

Ecclesiastes

or, *The Preacher*

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

²“Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher; “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.” ³What does man gain from all his labor in which he labors under the sun? ⁴One generation goes, and another generation comes; but the earth remains forever. ⁵The sun also rises, and the sun goes down, and hurries to its place where it rises. ⁶The wind goes toward the south, and turns around to the north. It turns around continually as it goes, and the wind returns again to its courses. ⁷All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full. To the place where the rivers flow, there they flow again. ⁸All things are full of weariness beyond uttering. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. ⁹That which has been

is that which shall be; and that which has been done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun. ¹⁰Is there a thing of which it may be said, “Behold,^a this is new?” It has been long ago, in the ages which were before us. ¹¹There is no memory of the former; neither shall there be any memory of the latter that are to come, among those that shall come after.

¹²I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. ¹³I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under the sky. It is a heavy burden that God^b has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with. ¹⁴I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and behold, all is vanity and a chasing after wind. ¹⁵That which is crooked can't be made straight; and that which is lacking can't be counted.

^a 1:10 “Behold”, from “הִנֵּה”, means look at, take notice, observe, see, or gaze at. It is often used as an interjection. ^b 1:13 The Hebrew word rendered “God” is “אֱלֹהִים” (Elohim).

¹⁶I said to myself, “Behold, I have obtained for myself great wisdom above all who were before me in Jerusalem. Yes, my heart has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.” ¹⁷I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also was a chasing after wind. ¹⁸For in much wisdom is much grief; and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.

2 I said in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with mirth: therefore enjoy pleasure;” and behold, this also was vanity. ²I said of laughter, “It is foolishness;” and of mirth, “What does it accomplish?”

³I searched in my heart how to cheer my flesh with wine, my heart yet guiding me with wisdom, and how to lay hold of folly, until I might see what it was good for the sons of men that they should do under heaven all the days of their lives. ⁴I made myself great works. I built myself houses. I planted myself vineyards. ⁵I made myself gardens and parks, and I planted trees in them of all kinds of fruit. ⁶I made myself pools of water, to water the forest where trees were grown. ⁷I bought male servants and female servants, and had servants born in my house. I also had great possessions of herds and flocks, above all who

were before me in Jerusalem. ⁸I also gathered silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and of the provinces. I got myself male and female singers, and the delights of the sons of men: musical instruments, and that of all sorts. ⁹So I was great, and increased more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also remained with me. ¹⁰Whatever my eyes desired, I didn’t keep from them. I didn’t withhold my heart from any joy, for my heart rejoiced because of all my labor, and this was my portion from all my labor. ¹¹Then I looked at all the works that my hands had worked, and at the labor that I had labored to do; and behold, all was vanity and a chasing after wind, and there was no profit under the sun.

¹²I turned myself to consider wisdom, madness, and folly; for what can the king’s successor do? Just that which has been done long ago. ¹³Then I saw that wisdom excels folly, as far as light excels darkness. ¹⁴The wise man’s eyes are in his head, and the fool walks in darkness—and yet I perceived that one event happens to them all. ¹⁵Then I said in my heart, “As it happens to the fool, so will it happen even to me; and why was I then more wise?” Then I said in my heart that this also is vanity. ¹⁶For of the wise man, even as of the

fool, there is no memory forever, since in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. Indeed, the wise man must die just like the fool!

¹⁷So I hated life, because the work that is worked under the sun was grievous to me; for all is vanity and a chasing after wind. ¹⁸I hated all my labor in which I labored under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who comes after me. ¹⁹Who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have rule over all of my labor in which I have labored, and in which I have shown myself wise under the sun. This also is vanity.

²⁰Therefore I began to cause my heart to despair concerning all the labor in which I had labored under the sun. ²¹For there is a man whose labor is with wisdom, with knowledge, and with skillfulness; yet he shall leave it for his portion to a man who has not labored for it. This also is vanity and a great evil. ²²For what does a man have of all his labor and of the striving of his heart, in which he labors under the sun? ²³For all his days are sorrows, and his travail is grief; yes, even in the night his heart takes no rest. This also is vanity. ²⁴There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and make his soul enjoy good in his labor. This also I saw, that it is from

the hand of God. ²⁵For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I? ²⁶For to the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy; but to the sinner he gives travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him who pleases God. This also is vanity and a chasing after wind.

