

## Ecclesiastes

### *Title*

<sup>1</sup> The words of the Teacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem:

### *Introduction: Utter Futility*

<sup>2</sup> “Futile! Futile!” laments the Teacher,  
“Absolutely futile! Everything is futile!”

### *Futility Illustrated from Nature*

<sup>3</sup> What benefit do people get from all the effort  
which they expend on earth?

<sup>4</sup> A generation comes and a generation goes,  
but the earth remains the same through the ages.

<sup>5</sup> The sun rises and the sun sets;  
it hurries away to a place from which it rises again.

<sup>6</sup> The wind goes to the south and circles around to the  
north;  
round and round the wind goes and on its rounds it  
returns.

<sup>7</sup> All the streams flow into the sea, but the sea is not full,  
and to the place where the streams flow, there they will  
flow again.

<sup>8</sup> All this monotony is tiresome; no one can bear to  
describe it:  
The eye is never satisfied with seeing, nor is the ear ever  
content with hearing.

<sup>9</sup> What exists now is what will be,  
and what has been done is what will be done;  
there is nothing truly new on earth.

<sup>10</sup> Is there anything about which someone can say, “Look  
at this! It is new!”?  
It was already done long ago, before our time.

<sup>11</sup> No one remembers the former events,  
nor will anyone remember the events that are yet to  
happen;  
they will not be remembered by the future generations.

*Futility of Secular Accomplishment*

<sup>12</sup> I, the Teacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.

<sup>13</sup> I decided to carefully and thoroughly examine  
all that has been accomplished on earth.

I concluded: God has given people a burdensome task  
that keeps them occupied.

<sup>14</sup> I reflected on everything that is accomplished by man  
on earth,  
and I concluded: Everything he has accomplished is futile  
– like chasing the wind!

<sup>15</sup> What is bent cannot be straightened,  
and what is missing cannot be supplied.

*Futility of Secular Wisdom*

<sup>16</sup> I thought to myself,

“I have become much wiser than any of my predecessors  
who ruled over Jerusalem;

I have acquired much wisdom and knowledge.”

<sup>17</sup> So I decided to discern the benefit of wisdom and  
knowledge over foolish behavior and ideas;

however, I concluded that even this endeavor is like trying  
to chase the wind!

<sup>18</sup> For with great wisdom comes great frustration;  
whoever increases his knowledge merely increases his  
heartache.

## 2

1

*Futility of Self-Indulgent Pleasure I thought to myself,*

“Come now, I will try self-indulgent pleasure to see if it is worthwhile.”

But I found that it also is futile.

<sup>2</sup> I said of partying, “It is folly,”

and of self-indulgent pleasure, “It accomplishes nothing!”

<sup>3</sup> I thought deeply about the effects of indulging myself with wine

(all the while my mind was guiding me with wisdom)

and the effects of behaving foolishly,

so that I might discover what is profitable

for people to do on earth during the few days of their lives.

#### *Futility of Materialism*

<sup>4</sup> I increased my possessions:

I built houses for myself;

I planted vineyards for myself.

<sup>5</sup> I designed royal gardens and parks for myself,

and I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them.

<sup>6</sup> I constructed pools of water for myself,

to irrigate my grove of flourishing trees.

<sup>7</sup> I purchased male and female slaves,

and I owned slaves who were born in my house;

I also possessed more livestock – both herds and flocks –

than any of my predecessors in Jerusalem.

<sup>8</sup> I also amassed silver and gold for myself,

as well as valuable treasures taken from kingdoms and provinces.

I acquired male singers and female singers for myself,

and what gives a man sensual delight – a harem of beautiful concubines!

<sup>9</sup> So I was far wealthier than all my predecessors in Jerusalem,

yet I maintained my objectivity:

<sup>10</sup> I did not restrain myself from getting whatever I wanted;  
I did not deny myself anything that would bring me pleasure.

So all my accomplishments gave me joy;  
this was my reward for all my effort.

<sup>11</sup> Yet when I reflected on everything I had accomplished and on all the effort that I had expended to accomplish it, I concluded: “All these achievements and possessions are ultimately profitless – like chasing the wind!  
There is nothing gained from them on earth.”

