverted. Consider how true this is. When something has been marred, it never can be fully restored to its original condition. If you smash your car up, a good body shop can restore it so that it looks pretty good, but it is still never the same.

It is possible that Solomon had people in mind more than things. If a person is subject to false accusations and later had them rescinded, he has still been harmed, there will always be some doubts in someone's mind.

There is the old saying about not counting your chickens before they are hatched. This is the idea that Solomon presents here. You can not count on what you don't have. Another philosopher has said that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.

Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom, and also of madness and folly. The madness and folly are the subjects of the next chapter and we shall consider them there. This section deals with the vanity of wisdom. The KJV is more literal with I gave my heart to know wisdom. He set his heart on knowing all the wisdom he could gain. We have the following information recorded for our understanding.

God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore. Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the men of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. He was wiser than any other man, including Ethan the Ezrahite--wiser than Heman, Calcol and Darda, the sons of Mahol. And his fame spread to all the surrounding nations. He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. He described plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also taught about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. Men of all nations came to listen to Solomon's wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom.

1 Kings 04:29-34

King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth. The whole world sought audience with Solomon to hear the

wisdom God had put in his heart.

1 Kings 10:23-24

That night God appeared to Solomon and said to him, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you." Solomon answered God, "You have shown great kindness to David my father and have made me king in his place. Now, LORD God, let your promise to my father David be confirmed, for you have made me king over a people who are as numerous as the dust of the earth. Give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may lead this people, for who is able to govern this great people of yours?" God said to Solomon, "Since this is your heart's desire and you have not asked for wealth, riches or honor, nor for the death of your enemies, and since you have not asked for a long life but for wisdom and knowledge to govern my people over whom I have made you king, therefore wisdom and knowledge will be given you. And I will also give you wealth, riches and honor, such as no king who was before you ever had and none after you will have."

2 Chronicles 01:07-12

The fact is, according to these passages, it was God who gave this wisdom to Solomon. Why? From what we read here it was grievous to him. He found out that *with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief*. Why did God give this to him then? Do you ever ask God for something that is not really good for you? Did any of your children ever ask for something that you knew was not good for them. Did you give it to them anyway? Sometimes we do, not to make them happy; not to make them unhappy, but for their learning.

Consider the following information concerning Solomon.

Solomon accumulated chariots and horses; he had fourteen hundred chariots and twelve thousand horses, which he kept in the chariot cities and also with him in Jerusalem. The king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones, and cedar as plentiful as sycamore-fig trees in the foothills. Solomon's horses were imported from Egypt and from Kue--the royal merchants purchased them from Kue. They imported a chariot from Egypt for six hundred shekels of silver, and a horse for a hundred and fifty. They also exported them to all the kings of the Hittites and of the Arameans.

1 Kings 10:26-29

Not only had Solomon obtained great wisdom but, as the Lord had promised, great wealth. He also obtained an over abundance of one other commodity.

King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter--Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. They were from nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods." Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray. As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. He followed Ashtoreth the

goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites. So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not follow the LORD completely, as David his father had done.

1 Kings 11:01-06

Solomon could handle the wisdom. He could handle the wealth. He could not handle the women. As a result, we find the following.

The LORD became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice. Although he had forbidden Solomon to follow other gods, Solomon did not keep the LORD'S command. So the LORD said to Solomon, "Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates. Nevertheless, for the sake of David your father, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son. Yet I will not tear the whole kingdom from him, but will give him one tribe for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen."

1 Kings 11:09-13

How could a man with so much wisdom and knowledge, the wisest man in the entire world, get into such a mess? The answer, as we shall continue to see, is that there was one thing lacking in Solomon - God. We have already considered the passage that describes man's wisdom. Solomon is completely right. Worldly wisdom is emptiness!

CHAPTER TWO

I thought in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good." But that also proved to be meaningless. "Laughter," I said, "is foolish. And what does pleasure accomplish?" I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly--my mind still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives.

Ecclesiastes 02:01-03

In Chapter One, Solomon concluded that wisdom, man's wisdom, was not satisfying. Indeed, it was burdensome. So, here, he turns to please. After all, as the old saying goes, "Let's eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die!"

He turns to pleasure. The KJV has mirth. The Hebrew word here, **simhgah** (שמחה) which does not necessarily have a bad conotation. Consider the following.

You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound.

Psalms 04:07

You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

Psalms 16:11

You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,

Psalms 30:11

They are led in with joy and gladness; they enter the palace of the king.

Psalms 45:15

But may the righteous be glad and rejoice before God; may they be happy and joyful.

Psalms 68:03

Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.

Psalms 100:02

The conclusion must be the same as in the last chapter. One may have wordly joy or heavenly joy. The Greek word found here in the LXX is found also in the N.T. One such passage is as follows.

And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." ' "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'

Luke 12:19-20

The New Testament speaks of joy many times, but it does not use the Greek word used above. It is **euphraino** (ευφραίνω) from which we get euphoria, a feeling of hapiness and bodily well being. On the other hand, we find these verses in the N.T.

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,

Romans 14:17

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 15:13

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

Galatians 05:22

You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.

1 Thessalonians 01:06

For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you?

1 Thessalonians 02:19

Joy is good or bad, depending on its source. If it is the joy that comes from God, it is good. If it comes not from God, it is euphoria, a surge of elations and then a depression. It does not last as eternal joy does.

Solomon, in order to try what pleasure might bring him, turns to laughter. Again, laughter may be good or bad. I don not believe that God lacks a sense of humor. Below are lome good examples of laughter.

"Surely God does not reject a blameless man or strengthen the hands of evildoers. He will yet fill your mouth with laughter and your lips with shouts of joy.

Job 08:20-21

When the LORD brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them."

Psalms 126:01-02

God does bring us joy and laughter. But not all joy and laughter comes from God. Solomon writes in Proverbs,

There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death. Even in laughter the heart may ache, and joy may end in grief.

Proverbs 14:12-12

If it is obtained in the wormg way, the world's way, it lead to heart ache and grief.

Solomon tries two things in his attempt to find please. He writes...

- 1) I tried cheering myself with wine
- 2) I tried embracing folly

He turned to drinking. I do not know what the situation was in Solomon's time, but today, more and more people are coming to understand that happiness is not found in a bottle. What comes out of a bottle is grief. Not only grief for the drinker, but for those near to him - or approaching him on the road in their car!

Embracing Folly comes from the term for wisdom which we have already studied. In this case, however, the context gives it a somewhat different meaning. It as it is found in the following passage.

They reeled and staggered like drunken men; they were at their wits' end.

Psalm 102:27

When being drunk with wine turned out to be of no avail, he turned to the drunkenness of wordly pleasures. As the Psalmist said, it leads to one wits' end.

I wanted to see what was worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives. In Chapter One the concept of the brevity of life was already discussed. What good is the labor with which we toil for the few days we are here? Labor, seeming futile, he turned to "eat drink, and being merry."

I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees.

Ecclesiastes 02:04-06

He took to building wordly possessions. Things, he hoped, would bring happiness. Indeed, he built some magnificent things. First, and foremost, he oversaw the construction of the temple that his father David had wished to build.

Solomon made an alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt and married his daughter. He brought her to the City of David until he finished building his palace and the temple of the LORD, and the wall around Jerusalem. The people, however, were still sacrificing at the high places, because a temple had not yet been built for the Name of the LORD.

1 Kings 03:01-02

"You know that because of the wars waged against my father David from all sides, he could not build a temple for the Name of the LORD his God until the LORD put his enemies under his feet. But now the LORD my God has given me rest on every side, and there is no adversary or disaster. I intend, therefore, to build a temple for the Name of the LORD my God, as the LORD told my father David, when he said, 'Your son whom I will put on the throne in your place will build the temple for my Name.'

1 Kings 05:03-05

In the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites had come out of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, the second month, he began to build the temple of the LORD.

1 Kings 06:01

So Solomon built the temple and completed it.

1 Kings 06:14

In the eleventh year in the month of Bul, the eighth month, the temple was finished in all its details according to its specifications. He had spent seven years building it.

1 Kings 06:38

I have indeed built a magnificent temple for you, a place for you to dwell forever."

1 Kings 08:13

Solomon, indeed, built a great many of edifices, all to bring him joy and glory. What did it gain him?

I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired men and women singers, and a harem as well--the delights of the heart of man. I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me. I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor.

Ecclesiastes 02:07-10

He ends up with the statements regarding all of the treasures he had amassed. He makes mention of the large number of wives and concubines he had obtained. He got everything one could possibly want. As a result, he says *my heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor.*

Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 02:11

He had sought (earthly) joy and please, wine, women, and song. *I tried cheering myself with wine (2:2), I acquired a harem (2:8), and I acquired men and women singers (2:8).* He had everything one could possibly seek in this life. He should have what would make anyone merry. He was, for a time. *My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor.* But, like any euphoria, it last for a time and then it is gone. He says, when he stopped to think about all he acquired, all he had worked for, it was still like chasing after the wind.

You can never catch the wind. You can never acquire enough earthy treasures to bring lasting joy. You may be content for a time, but then you want still more.

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 06:19-20

Earthly treasures are of little value. What will last is what is laid up for us in heaven. Solomon received no lasting joy or peace from all he accumulated.

Then I turned my thoughts to consider wisdom, and also madness and folly. What more can the king's successor do than what has already been done? I saw that wisdom is better than folly, just as light is better than darkness. The wise man has eyes in his head, while the fool walks in the darkness; but I came to realize that the same fate overtakes them both.

Ecclesiastes 02:12-14

He has tried wisdom, to no avail. He has tried riches and pleasure, to no avail. Next he turns to madness and folly. Madness and folly are the antonyms of wisdom. Wisdom and pleasure did no good so he turned to the opposite extreme. He acted like a fool. It did not take him long to realize that being foolish accomplished no more than being wise. This being the case, one might as well practice being wise.

Then I thought in my heart, "The fate of the fool will overtake me also. What then do I gain by being wise?" I said in my heart, "This too is meaningless." For the wise man, like the fool, will not be long remembered; in days to come both will be forgotten. Like the fool, the wise man too must die!

Ecclesiastes 02:15-16

He has exhausted all of the possibilities. He has obtained wisdom and lived by that. He has obtained wealth and pleasure and lived with that. He has tried what is left, madness and folly, and lived with that. None of these make one truly happy. All men, regardless of which of these they seek, will end up the same as they began, no better in God's eyes nor, if they think about it, in their own eyes.

So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the work into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless. So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun. For a man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then he must leave all he owns to someone who has not worked for it. This too

is meaningless and a great misfortune. What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun? All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless.

Ecclesiastes 02:17-23

There is the bumper sticker that reads, "We're spending our kids' inheritance. Solomon bemoaned the fact that he could not do this. All that he amassed would go, one day, to his heirs. It was of no value, then, to him and, as he says, *who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool?* His concern turned to the fact that what he had worked so hard for would be turned over to the control of another. How often have you read where some man, or couple, worked hard all of their lives and built up a business. Then, when it was time to turn it over to their children, none of them wanted it? Time after time, the children could care less what the parents had toiled so hard for. Solomon figured this out and decided that it, too, was chasing after the wind.

He concludes with the note that he had even gotten insomnia as a result of all his labor. Do you ever go to bed and can not drop off to sleep because you are so wound up from the events of the day. This is the way it was with him.

A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

Ecclesiastes 02:24-26

Ultimately, Solomon comes to the end of this chapter with some very wise advice. He says that man must *find satisfaction in his work*. I once had a teacher who taught us a maxim that went something like: "Success in life is not doing the things you like to do, but in liking the things you have to do." God has left each one of us here on earth for a purpose. That purpose is to do his will. Basically, His will is the fulfillment of the Great Commission. There are, however, many parts of this job and each of us is assigned a part. Real enjoyment is only obtained when we are doing the work that the Lord has left us here to do.

This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? God gave Solomon all that he had, including the toil under the sun. If we realize that God is omnipotent and in control of our lives, then we need not be wearisome over our daily toils. It is only by the grace of God that we have the ability to work and to eat and drink. Even our enjoyment must come from God.

To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This passage reminds us of a N.T. passage.

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where

thieves do not break in and steal.

Matthew 06:19-20

CHAPTER THREE

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven:

Ecclesiastes 03:01

Solomon now turns to speaking about Times and Seasons. We find these two terms together in several other passages (in the KJV).

And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding:

Daniel 02:21 KJV

And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.

Acts 01:07 KJV

But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

1 Thessalonians 05:01-02

The two terms are, more or less, synonyms. In some passages, one may discern a difference between them as one expands upon the meaning of the other. In this passage, the two terms are used for emphasis. The two terms together constitute the totality of time. What Solomon means by this is explained in the verses to follow.

*A time to be born and a time to die,
 A time to plant and a time to uproot,
 A time to kill and a time to heal,
 A time to tear down and a time to build,
 A time to weep and a time to laugh,
 A time to mourn and a time to dance,
 A time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
 A time to embrace and a time to refrain,
 A time to search and a time to give up,
 A time to keep and a time to throw away,
 A time to tear and a time to mend,
 A time to be silent and a time to speak,
 A time to love and a time to hate,
 A time for war and a time for peace.*

Ecclesiastes 03:02-08

A time to be born and a time to die

First on the list of times are the times for being born and a time for dying. Who (or what) determines these times? Let us first start with dying.

When the time drew near for David to die, he gave a charge to Solomon his son.

1 Kings 02:01

David knew when his time was coming. God has appointed it.

Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment

Hebrews 09:27

There is one case where God had appointed a time for a man to die and he did not!

In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, "This is what the LORD says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover." Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, "Remember, O LORD, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes." And Hezekiah wept bitterly. Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah: "Go and tell Hezekiah, 'This is what the LORD, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life.'

Isaiah 38:01-05

That was the biggest mistake of Hezekiah's life. Up until this time, he had faithfully served the Lord God. What of the additional fifteen years? At their conclusion we read the following.

Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the LORD: The time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the LORD. And some of your descendants, your own flesh and blood, that will be born to you, will be taken away, and they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon."

2 Kings 20:16-18

We will not live past the time God has appointed for us. If we did, as in the case of Hezekiah, it would not bring benefit. On the other hand, we will not die before God's time.

We find two specific promises of this in the Scriptures. With respect to Ananias, we read . . .

It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

Luke 02:26

"This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Go to Zedekiah king of Judah and tell him, 'This is what the LORD says: I am about to hand this city over to the king of Babylon, and he will burn it down. You will not escape from his grasp but will surely be captured and handed over to

him. You will see the king of Babylon with your own eyes, and he will speak with you face to face. And you will go to Babylon. "Yet hear the promise of the LORD, O Zedekiah king of Judah. This is what the LORD says concerning you: You will not die by the sword; you will die peacefully. As people made a funeral fire in honor of your fathers, the former kings who preceded you, so they will make a fire in your honor and lament, "Alas, O master!" I myself make this promise, declares the LORD."