3 For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven:

²a time to be born,
and a time to die;
a time to plant,
and a time to pluck up that
which is planted;

³a time to kill,
and a time to heal;
a time to break down,
and a time to build up;

⁴a time to weep,
and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn,
and a time to dance;

⁵a time to cast away stones,
and a time to gather
stones together;
a time to embrace,
and a time to refrain from
embracing;

⁶a time to seek,
and a time to lose;
a time to keep,
and a time to cast away;

⁷a time to tear,
and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence,

and a time to speak;
⁸a time to love,
and a time to hate;
a time for war,
and a time for peace.

⁹What profit has he who works in that in which he labors? ¹⁰I have seen the burden which God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with. ¹¹He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in their hearts, yet so that man can't find out the work that God has done from the beginning even to the end. ¹²I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice, and to do good as long as they live. ¹³Also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy good in all his labor, is the gift of God. ¹⁴I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; and God has done it, that men should fear before him. ¹⁵That which is has been long ago, and that which is to be has been long ago. God seeks again that which is passed away.

¹⁶Moreover I saw under the sun, in the place of justice, that wickedness was there; and in the place of righteousness, that wickedness was there. ¹⁷I said in my heart, "God will judge the righteous and the wicked; for there is a time there for every purpose

and for every work." ¹⁸I said in my heart, "As for the sons of men, God tests them, so that they may see that they themselves are like animals. ¹⁹For that which happens to the sons of men happens to animals. Even one thing happens to them. As the one dies, so the other dies. Yes, they have all one breath; and man has no advantage over the animals; for all is vanity. ²⁰All go to one place. All are from the dust, and all turn to dust again. ²¹Who knows the spirit of man, whether it goes upward, and the spirit of the animal, whether it goes downward to the earth?"

²²Therefore I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his works; for that is his portion: for who can bring him to see what will be after him?

4 Then I returned and saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold, the tears of those who were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter. ²Therefore I praised the dead who have been long dead more than the living who are yet alive. ³Yes, better than them both is him who has not yet been, who has not seen the evil work that is done under the sun. ⁴Then I saw all the labor and achievement that is the envy of a man's neighbor. This

also is vanity and a striving after wind.

⁵The fool folds his hands together and ruins himself. ⁶Better is a handful, with quietness, than two handfuls with labor and chasing after wind.

⁷Then I returned and saw vanity under the sun. ⁸There is one who is alone, and he has neither son nor brother. There is no end to all of his labor, neither are his eyes satisfied with wealth. “For whom then, do I labor and deprive my soul of enjoyment?” This also is vanity. Yes, it is a miserable business.

⁹Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. ¹⁰For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him who is alone when he falls, and doesn’t have another to lift him up. ¹¹Again, if two lie together, then they have warmth; but how can one keep warm alone? ¹²If a man prevails against one who is alone, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

¹³Better is a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who doesn’t know how to receive admonition any more. ¹⁴For out of prison he came out to be king; yes, even in his kingdom he was born poor. ¹⁵I saw all the living who walk under the sun, that they were with the youth, the other,

who succeeded him. ¹⁶There was no end of all the people, even of all them over whom he was—yet those who come after shall not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and a chasing after wind.

5 Guard your steps when you go to God’s house; for to draw near to listen is better than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they don’t know that they do evil. ²Don’t be rash with your mouth, and don’t let your heart be hasty to utter anything before God; for God is in heaven, and you on earth. Therefore let your words be few. ³For as a dream comes with a multitude of cares, so a fool’s speech with a multitude of words. ⁴When you vow a vow to God, don’t defer to pay it; for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay that which you vow. ⁵It is better that you should not vow, than that you should vow and not pay. ⁶Don’t allow your mouth to lead you into sin. Don’t protest before the messenger that this was a mistake. Why should God be angry at your voice, and destroy the work of your hands? ⁷For in the multitude of dreams there are vanities, as well as in many words; but you must fear God.

⁸If you see the oppression of the poor, and the violent taking away of justice and righteousness in a district, don’t marvel at the matter,

for one official is eyed by a higher one, and there are officials over them. ⁹Moreover the profit of the earth is for all. The king profits from the field.