*Wisdom is Better than Folly*

<sup>12</sup> Next, I decided to consider wisdom, as well as foolish behavior and ideas.  
For what more can the king’s successor do than what the king has already done?

<sup>13</sup> I realized that wisdom is preferable to folly,  
just as light is preferable to darkness:

<sup>14</sup> The wise man can see where he is going, but the fool walks in darkness.  
Yet I also realized that the same fate happens to them both.

<sup>15</sup> So I thought to myself, “The fate of the fool will happen even to me!

Then what did I gain by becoming so excessively wise?”

So I lamented to myself,

“The benefits of wisdom are ultimately meaningless!”

<sup>16</sup> For the wise man, like the fool, will not be remembered for very long,  
because in the days to come, both will already have been forgotten.

Alas, the wise man dies – just like the fool!

<sup>17</sup> So I loathed life because what happens on earth seems awful to me; for all the benefits of wisdom are futile – like chasing the wind.

*Futility of Being a Workaholic*

<sup>18</sup> So I loathed all the fruit of my effort, for which I worked so hard on earth, because I must leave it behind in the hands of my successor.

<sup>19</sup> Who knows if he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will be master over all the fruit of my labor for which I worked so wisely on earth!

This also is futile!

<sup>20</sup> So I began to despair about all the fruit of my labor for which I worked so hard on earth.

<sup>21</sup> For a man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge, and skill;

however, he must hand over the fruit of his labor as an inheritance

to someone else who did not work for it. This also is futile, and an awful injustice!

*Painful Days and Restless Nights*

<sup>22</sup> What does a man acquire from all his labor and from the anxiety that accompanies his toil on earth?

<sup>23</sup> For all day long his work produces pain and frustration, and even at night his mind cannot relax!

This also is futile!

*Enjoy Work and its Benefits*

<sup>24</sup> There is nothing better for people than to eat and drink, and to find enjoyment in their work.

I also perceived that this ability to find enjoyment comes from God.

<sup>25</sup> For no one can eat and drink or experience joy apart from him.

<sup>26</sup> For to the one who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy, but to the sinner, he gives the task of amassing wealth – only to give it to the one who pleases God. This task of the wicked is futile – like chasing the wind!

### 3

<sup>1</sup> For everything there is an appointed time, and an appropriate time for every activity on earth:  
<sup>2</sup> A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to uproot what was planted;  
<sup>3</sup> A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;  
<sup>4</sup> A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance.  
<sup>5</sup> A time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;  
<sup>6</sup> A time to search, and a time to give something up as lost; a time to keep, and a time to throw away;  
<sup>7</sup> A time to rip, and a time to sew; a time to keep silent, and a time to speak.  
<sup>8</sup> A time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.

#### *Man is Ignorant of God's Timing*

<sup>9</sup> What benefit can a worker gain from his toil?  
<sup>10</sup> I have observed the burden that God has given to people to keep them occupied.  
<sup>11</sup> God has made everything fit beautifully in its appropriate time, but he has also placed ignorance in the human heart so that people cannot discover what God has ordained, from the beginning to the end of their lives.

#### *Enjoy Life in the Present*

<sup>12</sup> I have concluded that there is nothing better for people

than to be happy and to enjoy  
themselves as long as they live,  
<sup>13</sup> and also that everyone should eat and drink, and find  
enjoyment in all his toil,  
for these things are a gift from God.

*God's Sovereignty*

<sup>14</sup> I also know that whatever God does will endure forever;  
nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken away from  
it.

God has made it this way, so that men will fear him.

<sup>15</sup> Whatever exists now has already been, and whatever  
will be has already been;  
for God will seek to do again what has occurred in the  
past.

*The Problem of Injustice and Oppression*

<sup>16</sup> I saw something else on earth:

In the place of justice, there was wickedness,  
and in the place of fairness, there was wickedness.

<sup>17</sup> I thought to myself, "God will judge both the righteous  
and the wicked;

for there is an appropriate time for every activity,  
and there is a time of judgment for every deed.

<sup>18</sup> I also thought to myself, "It is for the sake of people,  
so God can clearly show them that they are like animals.