Jeremiah 34:02-05

There is also a time to be born. God controls that just as surely as he controls the time of your death. He knew when Isaac would be born.

Then God said, "Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.

Genesis 17:19

But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year."

Genesis 17:21

He knew when John the Baptist would be born.

But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John.

Luke 01:13

Most important of all, God knew when His own precious son would be born!

But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law.

Galatians 04:04

God also knows when someone will not be born. He prevent the birth until the time is right. He did not give Rachael children until the time had come.

Then God remembered Rachel; he listened to her and opened her womb.

Genesis 30:22

God waited until the time was right before Samson was born.

The angel of the LORD appeared to her and said, "You are sterile and childless, but you are going to conceive and have a son. Now see to it that you drink no wine or other fermented drink and that you do not eat anything unclean, because you will conceive and give birth to a son. No razor may be used on his head, because the boy is to be a Nazirite, set apart to God from birth, and he will begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines."

Judges 13:03-05

Finally, God needed a man to be his apostle to the gentiles. God prepared for this. He saw to the birth of this man, this man Paul.

But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace

...

Galatians 01:15

God has summarized this in one verse.

By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

Genesis 03:19

A time to plant and a time to uproot

Obviously, there is a time when we should plant things and a time when we should reap. We find this often in the bible.

Isaac planted crops in that land and the same year reaped a hundredfold, because the LORD blessed him.

Genesis 26:12

There are, on the other hand, times when we are neither to plant nor to reap. The Lord was specific in this respect with Israel.

The fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you; do not sow and do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the untended vines.

Leviticus 25:11

Then we may sow and reap in spiritual ways, as well.

As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it.

Job 04:08

Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy.

Psalms 125:06

The wicked man earns deceptive wages, but he who sows righteousness reaps a sure reward.

Proverbs 11:18

Turning to the New Testament, we see that the Lord Himself has a set time to reap as well as to sow.

Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?' "An enemy

did this,' he replied. "The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' "No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'"

Matthew 12:24-30

Finally, it is up to us to choose, not only the time to sow, but also what to sow.

If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you?

1 Corinthians 09:11

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

Galatians 06:07-08

A time to kill and a time to heal

There is a time to kill. Other times one should not kill. The difference is whether or not God has ordained it. We have already noted that God has already determined when you are to die, when everyone is to die. Therefore, to be in God's will, you must kill someone when it is God's time for them to die and you are God's means. On the other hand, you must not kill when it is not God's intention for the person to die.

When the LORD your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations--the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you-- and when the LORD your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy. Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, for they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods, and the LORD'S anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you. This is what you are to do to them: Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones, cut down their Asherah poles and burn their idols in the fire. For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

Deuteronomy 07:01-06

God gave Israel very specific instructions to slay the people in the land of Canaan. Trouble is, they did not kill all of them as they were supposed to do.

On the other hand, we have the following.

This day you have seen with your own eyes how the LORD delivered you into my hands in the cave. Some urged me to kill you, but I spared you; I said, 'I will not lift my hand against my master, because he is the

LORD'S anointed.'

1 Samuel 24:10

Even though he had the opportunity, the motive, and the right to slay Saul, David did not slay him because it was not a time to kill.

A time to tear down and a time to build

When Sihon and all his army came out to meet us in battle at Jahaz, the LORD our God delivered him over to us and we struck him down, together with his sons and his whole army. At that time we took all his towns and completely destroyed them--men, women and children. We left no survivors.

Deuteronomy 02:32-34

The Lord has a time established for tearing things down. He also has a time table when things are to be built up.

So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. This is how you are to build it: The ark is to be 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high.

Genesis 06:13-15

When the Lord had His fill of corruption on the earth, he gave Noah orders to build up an ark. He gave instructions for building altars.

Write on them all the words of this law when you have crossed over to enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, promised you. And when you have crossed the Jordan, set up these stones on Mount Ebal, as I command you today, and coat them with plaster. Build there an altar to the LORD your God, an altar of stones. Do not use any iron tool upon them. Build the altar of the LORD your God with fieldstones and offer burnt offerings on it to the LORD your God.

Deuteronomy 27:03-06

And, in some case, to build houses.

Then the king sent for Shimei and said to him, "Build yourself a house in Jerusalem and live there, but do not go anywhere else.

1 Kings 02:36

Most important of all, is the time to build the Church.

And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

Matthew 16:18

We must note, however, that God can and will change the times to build and the time

to tear down. It depends on us.

"O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it.

Jeremiah 18:06-10

A time to weep and a time to laugh

This is a verse for today. Do you know the proper time to laugh? Or, do you laugh only to find it was not an appropriate time to do so? The Bible tells us when the time to laugh is - after we have mourned.

Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

Luke 06:21

Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.

Luke 06:25

A time to mourn and a time to dance,

Many times God has turned mourning into dancing.

Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing.

Exodus 15:20

When the men were returning home after David had killed the Philistine, the women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with tambourines and lutes. As they danced, they sang: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands."

1 Samuel 18:06-07

When those who were carrying the ark of the LORD had taken six steps, he sacrificed a bull and a fattened calf. David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the LORD with all his might, while he and the entire house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouts and the sound of trumpets. As the ark of the LORD was entering the City of David, Michal daughter of Saul watched from a window. And when she saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD, she despised him in her heart.

2 Samuel 06:13-16

Hear, O LORD, and be merciful to me; O LORD, be my help." You turned

my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing to you and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give you thanks forever.

Psalms 30:10-12

Let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him with tambourine and harp. . . . praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute,

Psalms 149:3,150:4

On the other hand, when people turn away from God, the times change.

Joy is gone from our hearts; our dancing has turned to mourning.

Lamentations 05:15

A time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,

I do not know of any specific Biblical instance when one is supposed to scatter stones. There is a time together them.

David fastened on his sword over the tunic and tried walking around, because he was not used to them. "I cannot go in these," he said to Saul, "because I am not used to them." So he took them off. Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd's bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine. . . . Reaching into his bag and taking out a stone, he slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell facedown on the ground. So David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone; without a sword in his hand he struck down the Philistine and killed him.

1 Samuel 17:39-40,49-50

For thirty days this giant had been taunting, not only Israel, but God Himself. It was time to put an end to it. David did. He gathered stones and hurled them and Goliath and brought victory to Israel.

There is also a time when we are not to gather or scatter stones.

"Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."

John 08:04-07

A time to embrace and a time to refrain,

Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

1 Corinthians 07:05

A time to search and a time to give up,

There is a time to seek or to search. There was a time when the Magi sought Jesus. There is a time in each of our lives when we must seek Him

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Matthew 6:33

"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

Luke 11:09

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Hebrews 11:06

There will come a time when it is no longer a time to seek.

During those days men will seek death, but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them.

Revelation 09:06

A time to keep and a time to throw away,

A time to tear and a time to mend,

A time to be silent and a time to speak,

"Be silent before me, you islands! Let the nations renew their strength! Let them come forward and speak; let us meet together at the place of judgment.

Isaiah 41:01

At that time your mouth will be opened; you will speak with him and will no longer be silent. So you will be a sign to them, and they will know that I am the LORD."

Exekiel 24:27

Sometimes God ordains that we can not be silent.

"Therefore I will not keep silent; I will speak out in the anguish of my

spirit, I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.

Job 07:11

One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent."

Acts 18:09

Sometimes we must be silent.

And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their proper time."

Luke 01:20

women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

1 Corinthians 14:34-35

A time to love and a time to hate,

The arrogant cannot stand in your presence; you hate all who do wrong.

Psalms 05:05

I hate those who cling to worthless idols; I trust in the LORD.

Psalms 31:06

While there are many verse in the Scripture that teach us to love, there are those that teach us to hate.

Let those who love the LORD hate evil, for he guards the lives of his faithful ones and delivers them from the hand of the wicked.

Psalms 97:10

To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech.

Proverbs 08:13

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.

Romans 12:09

But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Revelation 02:06

A time for war and a time for peace.

In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem.

2 Samuel 11:01

There is a time for war. There was in David's time - but he stayed home. Had he gone, the terrible affair with Bathsheba would probably never have occurred.

What does the worker gain from his toil? I have seen the burden God has laid on men. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil--this is the gift of God. I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him. Whatever is has already been, and what will be has been before; and God will call the past to account.

Ecclesiastes 09-15

Having described all(?) of the times that God has ordained, Solomon again asks the question, "*What does the worker gain from his toil?*" Then he proceeds to answer it. He concludes that *He has made everything beautiful in its time*. What does he mean by this?

What does beautiful mean? The Hebrew word is **yahpneh** (יפה) and means exactly that.

As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, "I know what a beautiful woman you are.

Genesis 12:11

Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel was lovely in form, and beautiful.

Genesis 29:17

Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This girl, who was also known as Esther, was lovely in form and features, and Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died.

Esther 02:07

It is beautiful in its loftiness, the joy of the whole earth. Like the utmost heights of Zaphon is Mount Zion, the city of the Great King.

Psalms 48:02

But, most of all, Solomon used this term many times in his Song.

If you do not know, most beautiful of women, follow the tracks of the sheep and graze your young goats by the tents of the shepherds.

Song of Solomon 01:08

Have you ever considered how beautiful God's timing is? The trouble is that, all too often, we live in the future rather than in the present. We are so intent on some great event that is a few days or weeks in advance that we fail to enjoy what God has

ordained for today. There is an old saying about people wishing their lives away. It refers to people wishing it was next Saturday or next Christmas, etc. and forgetting the present.

God really has ordained a time for everything. Try to go ahead of, or lag begin, this time, and life will not be beautiful. Consider the following things that we can learn from this from the Bible.

Then the LORD said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."

Genesis 15:13-16

The Lord sent Jacob and his family into Egypt for about four hundred years. Why? Why did God not give them the promised land right away? There are a number of reasons which may be summarized in one verse.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Romans 08:28

Why did God wait? Why was it not God's time? We can learn of a number of reasons.

But I will not drive them out in a single year, because the land would become desolate and the wild animals too numerous for you. Little by little I will drive them out before you, until you have increased enough to take possession of the land.

Exodus 23:29-30

Even after four hundred years, when Isreal had grown into a nation, God warned them that there are too many Amorites and other inhabitants of the land for them to be victorious immediately. Four hundred years earlier, Jacob and his family would never have been able to drive out any of the inhabitants.

God has a time for each of us when we are expected to do battle (a time for war). Until that time, we are supposed to grow, just as Israel did.

Another reason for the day is spelled out in the above passage. . . .*for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.* There is a time to repent and a time to not be able to repent. God's patience with the Amorites had not yet run out. God was still willing that they should have more time to repent from their evil ways.

God has a deadline for each of us to repent and accept Christ as our Savior. When does that time run out? We do not know. It certainly runs out when we die. It most likely runs out before that! You have no way of knowing when your last opportunity will be. Consider the very interesting example below.

Six times in the book of Exodus, Pharaoh had an opportunity to do right and did not. The Scriptures record the following:

Yet Pharaoh's heart became hard and he would not listen to them, just as the LORD had said. Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is unyielding; he refuses to let the people go.

Exodus 07:13-14

But the Egyptian magicians did the same things by their secret arts, and Pharaoh's heart became hard; he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the LORD had said.

Exodus 07:22

But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the LORD had said.

Exodus 08:15

The magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart was hard and he would not listen, just as the LORD had said.

Exodus 08:19

But this time also Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not let the people go.

Exodus 08:32

Pharaoh sent men to investigate and found that not even one of the animals of the Israelites had died. Yet his heart was unyielding and he would not let the people go.

Exodus 09:07

In all of the above passages, Pharaoh could have done the right thing, letting Israel go. He did not. Instead, he hardened his heart and became all the more determined not to let them go. This can happen only so long. Then God's time comes. From this point forward, we have the following six more passages. Note them carefully!

But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart and he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the LORD had said to Moses.

Exodus 09:12

When Pharaoh saw that the rain and hail and thunder had stopped, he sinned again: He and his officials hardened their hearts. So Pharaoh's heart was hard and he would not let the Israelites go, just as the LORD had said through Moses. Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his officials so that I may perform these miraculous signs of mine among them

Exodus 09:34-10:01

But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let the Israelites go.

Exodus 10:20

But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he was not willing to let them go.

Exodus 10:27

Moses and Aaron performed all these wonders before Pharaoh, but the

LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let the Israelites go out of his country.

Exodus 11:10

The LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, so that he pursued the Israelites, who were marching out boldly.

Exodus 14:08

From that time on, Pharaoh had no choice. God's time for him had past. He had hardend his heart too much to ever repent. From that point on, God hardened his heart yet further so that he could not repent.

God had a set time for Israel. He sent them prophet after prophet to warn them. There was Moses and Joshua and the judges and Elijah and Elisha and Nathan and Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel and, finally, the minor prophets. Then there was a period of about 400 years when noting, spiritually speaking, went on. The time for Israel had run out. The time for you and I had come.

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

Romans 05:06

But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law,

Galatians 04:04

For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men--the testimony given in its proper time.

1 Timothy 02:05-06

God had a set time when He would send his Son into the world for our salvation - and to end (for a season) the time for Israel. God has also a set time when our time (as Gentiles) will also run out.

Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

1 Corinthians 04:05

What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none;

1 Corinthians 07:29

And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time.

2 Thessalonians 02:06

to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which God will bring about in his own time--God, the

blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords,

1 Timothy 06:14-15

God has a beautiful plan and time-table for the world. We may only perceive it if we are not in a rush to go our own way. We need to wait on god and let God have His way and His timing.

He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. This is an extremely profound statement. What does it mean? The KJV has that he has set the world in the hearts of men. The word is better translated as eternity, or as it is usually translated in the KJV, everlasting.

And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.

Genesis 09:16

And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.

Genesis 17:07

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.

Psalms 90:02

Thy throne is established of old: thou art from everlasting.

Psalms 93:02

But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children;

Psalms 103:17

Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding.

Isaiah 40:28

Have you ever considered eternity? Have you ever really considered eternity? Can you fathom the universe? I have, at times, tried to philosophize about the universe. What is at the end of space? How far is the end of space? After considering it for a while, I end up with a bad headache. It is beyond human comprehension. We can not comprehend infinity - either with respect to time or space.

. . . so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,

Ephesians 03:17-18

We can really never grasp these dimensions either. We seek the answers. We are

mortal humans. As such, we can never fully grasp the answers - only God can.