¹⁰He who loves silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he who loves abundance, with increase: this also is vanity. ¹¹When goods increase, those who eat them are increased; and what advantage is there to its owner, except to feast on them with his eyes?

¹²The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eats little or much; but the abundance of the rich will not allow him to sleep.

¹³There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun: wealth kept by its owner to his harm. ¹⁴Those riches perish by misfortune, and if he has fathered a son, there is nothing in his hand. ¹⁵As he came out of his mother's womb, naked shall he go again as he came, and shall take nothing for his labor, which he may carry away in his hand. ¹⁶This also is a grievous evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go. And what profit does he have who labors for the wind? ¹⁷All his days he also eats in darkness, he is frustrated, and has sickness and wrath.

¹⁸Behold, that which I have seen to be good and proper is for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy good in all his labor, in which he labors

under the sun, all the days of his life which God has given him; for this is his portion. ¹⁹Every man also to whom God has given riches and wealth, and has given him power to eat of it, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labor—this is the gift of God. ²⁰For he shall not often reflect on the days of his life; because God occupies him with the joy of his heart.

6 There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is heavy on men: ²a man to whom God gives riches, wealth, and honor, so that he lacks nothing for his soul of all that he desires, yet God gives him no power to eat of it, but an alien eats it. This is vanity, and it is an evil disease.

³If a man fathers a hundred children, and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many, but his soul is not filled with good, and moreover he has no burial; I say that a stillborn child is better than he: ⁴for it comes in vanity, and departs in darkness, and its name is covered with darkness. ⁵Moreover it has not seen the sun nor known it. This has rest rather than the other. ⁶Yes, though he live a thousand years twice told, and yet fails to enjoy good, don't all go to one place? ⁷All the labor of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled. ⁸For what advantage has the wise more than

the fool? What has the poor man, that knows how to walk before the living? ⁹Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire. This also is vanity and a chasing after wind. ¹⁰Whatever has been, its name was given long ago; and it is known what man is; neither can he contend with him who is mightier than he. ¹¹For there are many words that create vanity. What does that profit man? ¹²For who knows what is good for man in life, all the days of his vain life which he spends like a shadow? For who can tell a man what will be after him under the sun?

7 A good name is better than fine perfume; and the day of death better than the day of one's birth. ²It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting; for that is the end of all men, and the living should take this to heart. ³Sorrow is better than laughter; for by the sadness of the face the heart is made good. ⁴The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. ⁵It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than for a man to hear the song of fools. ⁶For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool. This also is vanity. ⁷Surely extortion makes the wise man foolish; and a bribe destroys the understanding.

⁸Better is the end of a thing than its beginning.

The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. ⁹Don't be hasty in your spirit to be angry, for anger rests in the bosom of fools. ¹⁰Don't say, "Why were the former days better than these?" For you do not ask wisely about this.

¹¹Wisdom is as good as an inheritance. Yes, it is more excellent for those who see the sun. ¹²For wisdom is a defense, even as money is a defense; but the excellency of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of him who has it.

¹³Consider the work of God, for who can make that straight, which he has made crooked? ¹⁴In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider; yes, God has made the one side by side with the other, to the end that man should not find out anything after him.

¹⁵All this I have seen in my days of vanity: there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who lives long in his evildoing. ¹⁶Don't be overly righteous, neither make yourself overly wise. Why should you destroy yourself? ¹⁷Don't be too wicked, neither be foolish. Why should you die before your time? ¹⁸It is good that you should take hold of this. Yes, also don't

withdraw your hand from that; for he who fears God will come out of them all. ¹⁹Wisdom is a strength to the wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city. ²⁰Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and doesn't sin. ²¹Also don't take heed to all words that are spoken, lest you hear your servant curse you; ²²for often your own heart knows that you yourself have likewise cursed others. ²³All this I have proved in wisdom. I said, "I will be wise;" but it was far from me. ²⁴That which is, is far off and exceedingly deep. Who can find it out? ²⁵I turned around, and my heart sought to know and to search out, and to seek wisdom and the scheme of things, and to know that wickedness is stupidity, and that foolishness is madness.

²⁶I find more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and traps, whose hands are chains. Whoever pleases God shall escape from her; but the sinner will be ensnared by her.