<sup>19</sup> For the fate of humans and the fate of animals are the  
same:

As one dies, so dies the other; both have the same breath.  
There is no advantage for humans over animals,  
for both are fleeting.

<sup>20</sup> Both go to the same place,  
both come from the dust,  
and to dust both return.

<sup>21</sup> Who really knows if the human spirit ascends upward,  
and the animal's spirit descends into the earth?

<sup>22</sup> So I perceived there is nothing better than for people to enjoy their work, because that is their reward; for who can show them what the future holds?

#### 4

<sup>1</sup> So I again considered all the oppression that continually occurs on earth.

This is what I saw:

The oppressed were in tears, but no one was comforting them;

no one delivers them from the power of their oppressors.

<sup>2</sup> So I considered those who are dead and gone more fortunate than those who are still alive.

<sup>3</sup> But better than both is the one who has not been born and has not seen the evil things that are done on earth.

#### *Labor Motivated by Envy*

<sup>4</sup> Then I considered all the skillful work that is done: Surely it is nothing more than competition between one person and another.

This also is profitless – like chasing the wind.

<sup>5</sup> The fool folds his hands and does no work, so he has nothing to eat but his own flesh.

<sup>6</sup> Better is one handful with some rest than two hands full of toil and chasing the wind.

#### *Labor Motivated by Greed*

<sup>7</sup> So I again considered another futile thing on earth:

<sup>8</sup> A man who is all alone with no companion, he has no children nor siblings;

yet there is no end to all his toil,

and he is never satisfied with riches.

He laments, “For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?”

This also is futile and a burdensome task!



*Labor is Beneficial When Its Rewards Are Shared*

<sup>9</sup> Two people are better than one,  
because they can reap more benefit from their labor.

<sup>10</sup> For if they fall, one will help his companion up,  
but pity the person who falls down and has no one to help  
him up.

<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, if two lie down together, they can keep  
each other warm,  
but how can one person keep warm by himself?

<sup>12</sup> Although an assailant may overpower one person,  
two can withstand him.

Moreover, a three-stranded cord is not quickly broken.

*Labor Motivated by Prestige-Seeking*

<sup>13</sup> A poor but wise youth is better than an old and foolish  
king  
who no longer knows how to receive advice.

<sup>14</sup> For he came out of prison to become king,  
even though he had been born poor in what would  
become his kingdom.

<sup>15</sup> I considered all the living who walk on earth,  
as well as the successor who would arise in his place.

<sup>16</sup> There is no end to all the people nor to the past  
generations,

yet future generations will not rejoice in him.

This also is profitless and like chasing the wind.

**5**

<sup>1</sup> Be careful what you do when you go to the temple of  
God;  
draw near to listen rather than to offer a sacrifice like  
fools,

for they do not realize that they are doing wrong.

<sup>2</sup> Do not be rash with your mouth or hasty in your heart  
to bring up a matter before God,

for God is in heaven and you are on earth!

Therefore, let your words be few.

<sup>3</sup> Just as dreams come when there are many cares,  
so the rash vow of a fool occurs when there are many  
words.

<sup>4</sup> When you make a vow to God, do not delay in paying it.

For God takes no pleasure in fools:

Pay what you vow!

<sup>5</sup> It is better for you not to vow  
than to vow and not pay it.

<sup>6</sup> Do not let your mouth cause you to sin,  
and do not tell the priest, "It was a mistake!"

Why make God angry at you  
so that he would destroy the work of your hands?"

<sup>7</sup> Just as there is futility in many dreams,  
so also in many words.

Therefore, fear God!

#### *Government Corruption*

<sup>8</sup> If you see the extortion of the poor,  
or the perversion of justice and fairness in the govern-  
ment,

do not be astonished by the matter.

For the high official is watched by a higher official,  
and there are higher ones over them!

<sup>9</sup> The produce of the land is seized by all of them,  
even the king is served by the fields.

#### *Covetousness*

<sup>10</sup> The one who loves money will never be satisfied with  
money,

he who loves wealth will never be satisfied with his  
income.

This also is futile.

<sup>11</sup> When someone's prosperity increases, those who con-  
sume it also increase;

so what does its owner gain, except that he gets to see it  
with his eyes?