I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil--this is the gift of God. Let us do some grouping in these two sentences.

*to be happy eat and drink
do good find satisfaction*

Solomon equates happiness with having enough to eat and drink.

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?"

Matthew 06:25-27

Be content with what the Lord gives you. Be content that you have food to eat and drink. More important, Solomon equates satisfaction with doing good. This reminds me of the motto . . .

*Only one life, 'twill soon be past;
Only what's done for Christ will last.*

The greatest satisfactions of life come when we do something that helps others. If our goal in life is to please ourselves, we will be most miserable.

I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it.

God, through Moses, wrote the following:

Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you.

Deuteronomy 04:02

See that you do all I command you; do not add to it or take away from it.

Deuteronomy 12:32

If God has a perfect plan for our lives, there is nothing we can do to improve on it.

God does it so that men will revere him. Whatever is has already been, and what will be has been before; and God will call the past to account.

The KJV reads so that men will fear him. The Greek word found in the LXX is **phobeomai** (φοβεομαι). There are three Greek words that may be translated fear. One is not very common. The other is **deilia** (δειλια) which is found in the following reference.

For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and

of a sound mind.

2 Timothy 01:07

This other word speaks of cowardness. It has a negative connotation. Paul says we are not to have this kind of fear of God. To press this point, the NIV translates this passage a revere, a good and wholesome type of fear.

Let's take two examples: (1) Some people are afraid of elevators and so they climb the stairs; they will probably die of a heart attack! (2) Some people are afraid of Boa Constrictors; they still away from them, they will never be squeezed to death by one.

There are some things we should fear, we must fear. There are some fears that are not to our advantage. The real problem is that very few Christians (and, of course, non-Christians) fear God as they ought.

"Neither," he replied, "but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, "What message does my Lord have for his servant?"

Joshua 05:14

But I, by your great mercy, will come into your house; in reverence will I bow down toward your holy temple.

Psalms 05:07

Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

1 Corinthians 07:01

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Ephesians 05:21

Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.

Colossians 03:22

There is the old pun that says that the man who doesn't study history is bound to repeat it (i.e. take the course again - or - make the same mistakes his forefathers made). Paul writes along the same lines.

For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert. Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: "The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry." We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did--and in one day

twenty-three thousand of them died. We should not test the Lord, as some of them did--and were killed by snakes. And do not grumble, as some of them did--and were killed by the destroying angel. These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.

1 Corinthians 10:01-11

God has given us many examples from the past which we should follow in reverence for Him. Paul spoke of those above. There are others.

He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, but not as his father David had done. In everything he followed the example of his father Joash.

2 Kings 14:03

I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

John 13:15

Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

1 Corinthians 11:01

Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.

Hebrews 04:11

And I saw something else under the sun: In the place of judgment--wickedness was there, in the place of justice--wickedness was there. I thought in my heart, "God will bring to judgment both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time for every deed." I also thought, "As for men, God tests them so that they may see that they are like the animals. Man's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is meaningless.

Ecclesiastes 03:16-19

Solomon now turns his thoughts to wickedness. The word here translated as wickedness is found in a number of places in the O.T. Some of these are as follows (mostly in the poetic literature):

Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Overlook the stubbornness of this people, their wickedness and their sin.

Deuteronomy 09:27

You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil; with you the wicked cannot dwell.

Psalms 05:04

Break the arm of the wicked and evil man; call him to account for his

wickedness that would not be found out.

Psalm 10:05

Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked.

Psalm 84:10

Ill-gotten treasures are of no value, but righteousness delivers from death.

Proverbs 10:02

A man cannot be established through wickedness, but the righteous cannot be uprooted.

Proverbs 12:03

Kings detest wrongdoing, for a throne is established through righteousness.

Proverbs 16:12

It is interesting to note that the last three passages are attributed to Solomon and he thoroughly condemns it. What does he say about it here? *In the place of judgment--wickedness was there, in the place of justice--wickedness was there.* He claims that wickedness has taken the place of judgement and justice. The fact the these two (Hebrew) terms occur so often in the Bible indicates that they go together, they make up a single concept.

David reigned over all Israel, doing what was just and right for all his people.

2 Samuel 08:15

David reigned over all Israel, doing what was just and right for all his people.

1 Chronicles 18:14

The LORD loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love.

Psalm 33:05

Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the great deep. O LORD, you preserve both man and beast.

Psalm 36:06

Better a little with righteousness than much gain with injustice.

Proverbs 16:08

To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.

Proverbs 21:03

You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.

Psalm 45:07

In the two passages from Proverbs, Solomon praises righteousness and justice just as he condemned wickedness. But here he says wickedness has replaced both righteousness and justice.

I thought in my heart, "God will bring to judgment both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time for every deed."

There will come an end to wickedness, and Solomon states this. There is a judgement to come in which both the righteous and the wicked will be judged.

*For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will ****{test}**** the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.*

1 Corinthians 03:11-15

The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great--and for destroying those who destroy the earth."

Revelation 11:18

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done.

Revelation 20:12-13

What Solomon can not see in the future judgement is the fact that there are two. The righteous will be judged at the judgment seat of Christ (first passage above) and the wicked and the Great White Throne (oter passages).

for there will be a time for every activity, a time for every deed. This phrase reads somewhat different in the KJV. *...for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work.* Neither of them, nor the NAS, properly redner the term activity or purpose. The word really means pleasure.

But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.

Psalms 01:02

Great are the works of the LORD; they are pondered by all who delight in them.

Psalms 111:02

for wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her.

Proverbs 08:11

What Solomon is saying is that there is a time for pleasure and a time for working. Neither word needs be taken in a bad sense, nor in a good sense. Pleasures may appear to be in wickedness. Pleasure may be obtained from God. There are works of evil and works of good. We must have both. We can not work all of the time (although it seems like it!) nor can we have pleasure all of the time. God will judge which type of pleasure and toil we engage in.

I also thought, "As for men, God tests them so that they may see that they are like the animals. Man's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. In considering this passage, we are reminded of the passage in James.

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

James 01:13-15

One must make a distinction between testing and tempting. The first action is a neutral, unviased one. You test to see whether a person (or thing) is good or bad. The second, tempting, is done to prove that someone (or some thing) is bad. Furthermore, God does not test man to see whether he is good or evil; God knows man's heart. God test us so that we might know whether we are good or evil. This is what Solomon says. He says God tests so *that they may see* . . . One must read the rest of the passage carefully. He does not say that you and I are like animals! He says that we are like the animals in the sense that we both have the same fate.

Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment

Hebrews 09:27

We are all destined to die (unless the Rapture comes first). Animals also die. The difference, however, is that only men are judged.

All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is meaningless. This seems to be a bit at odds with the book of Genesis.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground--everything that has the breath of life in it--I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

Genesis 01:27-30

The term Solomon here uses does not speak of dominion, but of gain. Humanly speaking, man is no better off when he dies as is an animal.

All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return. Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?" So I saw that there is nothing better for a man than to enjoy his work, because that is his lot. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?

Ecclesiastes 3:20-22

Solomon repeats what Adam said, so many years before, and has been said since.

. . .the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Genesis 02:07

By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

Genesis 03:19

As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field;

Psalms 103:13-15

The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven.

1 Corinthians 15:47

He asks who knows what happens after we die. Does our spirit ascend above? This is what Solomon asks. The only place in the O.T. where the same two terms are found is as follows.

You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain.

Isaiah 14:13

This was Satan's desire. He wishes to be equal with God. He wished to dwell where God dwells. He did not, nor will he ever. He will never ascend, only descend. But what about us?

In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.

John 14:02

Solomon asks if the spirits of animals descend below when they die. Again, the two terms used here appear only at one other place.

The alien who lives among you will rise above you higher and higher, but you will sink lower and lower.

Deuteronomy 28:43

Some men, many men, like Satan will do just exactly that. As far as the animals is concerned, we do not believe that they have spirits. They have souls, but not spirits. Paul rather neatly demonstrated this in the following passage.

So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

1 Corinthians 15:42-44

If one were to study the Greek of the above passage, it would be found that Paul speaks about two bodies. The one we now have, made us dust, and one we will have at the resurrection. He says that the body we now have is (literally) a soulitual body (to coin a word to correspond to the Greek. He says the body we now have meets the needs of our spirit. He says the new body we will receive will meet the needs of our spirits - a spiritual body. There is no resurrection for animals for there is no soul that has need of them.

Leave out the spirit - man's God consciencness, and man, as Solomo says, is no better off than the animals.

It is now time to make an observation. Is Solomon really speaking about animals or is he speaking about men who live like animals. If the later is meant, then his question about the spirits of animals descending makes sense.

He concludes that we should be happy with our lot in life.

CHAPTER FOUR

Again I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun: I saw the tears of the oppressed--and they have no comforter; power was on the side of their oppressors--and they have no comforter. And I declared that the dead, who had already died, are happier than the living, who are still alive. But better than both is he who has not yet been, who has not seen the evil that is done under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 04:01-03

Chapter Four begins with the word Again. Solomon now steps back and takes another look. He take a fresh look at what is going on about him. He sees the misery of mankind. He sees the vanity he has been speaking about thoroughout the first three chapters. Here we find the key to why he sees such emptyness. He sees that there is no comforter. There is no one to bring relief.

Cry yet, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; My cities through prosperity shall yet be spread abroad; and the LORD shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem.

Zechariah 01:17

Throughout the O.T. there was no such comforter. The last of the propphets, Zechariah, above, states that the comforter has not yet come. But then we have the N.T.

And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever;

John 14:16

But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

John 14:26

But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:

John 15:26

Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.

John 16:07

Jesus promised that such a Comforter would come after He was taken up into heaven. Such a comforter did come, on the day of Pentecost. The Comforter was with the Apostles and the disciples. John, at a later time, wrote the following.

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:

1 John 02:01

The comforter is still with us. He, the Holy Spirit, will remain until the rapture of the Church. Solomon makes a very prophetic statement, even though this is not a prophetic book. He states *and I declared that the dead, who had already died, are happier than the living, who are still alive. But better than both is he who has not yet been, who has not seen the evil that is done under the sun.*

He looked at the oppression around them and declared that those who were dead were better of than the living. The dead were spared from the misery he saw.

Note, however, the last part of his statement. The ones who would be the best off would be those who had not yet been. My Christian friend, do you realize that he is speaking about you and I? Do you realize that release we have in Christ from the bondage of the Old Covenant? Do you realize where we are today with the Holy Spirit to guide and watch over us? ere this not so, we, too, might be writing a book like Solomon's.

And I saw that all labor and all achievement spring from man's envy of his neighbor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. The fool folds his hands and ruins himself. Better one handful with tranquillity than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind.

Ecclesiastes 04:04-06

As Solomon looks around, he sees that much of the wearisome labor that men do is spent in trying to "keep up with the Jones'" The we come to an interesting thing to figure out. How much should we expect from life? No handful? One hand fule? Two hands full?

He says that only the fool folds his hands and thus receives nothing. He speaks of this in Proverbs.

How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest-- and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man.

Proverbs 06:09-11

I went past the field of the sluggard, past the vineyard of the man who lacks judgment; thorns had come up everywhere, the ground was covered with weeds, and the stone wall was in ruins. I applied my heart to what I observed and learned a lesson from what I saw: A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest-- and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man.

Proverbs 24:30-44

All one has to do to observe the truth of this is to go to a place where the homeless congregate. In saying this, we are not including the unfortunate who have reached that condition through no fault of their own. We are speaking of the many who got there

through "a little folding of the hands." Solomon says that is folly and he is correct.

Now we come to the choice between one hand full and two. He says that one is sufficient from rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Matthew 11:29

If we are content with what the Lord supplies us with, we will find rest for our souls. Jesus taught that. It is true. Those who refuse will find themselves in a different state.

And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name."

Revelation 14:11

When one seeks self-satisfaction, two hands full, rather than being content with God's provision, it is chasing after the wind.

Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun. 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. Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. 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. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

Ecclesiastes 04:07-12

This passage is sometimes used in wedding ceremonies. Solomon sees that it is vain for a man to live alone. When there is another, each may help the other. The Scriptures abound with this message.

"They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'

Matthew 25:44

But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

Luke 10:40

"Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me."

John 05:07

The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea.

Acts 11:29

During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."

Acts 16:09

In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Acts 20:35

I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me.

Romans 16:02

And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.

1 Corinthians 12:28

And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.

1 Thessalonians 05:14

But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God. The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help.

1 Timothy 05:04-05

If any woman who is a believer has widows in her family, she should help them and not let the church be burdened with them, so that the church can help those widows who are really in need.

1 Timothy 05:16

We said that this passage is sometimes used at weddings. Indeed, the Scriptures back up this practice.

So his servants said to him, "Let us look for a young virgin to attend the king and take care of him. She can lie beside him so that our lord the king may keep warm."

1 Kings 01:02

As King David lie in bed, and old man, and ill, they found a young woman to lie beside him and warm him up (but it didn't work in this case). Then, in another passage,

Then he got on the bed and lay upon the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to

eyes, hands to hands. As he stretched himself out upon him, the boy's body grew warm.

2 Kings 04:04

When Elijah placed his body along the side of the Widow's son, he warmed the boy's body and restored him to health.

Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to take warning. The youth may have come from prison to the kingship, or he may have been born in poverty within his kingdom. I saw that all who lived and walked under the sun followed the youth, the king's successor. There was no end to all the people who were before them. But those who came later were not pleased with the successor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

Ecclesiastes 04:13-16

In the previous section we saw what appears to be a prophetic message even though this is not considered to be a prophetic book. Here, again, there is some pretty clear prophetic truth. I believe that he makes specific references to specific persons in this section.

Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to take warning. Who, do you suppose, is this old but foolish king? Recall Solomon's words earlier.

The wise man has eyes in his head, while the fool walks in the darkness; but I came to realize that the same fate overtakes them both. Then I thought in my heart, "The fate of the fool will overtake me also. What then do I gain by being wise?" I said in my heart, "This too is meaningless." For the wise man, like the fool, will not be long remembered; in days to come both will be forgotten. Like the fool, the wise man too must die!

Ecclesiastes 02:14-16

Solomon had, for a time, played the fool. He sought to see whether there was gain in being foolish. No wonder he scorns to follow so many many times in Proverbs. Solomon had tried everything and hence could speak with authority on all things. Being foolish, no matter how wealthy one might be is not nearly so wise as being wise, no matter how poor.

The youth may have come from prison to the kingship. Who might this be? This could very easily apply to Joseph who, while not actually being a king, was second in command over all of Egypt. One might apply it to David who, while not actually in prison, was sought by King Saul as a fugitive.