²⁷"Behold, I have found this," says the Preacher, "to one another, to find out the scheme ²⁸which my soul still seeks, but I have not found. I have found one man among a thousand, but I have not found a woman among all those. ²⁹Behold, I have only found this: that God made man upright; but they search for many schemes."

8 Who is like the wise man? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? A man's wisdom makes his face shine, and the hardness of his face is changed. ²I say, "Keep the king's command!" because of the oath to God. ³Don't be hasty to go out of his presence. Don't persist in an evil thing, for he does whatever pleases him, ⁴for the king's word is supreme. Who can say to him, "What are you doing?" ⁵Whoever keeps the commandment shall not come to harm, and his wise heart will know the time and procedure. ⁶For there is a time and procedure for every purpose, although the misery of man is heavy on him. ⁷For he doesn't know that which will be; for who can tell him how it will be? ⁸There is no man who has power over the spirit to contain the spirit; neither does he have power over the day of death. There is no discharge in war; neither shall wickedness deliver those who practice it.

⁹All this I have seen, and applied my mind to every work that is done under the sun. There is a time in which one man has power over another to his hurt. ¹⁰So I saw the wicked buried. Indeed they came also from holiness. They went and were forgotten in the city where they did this. This also is vanity. ¹¹Because sentence against an evil

work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

¹²Though a sinner commits crimes a hundred times, and lives long, yet surely I know that it will be better with those who fear God, who are reverent before him. ¹³But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he lengthen days like a shadow, because he doesn't fear God.

¹⁴There is a vanity which is done on the earth, that there are righteous men to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked. Again, there are wicked men to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity. ¹⁵Then I commended mirth, because a man has no better thing under the sun than to eat, to drink, and to be joyful: for that will accompany him in his labor all the days of his life which God has given him under the sun.

¹⁶When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done on the earth (even though eyes see no sleep day or night), ¹⁷then I saw all the work of God, that man can't find out the work that is done under the sun, because however much a man labors to seek it out, yet he won't find it. Yes even though a wise man

thinks he can comprehend it, he won't be able to find it.

9 For all this I laid to my heart, even to explore all this: that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God; whether it is love or hatred, man doesn't know it; all is before them. ²All things come alike to all. There is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good, to the clean, to the unclean, to him who sacrifices, and to him who doesn't sacrifice. As is the good, so is the sinner; he who takes an oath, as he who fears an oath. ³This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one event to all: yes also, the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead. ⁴For to him who is joined with all the living there is hope; for a living dog is better than a dead lion. ⁵For the living know that they will die, but the dead don't know anything, neither do they have any more a reward; for their memory is forgotten. ⁶Also their love, their hatred, and their envy has perished long ago; neither do they any longer have a portion forever in anything that is done under the sun.

⁷Go your way—eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine

with a merry heart; for God has already accepted your works. ⁸Let your garments be always white, and don't let your head lack oil. ⁹Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your life of vanity, which he has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity, for that is your portion in life, and in your labor in which you labor under the sun. ¹⁰Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work, nor plan, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in Sheol,^a where you are going.

¹¹I 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 favor to men of skill; but time and chance happen to them all. ¹²For man also doesn't know his time. As the fish that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare, even so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falls suddenly on them.

¹³I have also seen wisdom under the sun in this way, and it seemed great to me. ¹⁴There was a little city, and few men within it; and a great king came against it, besieged it, and built great bulwarks against

it. ¹⁵Now a poor wise man was found in it, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man. ¹⁶Then I said, "Wisdom is better than strength." Nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard. ¹⁷The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the cry of him who rules among fools. ¹⁸Wisdom is better than weapons of war; but one sinner destroys much good.

10 Dead flies cause the oil of the perfumer to produce an evil odor; so does a little folly outweigh wisdom and honor.

²A wise man's heart is at his right hand, but a fool's heart at his left.

³Yes also when the fool walks by the way, his understanding fails him, and he says to everyone that he is a fool. ⁴If the spirit of the ruler rises up against you, don't leave your place; for gentleness lays great offenses to rest.

⁵There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, the sort of error which proceeds from the ruler.

^a 9:10 Sheol is the place of the dead.

⁶Folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in a low place. ⁷I have seen servants on horses, and princes walking like servants on the earth. ⁸He who digs a pit may fall into it; and whoever breaks through a wall may be bitten by a snake. ⁹Whoever carves out stones may be injured by them. Whoever splits wood may be endangered by it. ¹⁰If the ax is blunt, and one doesn't sharpen the edge, then he must use more strength; but skill brings success.