<sup>12</sup> The sleep of the laborer is pleasant – whether he eats  
little or much –  
but the wealth of the rich will not allow him to sleep.

*Materialism Thwarts Enjoyment of Life*

<sup>13</sup> Here is a misfortune on earth that I have seen:  
Wealth hoarded by its owner to his own misery.

<sup>14</sup> Then that wealth was lost through bad luck;  
although he fathered a son, he has nothing left to give  
him.

<sup>15</sup> Just as he came forth from his mother's womb, naked  
will he return as he came,  
and he will take nothing in his hand that he may carry  
away from his toil.

<sup>16</sup> This is another misfortune:  
Just as he came, so will he go.  
What did he gain from toiling for the wind?

<sup>17</sup> Surely, he ate in darkness every day of his life,  
and he suffered greatly with sickness and anger.

*Enjoy the Fruit of Your Labor*

<sup>18</sup> I have seen personally what is the only beneficial and  
appropriate course of action for people:  
to eat and drink, and find enjoyment in all their hard work  
on earth  
during the few days of their life which God has given  
them,  
for this is their reward.

<sup>19</sup> To every man whom God has given wealth, and posses-  
sions,  
he has also given him the ability  
to eat from them, to receive his reward and to find  
enjoyment in his toil;  
these things are the gift of God.

<sup>20</sup> For he does not think much about the fleeting days of his life because God keeps him preoccupied with the joy he derives from his activity.

## 6

<sup>1</sup> Here is another misfortune that I have seen on earth, and it weighs heavily on people:

<sup>2</sup> God gives a man riches, property, and wealth so that he lacks nothing that his heart desires, yet God does not enable him to enjoy the fruit of his labor

–  
instead, someone else enjoys it!

This is fruitless and a grave misfortune.

<sup>3</sup> Even if a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years –

even if he lives a long, long time, but cannot enjoy his prosperity –

even if he were to live forever –

I would say, “A stillborn child is better off than he is!”

<sup>4</sup> Though the stillborn child came into the world for no reason and departed into darkness,

though its name is shrouded in darkness,

<sup>5</sup> though it never saw the light of day nor knew anything, yet it has more rest than that man –

<sup>6</sup> if he should live a thousand years twice, yet does not enjoy his prosperity.

For both of them die!

<sup>7</sup> All of man’s labor is for nothing more than to fill his stomach –

yet his appetite is never satisfied!

<sup>8</sup> So what advantage does a wise man have over a fool?

And what advantage does a pauper gain by knowing how to survive?

<sup>9</sup> It is better to be content with what the eyes can see

than for one's heart always to crave more.  
This continual longing is futile – like chasing the wind.

*The Futile Way Life Works*

<sup>10</sup> Whatever has happened was foreordained,  
and what happens to a person was also foreknown.  
It is useless for him to argue with God about his fate  
because God is more powerful than he is.

<sup>11</sup> The more one argues with words, the less he accomplishes.

How does that benefit him?

<sup>12</sup> For no one knows what is best for a person during his life –

during the few days of his fleeting life –  
for they pass away like a shadow.

Nor can anyone tell him what the future will hold for him  
on earth.

**7**

<sup>1</sup> A good reputation is better than precious perfume;  
likewise, the day of one's death is better than the day of  
one's birth.

<sup>2</sup> It is better to go to a funeral  
than a feast.

For death is the destiny of every person,  
and the living should take this to heart.

<sup>3</sup> Sorrow is better than laughter,  
because sober reflection is good for the heart.

<sup>4</sup> The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning,  
but the heart of fools is in the house of merrymaking.

*Frivolous Living Versus Wisdom*

<sup>5</sup> It is better for a person to receive a rebuke from those  
who are wise  
than to listen to the song of fools.

<sup>6</sup> For like the crackling of quick-burning thorns under a cooking pot,  
so is the laughter of the fool.  
This kind of folly also is useless.

*Human Wisdom Overturned by Adversity*

<sup>7</sup> Surely oppression can turn a wise person into a fool;  
likewise, a bribe corrupts the heart.

<sup>8</sup> The end of a matter is better than its beginning;  
likewise, patience is better than pride.

<sup>9</sup> Do not let yourself be quickly provoked,  
for anger resides in the lap of fools.