He may have been born in poverty within his kingdom. This would surely apply to David who began as a poor shepherd boy. Let us, however, get prophetic. What king do you know of who began his life lying in a manger?

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be

grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Philippians 02:05-08

Jesus Christ emptied himself of all He possessed to become a baby, born of poor parents, having his first sleep in a manger.

Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

Luke 09:58

Throughout His ministry he had no home, no wealth. When it came time to pay His taxes, He did not have the money!

After Jesus and his disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma tax came to Peter and asked, "Doesn't your teacher pay the temple tax?" "Yes, he does," he replied. When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak. "What do you think, Simon?" he asked. "From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes—from their own sons or from others?" "From others," Peter answered. "Then the sons are exempt," Jesus said to him. "But so that we may not offend them, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours."

Matthew 17:24-27

Now, Solomon gets even more prophetic. He goes on to say the following. *I saw that all who lived and walked under the sun followed the youth, the king's successor. There was no end to all the people who were before them. But those who came later were not pleased with the successor.* He says that the king's successor would be very popular, for a while. Then people would become displeased with him. Does this refer to Jesus Christ?

First of all, Christ was a successor of the king; not only of King Solomon, but more importantly, of King David.

A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham:

Matthew 01:01

Then Jesus said to them, "How is it that they say the Christ is the Son of David?"

Luke 20:41

There is no question about that. The second point was His great popularity. *The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest!"*

Matthew 21:09

Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, "Hosanna!"

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" "Hosanna in the highest!"

Mark 11:09-10

By the time He entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, He was extremely popular with the people. He fully met Solomon's second prediction. What about the third?

With one voice they cried out, "Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!" . . . Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. But they kept shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" For the third time he spoke to them: "Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him." But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed.

Luke 23:18-23

But they shouted, "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!" "Shall I crucify your king?" Pilate asked. "We have no king but Caesar," the chief priests answered.

John 19:15

Within the week, the attitudes of the multitude changed to hatred. *But those who came later were not pleased with the successor!*

What does this teach us? Should we be wise or fools? If we are wise, will the world hate us to?

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength. Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

1 Corinthians 01:18-27

We will be popular as wise people if we are wise with the world's wisdom but poor in God's eyes. If we are wise with God's wisdom, the world will think as to be fools - fools for Christ!

This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. After this very prophetic passage, Solomon concludes that this, too, is a chasing after the wind. Why?

The KJV does not have chasing after the wind. In its place it has vexation of spirit. The two Hebrew terms used here are as follows:

raah (רעע) *To tend a flock, i.e. pasture it; intrans. to graze (lit. or fig.); gen. to rule; by extens. to associate with (as a friend):-X break, companion, keep company with, devour, eat up, evil entreat, feed, use as a friend, make friendship with, herdman, keep [sheep] (-er), pastor, + shearing house, shepherd, wander, waste.*

and

ruwach (רוח) *Wind; by resemblance breath, i.e. a sensible (or even violent) exhalation; fig. life, anger, unsubstantiality; by extens. a region of the sky; by resemblance spirit, but only of a rational being (includ. its expression and functions): blast, breath, spirit.*

Both terms show up in the following passage.

Then his people recalled the days of old, the days of Moses and his people--where is he who brought them through the sea, with the shepherd of his flock? Where is he who set his Holy Spirit among them,
Isaiah 63:11

To use a play on words, Solomon was vexed because there was no shepherd to lead his spirit. The one to come after him promised us a Spirit to shepherd us and thus to end this vexation. Without Christ, without the Holy Spirit, all truly is meaningless. All is a vexation of spirit - a chasing after the wind.

CHAPTER FIVE

Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few. As a dream comes when there are many cares, so the speech of a fool when there are many words.

Ecclesiastes 05:01-03

Solomon begins this chapter with advice pertaining to the mouth. James also gives such advice. He speaks at length regarding the tongue. We will look at only two passages.

If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

James 01:26-27

Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.

James 03:05-10

The first passage is an enlargement on the adage "actions speak louder than words." The second passage is more emphatic with respect to the tongue. Then we have the following advice.

Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

Matthew 05:37

Above all, my brothers, do not swear--not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your "Yes" be yes, and your "No," no, or you will be condemned.

James 05:12

We need even be careful what we say when we pray to God. James tells us . . .

Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.

James 04:03

We could go on and cite the N.T. references which teach us how to pray, we will not do so. Solomon here is speaking about what not to speak in God's presence. With this in mind, consider the following passages.

And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.

Matthew 06:07

As Solomon says above, many words do not make an effective prayer.

"Have faith in God," Jesus answered. "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."

Mark 11:22:26

Again, words mean little to God when there are no actions to back them up.

"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'" But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

Luke 18:10-13

Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. Christ expresses the same sentiment in the above passage. Finally, lest you become concerned that you might not be praying correctly, we have this promise.

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.

Romans 08:26

When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it. Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the temple messenger, "My vow was a mistake." Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands? Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore stand in awe of God.

Ecclesiastes 05:04-07

Solomon continues with his advice concerning the tongue. Here he turns to advice regarding vows, especially vows to God. This is advice one ought to keep in mind when "New Year's Resolutions" are made! This is advice that many should heed, but do not. Don't promise to do something unless you really intend to do it. Do not say to a missionary visiting the church, "Oh, I'll pray for you while you are out on the field!" unless you really intend to follow through on it.

"Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.' But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black.

Matthew 05:33-36

Above all, my brothers, do not swear--not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your "Yes" be yes, and your "No," no, or you will be condemned.

James 05:12

Jesus repeated the advice. We should take any oath we make seriously. When you make a promise to do something, others depend upon your doing it (unless you have proven yourself to be untrustworthy!) In the church, the work of the church suffers when people make promises to do things and then fail to do them.

Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the temple messenger, "My vow was a mistake." Solomon says it like it is. If you make a promise and do not fulfill it, you have sinned! "But," you say, "I really meant it when I said it, I just made a mistake in making such a promise!" Solomon, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, says that is no excuse.

Therefore stand in awe of God. In other words, fear God! Unfortunately, we far too often take God too lightly. We do not really have the proper fear and respect for God's person. Our God conscienceness is not strong enough to realize when we are doing things that the fear of God would tell us No!

If you see the poor oppressed in a district, and justice and rights denied, do not be surprised at such things; for one official is eyed by a higher one, and over them both are others higher still. The increase from the land is taken by all; the king himself profits from the fields. Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless. As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owner except to feast his eyes on them The sleep of a laborer is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the abundance of a rich man permits him no sleep.

Ecclesiastes 05:08-12

You would think that Solomon lived in the late Twentieth Century in the United States! For years this country is supposed to have been working on eliminating poverty and discrimination. his country fought a Civil War to free the slaves. Civil Rights leaders

have made extreme sacrifices to better the lot of the poor and the minorities. Yet, when you look about you, things have only gotten worse. Why is this

Well, Solomon says that, when you look around and see such things, we should not be surprised. Why? What is wrong? The answer lies with the high officials. The Hebrew word here is **gaboahh** (גבוה).

elevated (or elated), powerful, arrogant:-haughty, height, high (-er), lofty, proud, X exceeding proudly.

When used of people, it takes on the meanings cited above, arrogant, haughty, or exceedingly proud. We find it in the following references.

Nothing on earth is his equal--a creature without fear. He looks down on all that are haughty; he is king over all that are proud."

Job 41:33-34

Though the LORD is on high, he looks upon the lowly, but the proud he knows from afar.

Psalms 138:6

So man will be brought low and mankind humbled, the eyes of the arrogant humbled.

Isaiah 05:15

See, the Lord, the LORD Almighty, will lop off the boughs with great power. The lofty trees will be felled, the tall ones will be brought low.

Isaiah 10:33

I looked up, and there before me was a ram with two horns, standing beside the canal, and the horns were long. One of the horns was longer than the other but grew up later.

Daniel 08:03

All of these verses, especially the last two, speak of men in high places. Today these men would be in Sacramento and in Washington. Today we see more and more evidence of corruption and loose morals among our elected officials. Someone made the following statement:

All power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely.

The reason we should not be surprised at the poverty and discrimination that still abounds in this country is because of those in high places, the arrogant, the proud, who satisfy their own ambitions rather than to really do what is best for the country. Solomon saw this thousands of years ago. It will continue until the time of the end.

Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. One does not have to comment very much on this statement. We all know it to be true. We have been told the same thing in the N.T.

"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

Matthew 06:24

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

1 Timothy 06:10

Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

Hebrews 13:05

To put it another way, we have also been told the following.

Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life

Luke 12:22-25

As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owner except to feast his eyes on them This is what Madison Avenue does not want you o know. Watch the TV commercials. You would gether from them that it is absolutly essential that you but this gadjet or that. We have Home Shoppers' Club so you can just sit in front of your TV with phone in hand and order all of the things you need. What you will do with them all when you get them is another story.

The sleep of a laborer is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the abundance of a rich man permits him no sleep.

I have seen a grievous evil under the sun: wealth hoarded to the harm of its owner, or wealth lost through some misfortune, so that when he has a son there is nothing left for him. Naked a man comes from his mother's womb, and as he comes, so he departs. He takes nothing from his labor that he can carry in his hand. This too is a grievous evil: As a man comes, so he departs, and what does he gain, since he toils for the wind All his days he eats in darkness, with great frustration, affliction and anger. Then I realized that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given him--for this is his lot. Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work--this is a gift of God. He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart.

Ecclesiastes 05:13-20

Solomon now begins with the words I have seen a grievous evil... (or sore evil in the KJV). Solomon has spoken about evis before, but now he comes to a greivous one. The Hebrew word is fairly common but is nowhere else used in this context. The word

is **chalah** (חלה)

prop. to be rubbed or worn; hence (fig.) to be weak, sick, afflicted; or (causat.) to grieve, make sick;

The modern English term which might be used to translate this word in this context would be debilitating. Most of the evils mentioned up to now are evil and end up in disaster, but here he is talking about a evil which is so bad that it causes immediate pain.

The subject is wealth. It is a subject in which Solomon was well qualified to speak. What does wealth do to a person? It depends on what sort of wealth is being considered. The N.T. has a lot to say about this. First, the type of riches Solomon is here speaking about.

Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.

Mark 04:18-19

Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

Luke 18:24-25

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

1 Timothy 06:17

Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter.

James 05:01-05

Then there are the other kind of riches.

What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory--

Romans 09:23

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!

Romans 11:23

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his

glorious inheritance in the saints,

Ephesians 01:18

Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,

Ephesians 03:08

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,

Ephesians 03:16

And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 04:19

Jesus sums it up when He says. . .

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 06:19-21

Getting back to Solomon and the grievous hurt of worldly riches. *Wealth hoarded to the harm of its owner, or wealth lost through some misfortune, so that when he has a son there is nothing left for him.* If you have it, you worry about it, if you lose it, you grieve over it. That is his conclusion. Refer to part of the above passage in James. *The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.* It is my observation that most (but not all) people who become rich in this world do so at the expense of others. Some by dishonest means, but mostly by just not dealing fairly with others. Many climb the ladder of "success" on the backs of other who trusted them. A person who gains great wealth in this manner either will have problems sleeping because of guilt over how he has obtained his riches or he will become hardened and have no feelings for others. In either case he is the loser.

. . . *Naked a man comes from his mother's womb, and as he comes, so he departs. He takes nothing from his labor that he can carry in his hand.* There is the old adage, "You can't take it with you!" - here is its source. Job also learned the same lesson from God.

At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised."

Job 01:20-21

Then I realized that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given him--for this is his lot. Solomon repeats the finding he has methoded before. We should find our satisfaction in doing our day-to-day work. He speaks of the few days of life that God has given us. The KJV has all the days of his life. The Hebrew phrase

has a definite indication that the days are numbered and, hence, limited. We find the terms in Job.

Man's days are determined; you have decreed the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed.

Job 14:05

What is the toilsome labor that we are to do? Recall the words of Jesus who said . . .

"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor."

John 04:34-38

Our work is to do with will of God who has left us here for a purpose. He has left us here to reap His harvest.

Solomon concludes this chapter with the following words. *Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work--this is a gift of God. He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart.* Some think that it is not possible for a person to have wealth and yet serve God. We are reminded of the Scripture in which Jesus says,

Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

Luke 18:24-25

Jesus said that it would be hard. He did not say it was impossible. In fact He followed this with the statement,

Those who heard this asked, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus replied, "What is impossible with men is possible with God."

Luke 18:26-27

God has made some of His people wealthy, He made Solomon wealthy. David had wealth. There were some people in the N.T. which had wealth. Just to name a one, there was Lydia.

On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord,"

she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

Acts 16:13-15

This woman was a good business woman or else she would not have been a merchant. If it were not for the few that God has blessed with wealth, there would be no missions program, no evangelistic outreach. All of these cost money and the majority of Christians either do not have the money it takes or are not willing to give it.

CHAPTER SIX

I have seen another evil under the sun, and it weighs heavily on men: God gives a man wealth, possessions and honor, so that he lacks nothing his heart desires, but God does not enable him to enjoy them, and a stranger enjoys them instead. This is meaningless, a grievous evil.

Ecclesiastes 06:01-02

Solomon begins this chapter with another evil which he has seen. Before we proceed, let us deal with the word evil. It comes from the Hebrew word **rah** (רַע) and has a variety of meanings. It may refer to evil or sin or wrong. But it also refers to many other things. Some examples, taken from the KJV, are below.

And Samson said concerning them, Now shall I be more blameless than the Philistines, though I do them a displeasure.

Judges 15:03

And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.

Nehemiah 01:03

And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that wine was before him: and I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king. Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence.

Nehemiah 02:01

Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all.

Psalms 34:19

Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head: for yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities.

Psalms 141:05

And the LORD God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.

Jonah 04:06

It, as shown above, refers to things that are bad, not in the moral sense, but in the emotional sense. As Solomon says, *it weighs heavily on men*. The Hebrew word here means, basically, much or, in most senses, too much.

They came as a group to oppose Moses and Aaron and said to them, "You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the LORD'S assembly?"

Numbers 16:03

...and tomorrow put fire and incense in them before the LORD. The man the LORD chooses will be the one who is holy. You Levites have gone too far!"

Numbers 16:07

After seeking advice, the king made two golden calves. He said to the people, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt."

1 Kings 12:28

This, then, is the source of the NIV's "it weighs heavily on men." What does? To have great riches from God and then have them given to another. This makes sense, one can visualize this very easily. But there is a much broader interpretation to this passage. We turn to the following passages.

This is what the Sovereign LORD says: "See, I will beckon to the Gentiles, I will lift up my banner to the peoples; they will bring your sons in their arms and carry your daughters on their shoulders."