¹¹If the snake bites before it is charmed, then is there no profit for the charmer's tongue. ¹²The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious; but a fool is swallowed by his own lips. ¹³The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness; and the end of his talk is mischievous madness. ¹⁴A fool also multiplies words.

Man doesn't know what will be; and that which will be after him, who can tell him? ¹⁵The labor of fools wearies every one of them; for he doesn't know how to go to the city.

¹⁶Woe to you, land, when
your king is a child,
and your princes eat in
the morning!

¹⁷Happy are you, land, when
your king is the son
of nobles,
and your princes eat in
due season,
for strength, and not for
drunkenness!

¹⁸By slothfulness the roof
sinks in;
and through idleness of the
hands the house leaks.

¹⁹A feast is made for laughter,
and wine makes the life glad;
and money is the answer
for all things.

²⁰Don't curse the king, no, not
in your thoughts;
and don't curse the rich in
your bedroom:
for a bird of the sky may
carry your voice,
and that which has wings
may tell the matter.

11 Cast your bread on the
waters;
for you shall find it after
many days.

²Give a portion to seven, yes,
even to eight;
for you don't know what evil
will be on the earth.

³If the clouds are full of rain,
they empty themselves
on the earth;

and if a tree falls toward
the south, or toward
the north,
in the place where the tree
falls, there shall it be.
⁴He who observes the wind
won't sow;
and he who regards the
clouds won't reap.
⁵As you don't know what is
the way of the wind,
nor how the bones grow
in the womb of her
who is with child;
even so you don't know
the work of God who
does all.
⁶In the morning sow your seed,
and in the evening don't
withhold your hand;
for you don't know which
will prosper, whether
this or that,
or whether they both will
be equally good.
⁷Truly the light is sweet,
and it is a pleasant thing for
the eyes to see the sun.
⁸Yes, if a man lives many
years, let him rejoice
in them all;
but let him remember the
days of darkness, for
they shall be many.
All that comes is vanity.
⁹Rejoice, young man, in
your youth,

and let your heart cheer
you in the days of
your youth,
and walk in the ways of
your heart,
and in the sight of your eyes;
but know that for all these
things God will bring
you into judgment.
¹⁰Therefore remove sorrow
from your heart,
and put away evil from
your flesh;
for youth and the dawn of
life are vanity.

12 Remember also your
Creator in the days of your
youth,

before the evil days
come, and the years
draw near,
when you will say, "I have
no pleasure in them;"
²Before the sun, the light, the
moon, and the stars
are darkened,
and the clouds return after
the rain;
³in the day when the
keepers of the house
shall tremble,
and the strong men shall
bow themselves,
and the grinders cease
because they are few,
and those who look out of the
windows are darkened,

⁴and the doors shall be shut
in the street;
when the sound of the
grinding is low,
and one shall rise up at the
voice of a bird,
and all the daughters
of music shall be
brought low;
⁵yes, they shall be afraid
of heights,
and terrors will be on
the way;
and the almond tree
shall blossom,
and the grasshopper shall
be a burden,
and desire shall fail;
because man goes to his
everlasting home,
and the mourners go about
the streets:
⁶before the silver cord
is severed,
or the golden bowl is broken,
or the pitcher is broken at
the spring,
or the wheel broken at
the cistern,
⁷and the dust returns to the
earth as it was,

and the spirit returns to God
who gave it.

⁸“Vanity of vanities,” says
the Preacher.

“All is vanity!”

⁹Further, because the Preacher
was wise, he still taught the people
knowledge. Yes, he pondered,
sought out, and set in order
many proverbs. ¹⁰The Preacher
sought to find out acceptable
words, and that which was written
blamelessly, words of truth.
¹¹The words of the wise are like
goads; and like nails well fastened
are words from the masters of
assemblies, which are given from
one shepherd. ¹²Furthermore, my
son, be admonished: of making
many books there is no end; and
much study is a weariness of the
flesh.

¹³This is the end of the matter.
All has been heard. Fear God and
keep his commandments; for this
is the whole duty of man. ¹⁴For
God will bring every work into
judgment, with every hidden thing,
whether it is good, or whether it is
evil.