<sup>10</sup> Do not say, “Why were the old days better than these days?”

for it is not wise to ask that.

*Wisdom Can Lengthen One’s Life*

<sup>11</sup> Wisdom, like an inheritance, is a good thing;  
it benefits those who see the light of day.

<sup>12</sup> For wisdom provides protection,  
just as money provides protection.  
But the advantage of knowledge is this:  
Wisdom preserves the life of its owner.

*Wisdom Acknowledges God’s Orchestration of Life*

<sup>13</sup> Consider the work of God:  
For who can make straight what he has bent?

<sup>14</sup> In times of prosperity be joyful,  
but in times of adversity consider this:  
God has made one as well as the other,  
so that no one can discover what the future holds.

*Exceptions to the Law of Retribution*

<sup>15</sup> During the days of my fleeting life I have seen both of these things:

Sometimes a righteous person dies prematurely in spite of his righteousness,  
and sometimes a wicked person lives long in spite of his evil deeds.

<sup>16</sup> So do not be excessively righteous or excessively wise; otherwise you might be disappointed.

<sup>17</sup> Do not be excessively wicked and do not be a fool; otherwise you might die before your time.

<sup>18</sup> It is best to take hold of one warning without letting go of the other warning;  
for the one who fears God will follow both warnings.

#### *Wisdom Needed Because No One is Truly Righteous*

<sup>19</sup> Wisdom gives a wise person more protection than ten rulers in a city.

<sup>20</sup> For there is not one truly righteous person on the earth who continually does good and never sins.

<sup>21</sup> Also, do not pay attention to everything that people say; otherwise, you might even hear your servant cursing you.

<sup>22</sup> For you know in your own heart that you also have cursed others many times.

#### *Human Wisdom is Limited*

<sup>23</sup> I have examined all this by wisdom; I said, "I am determined to comprehend this" – but it was beyond my grasp.

<sup>24</sup> Whatever has happened is beyond human understanding;  
it is far deeper than anyone can fathom.

#### *True Righteousness and Wisdom are Virtually Nonexistent*

<sup>25</sup> I tried to understand, examine, and comprehend the role of wisdom in the scheme of things, and to understand the stupidity of wickedness and the insanity of folly.

<sup>26</sup> I discovered this:  
More bitter than death is the kind of woman who is like a  
hunter's snare;  
her heart is like a hunter's net and her hands are like  
prison chains.

The man who pleases God escapes her,  
but the sinner is captured by her.

<sup>27</sup> The Teacher says:

I discovered this while trying to discover the scheme of  
things, item by item.

<sup>28</sup> What I have continually sought, I have not found;  
I have found only one upright man among a thousand,  
but I have not found one upright woman among all of  
them.

<sup>29</sup> This alone have I discovered: God made humankind  
upright,  
but they have sought many evil schemes.

## 8

<sup>1</sup> Who is a wise person? Who knows the solution to a  
problem?

A person's wisdom brightens his appearance, and softens  
his harsh countenance.

<sup>2</sup> Obey the king's command,  
because you took an oath before God to be loyal to him.

<sup>3</sup> Do not rush out of the king's presence in haste – do not  
delay when the matter is unpleasant,  
for he can do whatever he pleases.

<sup>4</sup> Surely the king's authority is absolute;  
no one can say to him, "What are you doing?"

<sup>5</sup> Whoever obeys his command will not experience harm,  
and a wise person knows the proper time and procedure.

<sup>6</sup> For there is a proper time and procedure for every  
matter,  
for the oppression of the king is severe upon his victim.



<sup>7</sup> Surely no one knows the future,  
and no one can tell another person what will happen.

<sup>8</sup> Just as no one has power over the wind to restrain it,  
so no one has power over the day of his death.

Just as no one can be discharged during the battle,  
so wickedness cannot rescue the wicked.

<sup>9</sup> While applying my mind to everything that happens in  
this world, I have seen all this:  
Sometimes one person dominates other people to their  
harm.

*Contradictions to the Law of Retribution*

<sup>10</sup> Not only that, but I have seen the wicked approaching  
and entering the temple,  
and as they left the holy temple, they  
boasted in the city that they had done so.

This also is an enigma.