Isaiah 49:22

Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For this is what the Lord has commanded us: "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth." When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed."

Acts 13:46-48

But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months."

Revelation 11:02

God gave Israel great riches, riches in God. He was their God and they were His people. But Israel is not glorying in this wealth today. As Isaiah promised and as the N.T. writers have proclaimed, God is giving His wealth to the Gentiles today. This is grievous to the Jew.

A man may have a hundred children and live many years; yet no matter how long he lives, if he cannot enjoy his prosperity and does not receive proper burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he. It comes without meaning, it departs in darkness, and in darkness its name is shrouded. Though it never saw the sun or knew anything, it has more rest than does that man-- even if he lives a thousand years twice over but fails to enjoy his prosperity. Do not all go to the same place?

Ecclesiastes 06:03-06

There is the old adage, "beter to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all."

What Solomon says here is contrary to this. He says it is better to never have lived than to have lived and not enjoyed it. He refers to the stillborn child. The KJV has an untimely death. The Hebrew word is **nephel** (נפל) *something fallen, i.e. an abortion:-untimely birth.*

It is found in two other passages.

Or why was I not hidden in the ground like a stillborn child, like an infant who never saw the light of day?

Job 03:16

Like a slug melting away as it moves along, like a stillborn child, may they not see the sun.

Psalms 58:08

Solomon has already spoken of wealth. Here he had the idea of a proper burial. The Hebrews were especially concerned that they receive a proper burial.

So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). Over her tomb Jacob set up a pillar, and to this day that pillar marks Rachel's tomb.

Genesis 35:19-20

And Moses the servant of the LORD died there in Moab, as the LORD had said. He buried him in Moab, in the valley opposite Beth Peor, but to this day no one knows where his grave is.

Deuteronomy 34:05-06

Therefore this is what the LORD says about Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah: "They will not mourn for him: 'Alas, my brother! Alas, my sister!' They will not mourn for him: 'Alas, my master! Alas, his splendor!' He will have the burial of a donkey--dragged away and thrown outside the gates of Jerusalem."

Jeremiah 22:18-19

Rachael, Jacob's favorite wife was given a grand burial with the pillar to mark her grave. Moses was given a proper burial, but it was never made. On the other hand, because of what he had done, Jehoiakim was given a donkey's burial.

But what is a proper burial? What was it that Solomon really longed for? It is what you and I possess today.

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Romans 06:03-04

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the

circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

Colossians 02:09-12

To be buried in Christ was a privilege that the O.T. saints never enjoyed. Again, we have a prophetic view in this book.

All man's efforts are for his mouth, yet his appetite is never satisfied. What advantage has a wise man over a fool? What does a poor man gain by knowing how to conduct himself before others? Better what the eye sees than the roving of the appetite. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

Ecclesiastes 06:07-09

CHAPTER SEVEN

A good name is better than fine perfume, and the day of death better than the day of birth. It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure. It is better to heed a wise man's rebuke than to listen to the song of fools. Like the crackling of thorns under the pot, so is the laughter of fools. This too is meaningless.

Ecclesiastes 07:01-06

Solomon now turns to a number of short concepts after the manner of Proverbs. The first though that he deals with is that of a good name. He mentions this also in the following:

A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.

Proverbs 22:01

One may obtain a good name by doing right and avoiding evil. Prophetically speaking, there is another way of obtaining a good name. Isaiah prophecies it.

Let no foreigner who has bound himself to the LORD say, "The LORD will surely exclude me from his people." And let not any eunuch complain, "I am only a dry tree." . . . to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will not be cut off. And foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to serve him, to love the name of the LORD, and to worship him, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant--

Isaiah 56:03,05-06

Turning to the N.T. we have the following:

The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.

Acts 05:41

But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.

Acts 09:15

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

Philippians 02:09-10

Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of

the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. He says, "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises."

Hebrews 02:11-12

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.

Revelation 02:17

He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.

Revelation 03:05

Next, Solomon says that *the day of death better than the day of birth*. This may seem strange, but is it? Consider the N.T. teachings.

What is our condition when we are born? Paul writes . . .

For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

1 Corinthians 15:22

We are born into sin. It is only as we die to self and become alive in Christ that we have the promise of eternal life.

It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart.

Solomon goes on with the statement that mourning is better than feasting. There are some interesting N.T. passages which speak of this.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Matthew 05:04

Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.

Luke 06:25

And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?

1 Corinthians 05:02

What we feast on makes a difference. When we feast upon the Lord, it is good. This is not what Solomon refers to. He refers to that which Peter speaks of.

For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do--living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry.

1 Peter 04:03

The summary of what Solomon states here is that we need to be serious and not

frivolous. We need to be about our Master's work and not simply playing.

Extortion turns a wise man into a fool, and a bribe corrupts the heart. The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride. Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools. Do not say, "Why were the old days better than these?" For it is not wise to ask such questions. Wisdom, like an inheritance, is a good thing and benefits those who see the sun. Wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter, but the advantage of knowledge is this: that wisdom preserves the life of its possessor.

Ecclesiastes 07:07-12

Solomon continues with a number of adages. The first deals with extortion and bribery. The KJV uses oppression and gifts in place of these terms. The words in the KJV are more general. Oppression may take on many forms. Gifts may be good or bad. When connected in this context, the words both have a bad sense and oppression becomes extortion and gifts become bribery.

If Solomon's words are true, and they are, then there must be a large number of fools and people with corrupt hearts walking around. They must be walking around in Washington DC, the state capitals, and on the streets in general. There was a time when the practices noted here were not widespread in this country. That time has past. In the Greek version the word for extort is the source of an English word...

syc-o-phant n. a person who seeks favor by flattering people of wealth or influence; parasite; toady —syc-o-phan'tic or syc-o-phant'ish adj. —syc-o-phan'ti-cal-ly or syc-o-phant'ish-ly adv. —syc-o-phant-ism n.

It is found several times in the N.T.

Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?" He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely--be content with your pay."

Luke 03:14

But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

Luke 19:08

Next, Solomon says, "*The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride.*" He turns to our beginnings and endings. The two terms are found several other places together.

Your beginnings will seem humble, so prosperous will your future be.

Job 08:07

One of Job's friends made the above predicton. God fulfilled it!

The LORD blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the first. He had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen and a thousand donkeys.

Job 42:12

God is from the beginning to the end.

Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.

Isaiah 46:09-10

He ties patience and pride with these. It takes patient to believe that God will bless you at the end. Pride is what makes us want the blessing now.

Next comes, "Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools." Solomon has noted the result of anger and wrath elsewhere.

A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult.

Proverbs 12:16

Better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and ill-tempered wife.

Proverbs 21:19

Stone is heavy and sand a burden, but provocation by a fool is heavier than both.

Proverbs 27:03

The word used in the Greek version for wrath is found in the passage below.

God "will give to each person according to what he has done." To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

Romans 02:06-10

We have one last reference in the N.T., a quote from the O.T.

"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry,

Ephesians 04:26

In your anger do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent. Selah

Psalms 04:04

The advice is not that we should never become angry. The advice is that we should not let anger control us. We should be able to control our anger. We should be able to count to ten before we react to something that provokes our anger.

Now, Solomon says, 'Do not say, "Why were the old days better than these?" For it is not wise to ask such questions.' How often have we said exactly this? How often have you longed for the "good old days?" If one thinks about it and asks the question, "Just when were these days?" a problem arises. If you pick some period of history as the time of the "good old days", you will find out that they were not considered good at the time.

There is no wisdom in seeking answers to such questions. It reminds me of the story of the preacher who announced his resignation one Sunday morning. After the service he was greeted by an older woman who was in tears. "Don't worry," said the preacher, "you will be getting a new preacher." "I know," sobbed the lady, "we have already had three preachers and each one was worse than the last!" Our minds have the habit of remembering the good of the past and excluding the bad. Hence the past always seems to be better than the present.

Solomon concludes this section with the advice, "*Wisdom, like an inheritance, is a good thing and benefits those who see the sun. Wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter, but the advantage of knowledge is this: that wisdom preserves the life of its possessor.*"

Wisdom is a characteristic needed by all Christians. It was of prime importance in the selection of the first deacons.

Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them

Acts 06:03

Its importance was soon proven.

Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)--Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia. These men began to argue with Stephen, but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.

Acts 06:09-10

Solomon then compares wisdom with money. There are a lot of things that you can buy with money - there are a lot of things that money can not buy. The person who will really amount to something in this life is the one with wisdom, not the one with money.

Consider what God has done: Who can straighten what he has made crooked? When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other. Therefore, a man cannot discover anything about his future.

Ecclesiastes 07:13-14

One may ask, what has God ever made crooked? God is usually in the business of straightening things out.

A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall

become level, the rugged places a plain.

Isaiah 40:03-04

But we do read of one place in the Psalms.

The LORD watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.

Psalms 146:09

Here the Hebrew word is translated frustrate. It is the same word. He makes things crooked for the wicked, he makes things smooth for His people.

The advice is great. There is no problem enjoying the good times in life. Everyone can do that. It is the times of trials and tribulations that we need to remember that God brings the bad times as well as the good. We need to remember the promise we have.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Romans 08:28

In this meaningless life of mine I have seen both of these: a righteous man perishing in his righteousness, and a wicked man living long in his wickedness. Do not be overrighteous, neither be overwise--why destroy yourself? Do not be overwicked, and do not be a fool--why die before your time? It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other. The man who fears God will avoid all extremes. Wisdom makes one wise man more powerful than ten rulers in a city.

Ecclesiastes 07:15-19

This passage is a bit difficult to understand in view of what we have been covering. We have been talking of the virtues of wisdom and righteousness. Now Solomon warns against four overindulgences.

- 1) *overrighteous,*
- 2) *overwise,*
- 3) *overwicked,*
- 4) *(over)fool(ish)*

These are all hard to understand. One would not think it possible to be overrighteous or overwise. One would not want to be wicked or foolish at all. Solomon was a wise man and realized that, on the one hand, we can not avoid displaying a certain amount of wickedness and foolishness. We are born into it.

One should not be alarmed if a self-examination is made and we see that once in a while we do something wicked or foolish. We should be alarmed if we find it occurring overly much.

But what about being overwise? What about being overrighteous? There are two thoughts here. First, it is impossible for us to obtain either of these, they must be given us by God and in the measure God delays them to us. To attempt to gain more than

God gives us would be foolish. One might get so engrossed in attempting to add wisdom that the real purpose of God would be aborted.

The man who fears God will avoid all extremes. This pretty well sums up what Solomon has said regarding over indulgence. All extremes are to be avoided. We have advice such as this in Hebrews and James and from Paul and from Christ Himself.

But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.

Luke 08:15

In other words, be patient. Do not try to obtain everything at once.

By standing firm you will gain life.

Luke 21:19

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

Hebrews 12:01

The KJV has run the race with patience. gain, we must pace ourselves and not try to obtain more than God expects of us, no to do less either!

because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

James 01:03-04

Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains.

James 05:07

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

Philippians 03:10-16

Paul runs with patient, but he presses on. The person who wins a race does not do so by running in spurts. It is the person who can pace himself or herself and not slow down but maintain a steady pace that wins.

So Solomon advises moderation.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 04:04-07

There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins. Do not pay attention to every word people say, or you may hear your servant cursing you-- for you know in your heart that many times you yourself have cursed others.

Ecclesiastes 07:20-22

At this point Solomon makes some curious observations. First he observes that there is no righteous man in all of the earth. This was observed in the O.T. and repeated in the N.T.

All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.

Psalm 14:03

Everyone has turned away, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.

Psalm 53:03

As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one;

Romans 03:10

All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."

Romans -3:12

So Solomon's observations are not surprising. But then he says something unusual. He says not to listen to everything that everyone says. Someone has said that you should believe only half of what you see and none of what you hear. In today's society that is good advice. The news media has become so corrupt in their quest for the almighty dollar, and with managers who have no liking for Christianity and other such things, that you really can not believe what you read, see or hear. It is sometimes very interesting to be at the scene of some event and then observe the report about it in the media. You would think that they were two different events.

Solomon, however, gives a different reason for not listening. You may very well hear something that you really would not like to hear - something about yourself. I have often thought how terrible it would be if I were to know all of the negative things people thought about me (regardless of whether or not they are true).

All this I tested by wisdom and I said, "I am determined to be wise"--but this was beyond me. Whatever wisdom may be, it is far off and most profound--who can discover it? 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. 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.

Ecclesiastes 07:23-26

Job found wisdom elusive just as did Solomon.

"But where can wisdom be found? Where does understanding dwell? Man does not comprehend its worth; it cannot be found in the land of the living. The deep says, 'It is not in me'; the sea says, 'It is not with me.' It cannot be bought with the finest gold, nor can its price be weighed in silver. It cannot be bought with the gold of Ophir, with precious onyx or sapphires. Neither gold nor crystal can compare with it, nor can it be had for jewels of gold. Coral and jasper are not worthy of mention; the price of wisdom is beyond rubies. The topaz of Cush cannot compare with it; it cannot be bought with pure gold. "Where then does wisdom come from? Where does understanding dwell? It is hidden from the eyes of every living thing, concealed even from the birds of the air.

Job 28:12-21

Solomon tried to obtain full wisdom. God allowed him to obtain much wisdom, not never to attain the goals he sought. Man does not have the capacity to know the all the wisdom of God. No matter how hard we seek, how hard Solomon sought, it can not be obtained.

The rest of this passage, I believe, is misunderstood by many. The remarks here and in the passage to follows are not very nice with respect to women. Does Solomon hate all women? He had 700 wives and 300 concubines. That adds up to 1000. Among these 1000 could he not find even one who was good? There are several scripture passages which may help with this question.

Wisdom calls aloud in the street, she raises her voice in the public squares;

Proverbs 01:20

Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you.

Proverbs 04:06

Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn out its seven pillars.

Proverbs 09:01

Wisdom reposes in the heart of the discerning and even among fools she lets herself be known.

Proverbs 14:33

Throughout the book of Proverbs, Solomon speaks of wisdom and characterizes it as a woman. Could it be, then, since he is speaking of wisdom and then abruptly begins to speak of women, he is using women as a picture of wisdom he sought? I believe that Solomon is equating his search for wisdom to his search for the right woman. Perhaps this was written before Song of Solomon in which he appears to have found the right woman.

"Look," says the Teacher, "this is what I have discovered: "Adding one thing to another to discover the scheme of things-- while I was still searching but not finding--I found one upright man among a thousand, but not one upright woman among them all. This only have I found: God made mankind upright, but men have gone in search of many schemes."

Ecclesiastes 07:27-29

Solomon says that, among a 1000 men, he could locate one who was righteous. He then says he could never find a righteous woman. On the other hand Micah says . . .

*The godly have been swept from the land; not one upright man remains.
All men lie in wait to shed blood; each hunts his brother with a net.*

Micah 07:02

So, according to him, there are none righteous. But we knew this. There was at least one woman who should have met Solomon's standards.

The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God.

Luke 01:28-30

CHAPTER EIGHT

Who is like the wise man? Who knows the explanation of things? Wisdom brightens a man's face and changes its hard appearance. Obey the king's command, I say, because you took an oath before God. Do not be in a hurry to leave the king's presence. Do not stand up for a bad cause, for he will do whatever he pleases. Since a king's word is supreme, who can say to him, "What are you doing?" Whoever obeys his command will come to no harm, and the wise heart will know the proper time and procedure. For there is a proper time and procedure for every matter, though a man's misery weighs heavily upon him. Since no man knows the future, who can tell him what is to come? No man has power over the wind to contain it; so no one has power over the day of his death. As no one is discharged in time of war, so wickedness will not release those who practice it.

Ecclesiastes 08:01-08

In this chapter Solomon's advice turns to that of obeying the king. This seems a bit unusual since he was the king at the time. What does the advice mean to us? I believe we can learn several things from this. First, we have the same teachings in the N.T.

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you.

Romans 13:01-03

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone -- for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

1 Timothy 02:01-02

Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good,

Titus 03:01

Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Hebrews 13:17

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority,

1 Peter 02:13

So there is ample evidence from the N.T. that Solomon's advice is wise. There is one thing to be noted here. The passage in Hebrews does not really refer to the king or other civil authority. It refers to those who have spiritual authority.

While Solomon's advice is good with respect to civil authority, the terms that he uses leads one to believe that he is referring to another king, the King of Kings.

Obey the king's command, I say, because you took an oath before God. I don't remember taking any oath to God with respect to civil authority. I did, in effect, make a promise to God when I took Jesus Christ as my Savior. The oath, it would seem, is a spiritual one.

Do not be in a hurry to leave the king's presence. Now the only king whose presence we should never leave is the King of kings. Again, the wording is strongly spiritual.

Since a king's word is supreme, who can say to him, "What are you doing?" Whoever obeys his command will come to no harm, and the wise heart will know the proper time and procedure. While any civil authority may be considered as supreme, it is God we think of when we think of the one who is supreme. Expanding on a passage we looked at before, we find the following.

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.

1 Peter 02:13-16

It is God who gives men authority and hence it is God who has supreme authority.

For there is a proper time and procedure for every matter, though a man's misery weighs heavily upon him. In a previous chapter we found that there was a time for everything and that "everything is beautiful in its time." It is not clear of what misery Solomon speaks. The Greek version reads different, *for the knowledge of man is great to him.* The point Solomon makes is that, regardless of what we would like to do, or how we would like to do it, God has established the time and way for doing things. On many occasions in Paul's ministry, he would have liked to do one thing, God had another for him to do. It is the same with us. Sometimes we would like to have had things go different than they did. Often, if we reflect on it at a later time, we see that God's way was best.

Since no man knows the future, who can tell him what is to come? No man has power over the wind to contain it; so no one has power over the day of his death. As no one is discharged in time of war, so wickedness will not release those who practice it. James has thoughts much the same as Solomon's when he writes the following.

Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

James 04:13-14

James says we do not even know what tomorrow will bring, not to mention the distant

future. I do not believe the NIV translation regarding the wind is correct (although the statement is true). The Hebrew word for wind and for spirit is the same. One has to go by context in its translation. When Solomon mentions, in the same sentence, death we would assume that Spirit is the better translation.

The section concludes with a strange comment. The first part is understandable. When a nation is at war, men (and women today) are not normally discharged. You wait for the war to end and then are discharged. What is not easy to comprehend is the connection of this with the release from wickedness.

The thing to remember is that this is a time of war.

... but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

Romans 07:23-24

Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.

1 Peter 02:11

This is the reason for Paul's warning:

Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Ephesians 06:11-17

We have a constant battle against evil. If we do not fight it, it will conquer us.

All this I saw, as I applied my mind to everything done under the sun. There is a time when a man lords it over others to his own hurt. Then too, I saw the wicked buried--those who used to come and go from the holy place and receive praise in the city where they did this. This too is meaningless. When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong. Although a wicked man commits a hundred crimes and still lives a long time, I know that it will go better with God-fearing men, who are reverent before God. Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them, and

their days will not lengthen like a shadow.

Ecclesiastes 08:09-13

Solomon now turns to justice, or the lack of it. How fitting his words are today! *When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong.* Today it is sometimes years before an important case comes to trial. Many do not come to trial at all, a plea bargain is made. When a trial is held and justice administered, the punishment is neither sufficient nor consistent. Let us consider just a few examples:

- 1) Driving under the influence: This is a tremendous problem today because, if you are caught, the penalty is seldom very severe.
- 2) Speeding: If you drive less than 60 MPH on the highway, you are likely to get rear ended. There is no enforcement of a strict speed limit and the result is that there is none.
- 3) Drugs: Again, the penalties, if imposed, are not sufficient to stop the selling and the penalties for using are seldom enforced and ineffective.

There is, however, consolation in all this. We may see others getting away with all sorts of crime. We may wonder if it is worth it to be honest and law abiding. Solomon says it is, even in such circumstances. *Although a wicked man commits a hundred crimes and still lives a long time, I know that it will go better with God-fearing men, who are reverent before God.* In this life we may not be rewarded for avoiding evil and crime, but we may. In any event, in the Resurrection, we will be rewarded without question. We have ample evidence of this.

(Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.) This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

Romans 02:14-16

You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.

Romans 14:10

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

2 Corinthians 05:10

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge:

2 Timothy 04:01

Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord,

the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

2 Timothy 04:08

Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.

1 Peter 01:17

For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do--living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to men in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.

1 Peter 04:03-06

The other side of the coin is also mentioned.

Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them, and their days will not lengthen like a shadow. The will stand before the Great White Throne and pay for what they have done in this life.

There is something else meaningless that occurs on earth: righteous men who get what the wicked deserve, and wicked men who get what the righteous deserve. This too, I say, is meaningless. So I commend the enjoyment of life, because nothing is better for a man under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany him in his work all the days of the life God has given him under the sun. When I applied my mind to know wisdom and to observe man's labor on earth--his eyes not seeing sleep day or night-- then I saw all that God has done. No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all his efforts to search it out, man cannot discover its meaning. Even if a wise man claims he knows, he cannot really comprehend it.

Ecclesiastes 08:14-17

Solomon concludes this chapter with a summary. He claims that, even after an in depth search, he can not understand all that goes on under the sun. He claims that no one can. We have some other wise words along this same line.

This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD.

Jeremiah 09:23-24

It is not important that we understand all that goes on under the sun. What is important is knowing the one who causes it to happen. This is what Jeremiah had to say. Isaiah said the following.

Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Isaiah 55:06-09

He said it like it is. God works on a much higher plane than we do. Let me give an example from my experience. In my office I can work a complex mathematical problem with no difficulty at all. If I go to the classroom and work the same problem on the chalk board, it is much more difficult to do. Why? In order to write on the chalk board, you have to stand fairly close to it. If it is a large chalk board, you can not see everything you have written, just what is in the area you are writing. Without a broad view of the problem, it is hard to see where you are. The same is true with all of life. We are too close to it. We see only what is in our immediate area. God can see the entire picture.

He looks around and comes to a conclusion he has reached before - to eat, drink and be glad. One asks is this is a proper conclusion. Paul seems to think that it is the attitude of the unsaved.

If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

1 Corinthians 15:32

In stating this, Paul is quoting Isaiah who wrote the following:

The Lord, the LORD Almighty, called you on that day to weep and to wail, to tear out your hair and put on sackcloth. But see, there is joy and revelry, slaughtering of cattle and killing of sheep, eating of meat and drinking of wine! "Let us eat and drink," you say, "for tomorrow we die!"

Isaiah 22:12-13

Thus, it seems that we have both O.T. and N.T. information that says that this is the way of the world. But, we have yet one more reference.

Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: "My servants will eat, but you will go hungry; my servants will drink, but you will go thirsty; my servants will rejoice, but you will be put to shame.

Isaiah 65:13

There is a time for the unsaved to eat, drink and be merry, there is a time for the Christian to eat, drink and be glad. As before, the point is that we should be content with the food and the drink that the Lord provides and we should be glad in this.

Open for me the gates of righteousness; I will enter and give thanks to the LORD. This is the gate of the LORD through which the righteous may enter. I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation. The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

CHAPTER NINE

So I reflected on all this and concluded that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God's hands, but no man knows whether love or hate awaits him. All share a common destiny--the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not. As it is with the good man, so with the sinner; as it is with those who take oaths, so with those who are afraid to take them.

Ecclesiastes 09:01-02

It is not necessary to comment long on this passage. Solomon has made virtually the same conclusion twice before.

In this meaningless life of mine I have seen both of these: a righteous man perishing in his righteousness, and a wicked man living long in his wickedness.

Ecclesiastes 07:15

There is something else meaningless that occurs on earth: righteous men who get what the wicked deserve, and wicked men who get what the righteous deserve. This too, I say, is meaningless.

Ecclesiastes 08:14

Humanly speaking this is so, and Solomon reverts back to a humanistic viewpoint.

This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun: The same destiny overtakes all. The hearts of men, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead. Anyone who is among the living has hope--even a live dog is better off than a dead lion! For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even the memory of them is forgotten. Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 09:03-06

In these next four verses, Solomon expands on the introduction of the first two. Again, he reiterates what he said in chapters seven and eight.

Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for it is now that God favors what you do. Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil. Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun--all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with

all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.

Ecclesiastes 09:07-10

Solomon quickly turns to the other side of the philosophy, to that enjoyed by the Christian. Even though there is much wickedness under the sun, we, as Christians, may eat with gladness and drink with a joyful heart. Unlike the humanistic philosophy that says there is no difference between men, Solomon here points out that there is. *It is now that God favors what you do.* In addition, we are to be clothed in white. White apparel is always a sign of holiness.

"As I looked, "thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze.

Daniel 07:09

When the disciples saw Jesus' transfiguration, they saw . . .

His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.

Mark 09:03

One would suppose that they were even whiter than Clorox white! But it is not only the Lord who may be so clothed. We, too, may be clothed in white.

Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy.

Revelation 03:04

Not only may we be so clothed, we are counselled to do so.

I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

Revelation 03:18

He also mentions anointing our heads with oil. The whiteness signifies holiness and purity. The oil signifies nobility (spiritual or political). Consider the following. First, the high priest . . .

Take the anointing oil and anoint him by pouring it on his head.

Exodus 29:07

Then King Saul . . .

As they were going down to the edge of the town, Samuel said to Saul, "Tell the servant to go on ahead of us"--and the servant did so--"but you stay here awhile, so that I may give you a message from God." Then Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on Saul's head and kissed him, saying, "Has not the LORD anointed you leader over his inheritance?"

1 Samuel 09:27-10:01

All of Israel's kings were so treated . . .

Jehu got up and went into the house. Then the prophet poured the oil on Jehu's head and declared, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'I anoint you king over the LORD'S people Israel.

2 Kings 09:06

But, as children of the king, we too share in this privilege. There is, of course, that very well know reference . . .

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Psalms 23:05

He then makes a rather strange comment.

Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun--all your meaningless days.

He gives the instruction to enjoy life with your wife. I would assume that this implies that women should also enjoy life with their husbands. We have Biblical examples of this.

Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah. So she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

Genesis 24:67

Solomon took his own advice too liberally!

But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites;

1 Kings 11:01

And the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins; so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti.

Esther 02:17

In the N.T., We are instructed by Paul to do this.

In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

Ephesians 05:28

However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Ephesians 05:33

As Solomon looks at the long days of toil under the sun, he says that the way to survive is to enjoy the company of one wife (or spouse). God said the same thing.

The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

Genesis 02:18

God knew that man would need a helper. We shall not discuss the reason why he needed a helper.

To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

Genesis 03:17-19

Solomon's observations regarding our toil under the sun were not unique. God promised this from the beginning.

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.

Ecclesiastes 09:11

The O.T. teaches the wisdom of this statement.

Let not the swift flee away, nor the mighty man escape; they shall stumble, and fall toward the north by the river Euphrates.

Jeremiah 46:06

Therefore the flight shall perish from the swift, and the strong shall not strengthen his force, neither shall the mighty deliver himself:

Amos 02:14

Who wins the battle? Who wins the race? We have previously noted it is the one who runs the race with patience.

Moreover, no man knows when his hour will come: As fish are caught in a cruel net, or birds are taken in a snare, so men are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly upon them. I also saw under the sun this example of wisdom that greatly impressed me: There was once a small city with only a few people in it. And a powerful king came against it, surrounded it and built huge siegeworks against it. Now there lived in that city a man poor but wise, and he saved the city by his wisdom. But nobody remembered that poor man. So I said, "Wisdom is better than strength." But the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are no longer heeded. The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouts of a ruler of fools. Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but

one sinner destroys much good.

Ecclesiastes 09:12-18

Solomon again expresses his weariness with things. He expresses his feelings with a story. Whether this is real or just a made up story, we do not know - it makes no difference.

Before we look at the story, we recall the story of the little dutch boy who saved Holland by plugging a hole in the dyke with his finger. We mention this because it expresses the opposite philosophy than that Solomon's of story. Here it was not a poor boy, but a poor and wise man. He, like the boy, saved his city from ruination. In his case, however, Solomon says, "*But nobody remembered that poor man.*" Solomon's story is much wiser than that of the dutch boy.

How many people do you know that have made our lives better and improved the lot of the world? Sure, there are some well know people who did (or presumed to do) something that made an important change in our lives. With out Salk we would still be worrying about polio. But what of the many many nameless people who toiled long and hard and no one even knows who they are?

Billy Graham has done a tremendous work in evangelisim. But who was it who led him to a saving knowledge of Christ? Without that person, there would have been no evangelist. Perhaps, if you study his biography, you may find out the name of the person. But let us go still further, who planted the seed?

What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe--as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.

1 Corinthians 03:05-07

Do you work and toil and see no results for your labor. Paul says I planted the seed. Have you ever planted (actual) seed? When you are all done there is absolutely nothing to show for your labor. The seed in usner the ground and it looks no different than it did before. Then there are the Apollos' who do the watering. You pour gallons and gallons of watr on this dirt and see no results except muddy dirt. But, in the end, when God makes it grow, there is the fruit of your labors. The fruit is there, you are not. You don't often see it.