<sup>11</sup> When a sentence is not executed at once against a  
crime,  
the human heart is encouraged to do evil.

<sup>12</sup> Even though a sinner might commit a hundred crimes  
and still live a long time,  
yet I know that it will go well with God-fearing people –  
for they stand in fear before him.

<sup>13</sup> But it will not go well with the wicked,  
nor will they prolong their days like a shadow,  
because they do not stand in fear before God.

<sup>14</sup> Here is another enigma that occurs on earth:  
Sometimes there are righteous people who get what the  
wicked deserve,  
and sometimes there are wicked people who get what the  
righteous deserve.

I said, “This also is an enigma.”

*Enjoy Life In Spite of Its Injustices*

<sup>15</sup> So I recommend the enjoyment of life,  
for there is nothing better on earth for a person to do  
except to eat, drink, and enjoy life.  
So joy will accompany him in his toil  
during the days of his life which God gives him on earth.

*Limitations of Human Wisdom*

<sup>16</sup> When I tried to gain wisdom  
and to observe the activity on earth –  
even though it prevents anyone from sleeping day or  
night –

<sup>17</sup> then I discerned all that God has done:  
No one really comprehends what happens on earth.  
Despite all human efforts to discover it, no one can ever  
grasp it.  
Even if a wise person claimed that he understood,  
he would not really comprehend it.

## 9

<sup>1</sup> So I reflected on all this, attempting to clear it all up.  
I concluded that the righteous and the wise, as well as  
their works, are in the hand of God;  
whether a person will be loved or hated –  
no one knows what lies ahead.

<sup>2</sup> Everyone shares the same fate –  
the righteous and the wicked,  
the good and the bad,  
the ceremonially clean and unclean,  
those who offer sacrifices and those who do not.  
What happens to the good person, also happens to the  
sinner;  
what happens to those who make vows, also happens to  
those who are afraid to make vows.

<sup>3</sup> This is the unfortunate fact about everything that hap-  
pens on earth:

the same fate awaits everyone.

In addition to this, the hearts of all people are full of evil, and there is folly in their hearts during their lives – then they die.

*Better to Be Poor but Alive than Rich but Dead*

<sup>4</sup> But whoever is among the living has hope;  
a live dog is better than a dead lion.

<sup>5</sup> For the living know that they will die, but the dead do not know anything;  
they have no further reward – and even the memory of them disappears.

<sup>6</sup> What they loved, as well as what they hated and envied, perished long ago,  
and they no longer have a part in anything that happens on earth.

*Life is Brief, so Cherish its Joys*

<sup>7</sup> Go, eat your food with joy,  
and drink your wine with a happy heart,  
because God has already approved your works.

<sup>8</sup> Let your clothes always be white,  
and do not spare precious ointment on your head.

<sup>9</sup> Enjoy life with your beloved wife during all the days of your fleeting life  
that God has given you on earth during all your fleeting days;  
for that is your reward in life and in your burdensome work on earth.

<sup>10</sup> Whatever you find to do with your hands,  
do it with all your might,  
because there is neither work nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom in the grave,  
the place where you will eventually go.

*Wisdom Cannot Protect against Seemingly Chance Events*

<sup>11</sup> Again, I observed this on the earth:  
the race is not always won by the swiftest,  
the battle is not always won by the strongest;  
prosperity does not always belong to those who are the  
wisest,  
wealth does not always belong to those who are the most  
discerning,  
nor does success always come to those with the most  
knowledge –  
for time and chance may overcome them all.  
<sup>12</sup> Surely, no one knows his appointed time!  
Like fish that are caught in a deadly net, and like birds that  
are caught in a snare –  
just like them, all people are ensnared at an unfortunate  
time that falls upon them suddenly.

*Most People Are Not Receptive to Wise Counsel*

<sup>13</sup> This is what I also observed about wisdom on earth,  
and it is a great burden to me:  
<sup>14</sup> There was once a small city with a few men in it,  
and a mighty king attacked it, besieging it and building  
strong siege works against it.  
<sup>15</sup> However, a poor but wise man lived in the city,  
and he could have delivered the city by his wisdom,  
but no one listened to that poor man.  
<sup>16</sup> So I concluded that wisdom is better than might,  
but a poor man's wisdom is despised; no one ever listens  
to his advice.