The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouts of a ruler of fools. These words go along with the previous. Behind most any great man (or woman) is one or more wise people who have given him or her advice. It is the wise ruler who heeds the words of people he can trust to give proper advice.

There a many Biblical examples of this.

Moses' father-in-law replied, "What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. Listen now to me and I

will give you some advice, and may God be with you. You must be the people's representative before God and bring their disputes to him.

Exodus 18:17-19

Absalom and all the men of Israel said, "The advice of Hushai the Arkite is better than that of Ahithophel." For the LORD had determined to frustrate the good advice of Ahithophel in order to bring disaster on Absalom. . . . When Ahithophel saw that his advice had not been followed, he saddled his donkey and set out for his house in his hometown. He put his house in order and then hanged himself. So he died and was buried in his father's tomb.

2 Samuel 17:14,23

Then let the girl who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti." This advice appealed to the king, and he followed it.

Esther 02:04

The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice.

Proverbs 12:15

Pride only breeds quarrels, but wisdom is found in those who take advice.

Proverbs 13:10

Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise.

Proverbs 19:20

Make plans by seeking advice; if you wage war, obtain guidance.

Proverbs 20:18

Therefore, O king, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue."

Daniel 04:27

There are also case where people listened to bad advise. Solomon here speaks of the advice of the wise as contrasted with that of the fool.

CHAPTER TEN

As dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor. The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left. Even as he walks along the road, the fool lacks sense and shows everyone how stupid he is. If a ruler's anger rises against you, do not leave your post; calmness can lay great errors to rest. There is an evil I have seen under the sun, the sort of error that arises from a ruler: Fools are put in many high positions, while the rich occupy the low ones. I have seen slaves on horseback, while princes go on foot like slaves. Whoever digs a pit may fall into it; whoever breaks through a wall may be bitten by a snake. Whoever quarries stones may be injured by them; whoever splits logs may be endangered by them. If the ax is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed but skill will bring success. If a snake bites before it is charmed, there is no profit for the charmer. Words from a wise man's mouth are gracious, but a fool is consumed by his own lips. At the beginning his words are folly; at the end they are wicked madness-- and the fool multiplies words. No one knows what is coming--who can tell him what will happen after him? A fool's work wears him; he does not know the way to town. Woe to you, O land whose king was a servant and whose princes feast in the morning. Blessed are you, O land whose king is of noble birth and whose princes eat at a proper time--for strength and not for drunkenness. If a man is lazy, the rafters sag; if his hands are idle, the house leaks. A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes life merry, but money is the answer for everything. Do not revile the king even in your thoughts, or curse the rich in your bedroom, because a bird of the air may carry your words, and a bird on the wing may report what you say.

Ecclesiastes 10:01-20

We have cited the entire chapter here. There is virtually no way this can be divided into sections unless you divide it up sentence-by-sentence. The entire chapter consists of a series of proverbs which began in verse 17 of the previous chapter. They are "words of wisdom" that Solomon had collected. We shall, therefore, consider these proverb by proverb.

As dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor. There is a N.T. proverb that is quite similar to this.

Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast--as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.

1 Corinthians 05:06-08

Paul speaks of the yeast (or leaven) of malice and wickedness. Solomon speaks of the yeast of folly. It takes little of any of these to ruin an entire local church. It is sometime rather frightening to think that many people can work long and hard to build up a church or other organization and it takes only a few a few hours to tear it down!

Solomon is here advising us to look out for dead flies. We we started the church, it was our prayer that God would be a faithful exterminator and remove the bad flies from the church before they caused harm. He has, on a number of occasions!

The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left. Today the right is associated with conservatism and the left with liberalism. What does Solomon mean by these word? First, they are many passages like the ones below.

So be careful to do what the LORD your God has commanded you; do not turn aside to the right or to the left.

Deuteronomy 05:32

Act according to the law they teach you and the decisions they give you. Do not turn aside from what they tell you, to the right or to the left.

Deuteronomy 17:11

On the other hand (pun not intended), we have the following verses.

Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor.

Proverbs 03:16

Speaking of wisdom, Solomon says that if you seek long life, it is in her right hand. The left only holds riches and honor - which pass away. When Abraham and Lot seperated, Abraham said,

Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left."

Genesis 13:09

Lot went to the left, Abraham to the right. You know the rest of the story. There there is the rather gory story in Judges.

Ehud reached with his left hand, drew the sword from his right thigh and plunged it into the king's belly.

Judges 03:21

He was able to kill the king because one did not normally worry about the left hand, only the right. The right hand was the one which one feared.

And Joseph took both of them, Ephraim on his right toward Israel's left hand and Manasseh on his left toward Israel's right hand, and brought them close to him.

Genesis 48:13

Joseph wished to have Manasseh receive the greater blessing in the above verse, but Jacob laid his right hand on Ephriam.

In any case, the standard dictionary will tell us the real significance. The basic definition for right is "straight". When used in the ethical sense, it refers to that which is correct or, hence righteous. The definition for left stems from the concept of "weak". The left hand is (normally) the weaker hand and hence the "wrong hand" to use. It is the "incorrect hand". It is what is "left" after you select what is right.

This may be summed up in the verses to follow.

learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.

Isaiah 01:17

Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the LORD'S anger.

Zephaniah 02:03

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Matthew 06:33

Even as he walks along the road, the fool lacks sense and shows everyone how stupid he is. The KJV says that he "saith to everyone" rather than "shows". there is the old joke that says if you keep your mouth shut people may think you are a fool - if you open it they will know it! The KJV does not imply that a fool goes around and says "I am foolish!", it implies that what he says with his mouth shows that he is foolish.

There are many foolish Christians. Paul says so.

But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

1 Corinthians 01:27

God chose the foolish things of the world but he does not intend us to remain that way. Some do.

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?

Galatians 03:01-03

We are not to remain as foolish Christians. Paul writes . . .

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.

Ephesians 05:03-04

Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

Ephesians 05:17

Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels.

2 Timothy 02:23

On the other hand, according to James, there should be no problem in our obtainment

of wisdom.

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.

James 01:05

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

James 03:13-17

If a ruler's anger rises against you, do not leave your post; calmness can lay great errors to rest. Next, Solomon deals with the anger of a ruler. The key word here is calmness. Solomon uses the same word a number of times in Proverbs.

My son, pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to a man's whole body.

Proverbs 04:20-22

Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

Proverbs 12:18

A wicked messenger falls into trouble, but a trustworthy envoy brings healing.

Proverbs 13:17

A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones.

Proverbs 14:30

The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit.

Proverbs 15:04

Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.

Proverbs 16:24

Note that nearly all of these passages deal with the tongue. Let's turn to the N.T.

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour;

1 Timothy 02:01-03

There is an evil I have seen under the sun, the sort of error that arises from a ruler: Fools are put in many high positions, while the rich occupy the low ones. I do not want to get into specific politics here, but Solomon could have written this today. One of Parkinson's Laws is that people advance in an organization until they reach a level where they are not competent to serve. This seems especially true of government offices. This is not to say that there are no intelligent and wise people in high places. There are, however, some that surely ought not to be where they are. They get there by various devious means.

I think it might be shown that virtually no one gets into high political positions who is really straight and true in all dealings. This is not to say these people are totally corrupt. It does mean that most of them have had to make compromises at points along the way.

Solomon further explains this with the following statement. *I have seen slaves on horseback, while princes go on foot like slaves.*

Next, Solomon states four parallel adages.

- 1) *Whoever digs a pit may fall into it.*
- 2) *Whoever breaks through a wall may be bitten by a snake.*
- 3) *Whoever quarries stones may be injured by them.*
- 4) *Whoever splits logs may be endangered by them.*

These sense of three of these is fairly clear - a person may be injured in doing his work. The one regarding the wall is not as clear. There are four O.T. references to the act of breaking through a wall.

Why have you broken down its walls so that all who pass by pick its grapes?

Psalm 80:12

Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled.

Isaiah 05:05

In both of these cases it was God who broke down the wall (KJV=hedge) around Israel and invalidated her protection.

You have not gone up to the breaks in the wall to repair it for the house of Israel so that it will stand firm in the battle on the day of the LORD.

Ezekiel 13:05

"I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none.

Ezekiel 22:30

In both of these cases the wall is still broken and no one will step in to mend it. It would appear that the process of breaking through a wall is not a noble one. It is not an

occupation in which one should be engaged. The fact that a serpent (snake) is the Bible usually refers to Satan would indicate that the man who breaks down a wall will be caught up by Satan.

Now if breaking through a wall is not something we should do, what about the other three acts? Let's consider each of them. The Hebrew word her used for pit is not used elsewhere in the Bible. The verb, however, is. It is found in two connotations, the first of which is not very pleasant, the other is not good.

Designate a place outside the camp where you can go to relieve yourself. As part of your equipment have something to dig with, and when you relieve yourself, dig a hole and cover up your excrement.

Deuteronomy 23:12-13

I really doubt that this is what Solomon had in mind. In fact, the implication here is that of a hole too small for one to have trouble with. But the other connection is found below.

He who is pregnant with evil and conceives trouble gives birth to disillusionment. He who digs a hole and scoops it out falls into the pit he has made. The trouble he causes recoils on himself; his violence comes down on his own head.

Psalms 7:14-16

May those who seek my life be disgraced and put to shame; may those who plot my ruin be turned back in dismay. May they be like chaff before the wind, with the angel of the LORD driving them away; may their path be dark and slippery, with the angel of the LORD pursuing them. Since they hid their net for me without cause and without cause dug a pit for me, may ruin overtake them by surprise--may the net they hid entangle them, may they fall into the pit, to their ruin.

Psalms 35:04-08

Again, the advice is with respect to doing things one ought not to do. Turning to the situation with the stones. There is a difference between the KJV interpretation and the NIV. Where the NIV has *quarries stones*, the KJV has *removeth stones*. The implication of the latter is to tear something down rather than to get new stones. The only other Biblical reference is below.

At the king's command they removed from the quarry large blocks of quality stone to provide a foundation of dressed stone for the temple.

1 Kings 05:17

To decide which is correct, we shall move on to the wood. The NIV has split logs which is more of an interpretation than a translation. The same expression is found in two other places:

Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about.

Genesis 22:03

The cart came to the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh, and there it stopped beside a large rock. The people chopped up the wood of the cart and sacrificed the cows as a burnt offering to the LORD.

1 Samuel 06:14

In the later passage, the word is definitely used to tear something down and to destroy it (although for a good purpose in the above). In the first passage it refers to hewing wood that is to be burned.

It all comes down to this. The common factor is that (1) all four actions are actions which destroy and (2) actions which are dangerous, and (3) actions in which we should not engage. We, as Christians should not engage in any practice that tears down or destroys. We should not if for no other reason than that it may destroy us!

From the N.T. we learn the following.

If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died.

Romans 14:15

Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble.

Romans 14:20

If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.

1 Corinthians 03:17

For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it.

Galatians 01:13

Next Solomon has the following proverb. *If the ax is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed but skill will bring success.* This passage is difficult to interpret correctly. The Hebrew text is so abstract that there is little to compare it with for the purpose of obtaining its meaning. We shall pursue its meaning by first noting its context with the last proverb, that of hewing wood.

Axes get dull, if you use them a lot, they dull quite quickly. Now there are two types of people who might use the axe. There are the foolish who, as the axe gets duller and duller, compensate by working harder and harder. On the other hand, the wise, skilled users of the axe, will stop periodically and sharpen it.

The Hebrew does not mention axe specifically, it simply refers to things fashioned out of iron. It would equally well be applied to a sword or other sharp instrument.

Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Ephesians 06:17

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Hebrews 04:12

As Christians, we have a sword to yield. Many of us go about with dull swords and work hard with little success. The sword is the Word of God and we make it more keen by continually studying and reviewing it. Properly used, when it is in the hands of one skilled with its use, it can be used as described above. Without proper training, it is no more effective than a dull sword or axe.

If a snake bites before it is charmed, there is no profit for the charmer.

This may be the beginning of the need for warranties on the things we buy. If you buy something to use for your business and for your pleasure, and it becomes unusable before it is put to use, there is no gain in getting it. Finding parallel references to this is somewhat futile.

"See, I will send venomous snakes among you, vipers that cannot be charmed, and they will bite you," declares the LORD.

Jeremiah 08:17

Again, the snake or serpent in the Scriptures usually refers to Satan. If you have no power to put Satan in his place before he gets a grip on you, there is "no profit".

To you, O LORD, I called; to the Lord I cried for mercy: "What gain is there in my destruction, in my going down into the pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it proclaim your faithfulness?

Psalms 30:08-09

What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?

Mark 08:36

Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all.

Galatians 05:02

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?

James 02:14-16

Words from a wise man's mouth are gracious, but a fool is consumed by his own lips. At the beginning his words are folly; at the end they are wicked madness-- and the fool multiplies words. It would appear to be a good rule of thumb to say that the one who has the most to say has the least to give. As a wise man will state the facts and let the hearer take advantage of the words. The ignorant will go on and on trying to make his point. This has come up twice before.

As a dream comes when there are many cares, so the speech of a fool when there are many words.

Ecclesiastes 05:03

Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore stand in awe of God.

Ecclesiastes 05:07

and Jesus makes the point also.

And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.

Matthew 06:07

No one knows what is coming--who can tell him what will happen after him?

This concept was covered in Chapter 6, verse 12.

A fool's work wearies him; he does not know the way to town.

What this proverb means is certainly rather abstract. We cite the following passage as the only example in the O.T. that fits this description.

As the enemy came down toward him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, "Strike these people with blindness." So he struck them with blindness, as Elisha had asked. Elisha told them, "This is not the road and this is not the city. Follow me, and I will lead you to the man you are looking for." And he led them to Samaria. After they entered the city, Elisha said, "LORD, open the eyes of these men so they can see." Then the LORD opened their eyes and they looked, and there they were, inside Samaria.

2 Kings 06:18-20

Here, the enemies of Judah were seeking to reach Jerusalem. Elisha requested that their eyes be blinded (probanly not in the normal sense, but in the sense that they did not comprehend where they were) and led them off into Samaria.

If you consider the fool to be the unsaved and take this proverb spiritually, you end up with the following.

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

Hebrews 11:08-10

Abraham sought for the city, the heavenly city. He did not seek in vain for we are told the following.

Instead, they were longing for a better country--a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

Hebrews 11:16

As wise people and as saved people, then, the following words apply.

For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.

Hebrews 13:14

Woe to you, O land whose king was a servant and whose princes feast in the morning. Blessed are you, O land whose king is of noble birth and whose princes eat at a proper time--for strength and not for drunkenness. Here Solomon presents an interesting contrast. The first is a king whose aides feast in the morning. Now what is wrong with that? I have several bowls of Product 19 every morning. This is not the type of feast Solomon speaks of. On my way to church most Sunday mornings, I drive past two bars and I regularly observe people going in at 8AM to get drunk - to "feast on wine." This is what Solomon speaks of. He speaks of a king whose aides are continually drunk. This is in contrast to a king whose aides eat a proper diet so that they may serve effectively.

They set out at noon while Ben-Hadad and the 32 kings allied with him were in their tents getting drunk.

1 Kings 20:16

Here is a case where drunkenness on the part of the king's aides led to the downfall of the king. Solomon has another proverb concerning this.

Listen, my son, and be wise, and keep your heart on the right path. Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat, for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags.

Proverbs 23:19-21

Turning to the N.T., we have the following advice.

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

Ephesians 05:18

and

*You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get **{drunk}**, get **{drunk}** at night.*

1 Thessalonians 05:05-07

The proverb we are considering has to do with the king's aides. Thus, let us be a bit more specific.

Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

1 Timothy 03:02-03

Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless--not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.

Titus 01:07

While these passages deal with the elders, they apply to all who are "aides of the King."

If a man is lazy, the rafters sag; if his hands are idle, the house leaks.

It is hardly necessary to comment on this proverb. The two hebrew words here translated lazy and idle are rare. We find the first in one other verse.

Laziness brings on deep sleep, and the shiftless man goes hungry.

Proverbs 19:15

Turning to the N.T., we find some important application of this.

"His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

Matthew 25:26-27

The Lord does not look for lazy servants.

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

Romans 12:10-11

He expects us to not be lacking in zeal. Finally, . . .

God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

Hebrews 06:10-12

As Christians, we need to practice diligence and not become lazy. It is this way that we inherit what has been promised. What is that? Not eternal life, that is the gift of God. No, the promise spoken here is not that of eternal life, but of rewards that we will receive.

Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.

1 Corinthians 09:25

Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules.

2 Timothy 02:05

Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

2 Timothy 04:08

Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

James 01:12

And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

1 Peter 05:04

A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes life merry, but money is the answer for everything. Now, the first part of this proverb is understandable, but money is the answer for everything? We are told not to lay up treasures on earth. We are told that the love of money is the root of all evil. What on earth is Solomon talking about?

Let us be more precise. Paul says it is the love of money that is the root of all evil - not the money itself. In a passage above, we saw where the slothful servant was rebuked by not investing his money wisely. Indeed, a church, a mission board, nor any other Christian endeavor can go forth with out money. Paul writes . . .

Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem.

1 Corinthians 16:01-03

I do not know if it is because of Paul's remarks about the "love of money" that seems to make Christians think that money is bad and not a concern of the Christian or if it is just stinginess on the part of many Christians.

Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

2 Corinthians 09:07

Do not revile the king even in your thoughts, or curse the rich in your bedroom, because a bird of the air may carry your words, and a bird on the wing may report what you say. Did you ever hear the expression "A little birdie told me?" Now you know that it is Biblical. A more modern expression is that "walls have ears."

The words revile and curse, while being correct translations of the Hebrew word **galal** (קלל), its prime root means to make light of, and hence may not necessarily refer to strong cursing. As Christians, we should never say anything against another person unless it becomes necessary to do so. The process for doing such is given us by Christ Himself.

"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But

if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

Matthew 18:15-17

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it again. Give portions to seven, yes to eight, for you do not know what disaster may come upon the land. If clouds are full of water, they pour rain upon the earth. Whether a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where it falls, there will it lie. Whoever watches the wind will not plant; whoever looks at the clouds will not reap. As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother's womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things.

Ecclesiastes 11:01-05

Again, we have a rapid sequence of proverbs in this chapter. The first two are parallel.

Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it again.

and

Give portions to seven, yes to eight, for you do not know what disaster may come upon the land.

Both of these have a parallel in the N.T.

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. "Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

Matthew 07:07-12

Solomon is telling us to share what we have with others - while we have it to share. there may come a day when we are in want and we will receive back what we spread abroad. He may be saying more than this.

Consider the metaphore of casting bread upon the waters. There is a very literal interpretation of this that has gone on in recent years. Year-after-year we see U.S. merchant ships, laden with U.S. grain, headed to countries in need of food. So the proverb not only has personal significance, but national as well.

The second proverb may also have an additional interpretation. If one has much money, he or she is ill advised if all of the wealth is placed in one bank, one commodity, etc. Financial people tell you to diversify your assets. You may interpret this in the spiritual realm as well.

If clouds are full of water, they pour rain upon the earth. What on earth does Solomon mean by this? I have seen clouds which were (apparently) full of water yet they

brought no rain. Besides, what if they do? What do we learn from this? Let's look at what comes next. *Whether a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where it falls, there will it lie.* This makes even less sense!

Let's now go back to the first. Solomon says "if a cloud is full of water" it will bring rain. Solomon is not speaking here as a physicist. I do not think the term has any physical meaning. What it does mean is that if the conditions are right, the cloud will bring rain. If the conditions are not right (i.e. the cloud is not full) it will not. We can not make it rain or keep it from raining. We have tried seeding the clouds to bring rain, but with little success.

When a tree falls, we have no more control on its direction of fall than we do with the cloud. So, then, consider what Solomon says next.

Whoever watches the wind will not plant; whoever looks at the clouds will not reap. Solomon says that we should not base our actions upon things over which we have no control. If you wait until the wind or the clouds are just right before you plant, you will be planting very little. When do you plant then? You plant when God directs you to plant.

We should not get carried away with the physical significance of this. The spiritual is what is of importance.

I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.

1 Corinthians 03:06

We never know when a seed planted will be watered by another and, someday, God will cause that seed to grow. This is why Paul writes to Timothy . . .

Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction.

2 Timothy 04:02

Do not just plant seed when the "seasons" are right, when you see that there are clouds to bring rain for the seed, be read out of season.

Solomon sums this up in the next sentence. *As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother's womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things.* It is God that does the work. It is somewhat like the old adage,

*Mine is not to reason why,
Mine is just to do or die.*

Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let not your hands be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well.

Ecclesiastes 11:06

As we noted above, we are to be ready to sow at any time. This verse reminds us of one of Jesus' better known parables...

"A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown."

Luke 08:05-08a

Light is sweet, and it pleases the eyes to see the sun. However many years a man may live, let him enjoy them all. But let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. Everything to come is meaningless. Be happy, young man, while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment. So then, banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body, for youth and vigor are meaningless.

Ecclesiastes 11:07-10

While Solomon here is speaking on a humanistic theme, there is still a spiritual lesson to be learned. He begins with *light is sweet, and it pleases the eyes to see the sun*. Think about how you feel after several weeks of gloomy wet weather and you arise one morning to a beautiful sunrise. In a case like this, Solomon's words are certainly appropriate.

We can carry the same concept into the spiritual realm. We may have a string of spiritually dark rainy days. Days when nothing is right, our relationship with God is not as it should be. But then there comes a restoration when we fell right with God and all is well. What Solomon is saying is good advice. When these days come, savor them, hold onto them, enjoy them.

Why is this important? *But let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many*. As much as we like the bright sunny days, we are not destined to have many of them here on earth. Read the N.T. Carefully.

"You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.

Mark 13:09-11

Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

Romans 12:12

Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.

2 Corinthians 08:02

We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.

2 Thessalonians 01:03-04

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.

James 01:02-03

Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

James 01:12

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

1 Peter 01:06-07

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.

1 Peter 04:12-16

If you have no trials and afflictions as a Christian, you ought to carefully examine your walk with the Lord. Satan does not bother with those who are no threat to him. We will have many dark days with little sun. We should, then, all the more rejoice when the bright days come.

However many years a man may live, let him enjoy them all. Solomon goes so far as to say that we should enjoy them all, the bad days as well as the good. Paul said the same thing . . . But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

Solomon concludes this chapter with the words that follows. *Everything to come is meaningless. Be happy, young man, while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment. So then, banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body, for youth and vigor are meaningless.*

How can he say that the days of our lives are emptiness? They are! What we do in the flesh is meaningless. Only what we accomplish in the heavenly realm is of lasting

value. When we go through days of affliction and trials, everything looks totally meaningless - unless we keep our eyes on Jesus and realize that God is allowing these days for our good.

The last part of this turns out to be practical advice. Noe everything we do as Christians is furthering the Gospel. If we go to the beach for a swim(?) or a tan, that is only for our own enjoyment. If we go fishing or golfing or a myriad of other things, again, they are for our enjoyment. Solomon says, "Go ahead and enjoy these pleasures, but remember that this is all that they are." When we go before the Judgement Seat of Christ, it is what we do for Him that will really matter.

Don't feel guilty for doing something for your own enjoyment unless this is all you do. God does not intend for us to work continually with no break for some relaxation. As the old saying goes, "he who does not come apart once in a while will soon fall apart."

CHAPTER TWELVE

Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, "I find no pleasure in them"-- before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain; when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men stoop, when the grinders cease because they are few, and those looking through the windows grow dim; when the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades; when men rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint; when men are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets; when the almond tree blossoms and the grasshopper drags himself along and desire no longer is stirred. Then man goes to his eternal home and mourners go about the streets. Remember him--before the silver cord is severed, or the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, or the wheel broken at the well, and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Everything is meaningless!"

Ecclesiastes 12:01-08

The key word here is youth. Let me describe the days of our lives as I see them.

- 1) Age 0 to 10: Life is a bed a roses, everything is perfect (unless we don't get fed on time or something like that.)
- 2) Age 10 to 20: Life is not perfect because man has messed it up. But, "not to

- worry", the next generation will fix it.
- 3) Age 20 to 30: Life is good, We can work on the things that mar its perfection.
 - 4) Age 30 to 50: Life is not so good. We can fix some things, the rest we will have to learn to live with.
 - 5) Age 50 to 70: Life is for the birds. There is little that can be fixed without messing something else up. The best we can do is learn to persever.
 - 6) Age 70 on: Come quickly, Lord Jesus.

This view may be a bit pessimistic, but reflects that change in attitude that one undergoes as age comes upon him or her.

Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, "I find no pleasure in them." Statistics have shown that very few people come to Christ over the age of 30 or so. Solomon say to look to God while you are still young. It is much easier to accept Christ's claims as a young person than as an old. As we grow older, there are more and more experiences which Satan puts in our way to make acceptance of Christ harder. As we grow older and see the suffering, the injustices, and wrong doings in the world, as Solomon has described them so vividly in this book, it is so much easier to say "There can not be a God who would let all this happen."

The older we get, the more the unsaved tend to agree with Solomon, "Vanity of Vanity, all is Vanity!"

Remember him . . . Solomon concludes this section, then with the adice that we should rememebr him, that is , our Creator, before . . .

- 1) . . . *the silver cord is severed,*
- 2) . . . *the golden bowl is broken;*
- 3) . . . *before the pitcher is shattered at the spring,*
- 4) . . . *the wheel broken at the well,*
- 5) . . . *the dust returns to the ground it came from,*
- 6) . . . *the spirit returns to God who gave it.*

Let us consider each of these events that Solomon notes. First, the silver cord.

So she let them down by a rope through the window, for the house she lived in was part of the city wall.

Joshua 02:15

The spies who spied out Jricho were saved by a cord which was used to lower them from a window.

So Ebed-Melech took the men with him and went to a room under the treasury in the palace. He took some old rags and worn-out clothes from there and let them down with ropes to Jeremiah in the cistern. Ebed-Melech the Cushite said to Jeremiah, "Put these old rags and worn-out clothes under your arms to pad the ropes." Jeremiah did so, and they pulled him up with the ropes and lifted him out of the cistern. And Jeremiah remained in the courtyard of the guard.

Jeremiah 38:11-13

Jeremiah, the Prophet, was saved from a cistern by being drawn up by a cord.

In Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me. But I was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and slipped through his hands.

2 Corinthians 11:32-33

The same experience is recorded by Paul. In all of these cases the common factor is that their lives were saved by a cord. One might say their life hung by a thread.

God holds His people by cords. With reference to Israel He says

Look upon Zion, the city of our festivals; your eyes will see Jerusalem, a peaceful abode, a tent that will not be moved; its stakes will never be pulled up, nor any of its ropes broken.

Isaiah 33:20

and it is also written,

I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them.

Hosea 11:04

When the cord breaks, an object suspended by it falls. When the cord which holds man up is broken, he falls, all the way to Hell.

Next, we have the golden bowl which is broken. The Hebrew word here translated bowl is not found often in the O.T. and has various translations.

She replied, "Do me a special favor. Since you have given me land in the Negev, give me also springs of water." So Caleb gave her the upper and lower springs.

Joshua 15:19

In order to interpret this correctly, we must take it along with the next two things. There is the pitcher shattered at the spring and the wheel broken at the well. Taken altogether, we have items which are associated with man's ability to obtain water.

This leads us to the N.T. reference.

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?" Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

John 04:07-14

These three items, taken together are the source of life, whether physical or spiritual. Without means of obtaining water, man will die, both physically and spiritually. This leads to the dust.

The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Genesis 02:07

By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

Genesis 03:19

*All go to the same place; all come from ****{dust}****, and to dust all return.*

Ecclesiastes 03:20

This is the final step to death - humansly speaking. Had Solomon stopped here, we would have been most miserable. But there is one more step.

The spirit returns to God who gave it. Dust is not the end. There is no end for man. The body may return to dust, the spirit lives on, in heaven or in Hell.

Solomon concludes the body of this book where he began. *"Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Everything is meaningless!"* He then goes on with an addendum.

Not only was the Teacher wise, but also he imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true. The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails--given by one Shepherd. Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them. Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body. Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter:

Ecclesiastes 12:09-14

We have talked about Solomon's wisdom. We have seen evidence of it in this book. He adds to the end of this book a few notes. He tells us his intentions were to impart knowledge. We have not done our part of the job if we have not learned from this book.

Solomon says *he pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true.* This is why we have the book of Proverbs and why we have many proverbs in this book. What Solomon says next would make one believe that he had just stepped out of the local Bible Bookstore. *Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body. Now all has been heard;* One can find row after row of books in Bible stores today. You can find books on just about any subject under the sun - except the

Bible. You can hardly find a Bible in a bookstore today. You can hardly find any works that are an aid in the study of the Bible. There are just a whole lot of books whose study wearies the body. Solomon says, all has been heard. We do not need more books. We have all we need.

So, we have reached the bottom line. *Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.*

There is no more to be said. This is it. Solomon has set down many words, but these say it all.

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