*Wisdom versus Fools, Sin, and Folly*

<sup>17</sup> The words of the wise are heard in quiet,  
more than the shouting of a ruler is heard among fools.  
<sup>18</sup> Wisdom is better than weapons of war,  
but one sinner can destroy much that is good.

**10**

<sup>1</sup> One dead fly makes the perfumer's ointment give off a rancid stench,  
so a little folly can outweigh much wisdom.

*Wisdom Can Be Nullified By the Caprice of Rulers*

<sup>2</sup> A wise person's good sense protects him,  
but a fool's lack of sense leaves him vulnerable.

<sup>3</sup> Even when a fool walks along the road he lacks sense,  
and shows everyone what a fool he is.

<sup>4</sup> If the anger of the ruler flares up against you, do not  
resign from your position,  
for a calm response can undo great offenses.

<sup>5</sup> I have seen another misfortune on the earth:  
It is an error a ruler makes.

<sup>6</sup> Fools are placed in many positions of authority,  
while wealthy men sit in lowly positions.

<sup>7</sup> I have seen slaves on horseback  
and princes walking on foot like slaves.

*Wisdom is Needed to Avert Dangers in Everyday Life*

<sup>8</sup> One who digs a pit may fall into it,  
and one who breaks through a wall may be bitten by a  
snake.

<sup>9</sup> One who quarries stones may be injured by them;  
one who splits logs may be endangered by them.

<sup>10</sup> If an iron axhead is blunt and a workman does not  
sharpen its edge,

he must exert a great deal of effort;  
so wisdom has the advantage of giving success.

<sup>11</sup> If the snake should bite before it is charmed,  
the snake charmer is in trouble.

*Words and Works of Wise Men and Fools*

<sup>12</sup> The words of a wise person win him favor,  
but the words of a fool are self-destructive.

<sup>13</sup> At the beginning his words are foolish  
and at the end his talk is wicked madness,  
<sup>14</sup> yet a fool keeps on babbling.

No one knows what will happen;  
who can tell him what will happen in the future?

<sup>15</sup> The toil of a stupid fool wears him out,  
because he does not even know the way to the city.

*The Problem with Foolish Rulers*

<sup>16</sup> Woe to you, O land, when your king is childish,  
and your princes feast in the morning!

<sup>17</sup> Blessed are you, O land, when your king is the son of  
nobility,  
and your princes feast at the proper time – with self-  
control and not in drunkenness.

<sup>18</sup> Because of laziness the roof caves in,  
and because of idle hands the house leaks.

<sup>19</sup> Feasts are made for laughter,  
and wine makes life merry,  
but money is the answer for everything.

<sup>20</sup> Do not curse a king even in your thoughts,  
and do not curse the rich while in your bedroom;  
for a bird might report what you are thinking,  
or some winged creature might repeat your words.

## 11

<sup>1</sup> Send your grain overseas,  
for after many days you will get a return.

<sup>2</sup> Divide your merchandise among seven or even eight  
investments,  
for you do not know what calamity may happen on earth.

<sup>3</sup> If the clouds are full of rain, they will empty themselves  
on the earth,  
and whether a tree falls to the south or to the north, the  
tree will lie wherever it falls.

<sup>4</sup> He who watches the wind will not sow,  
and he who observes the clouds will not reap.

<sup>5</sup> Just as you do not know the path of the wind,  
or how the bones form in the womb of a pregnant woman,  
so you do not know the work of God who makes every-  
thing.

<sup>6</sup> Sow your seed in the morning,  
and do not stop working until the evening;  
for you do not know which activity will succeed –  
whether this one or that one, or whether both will  
prosper equally.

*Life Should Be Enjoyed Because Death is Inevitable*

<sup>7</sup> Light is sweet,  
and it is pleasant for a person to see the sun.

<sup>8</sup> So, if a man lives many years, let him rejoice in them all,  
but let him remember that the days of darkness will be  
many – all that is about to come is obscure.

*Enjoy Life to the Fullest under the Fear of God*

<sup>9</sup> Rejoice, young man, while you are young,  
and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth.  
Follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your  
eyes,

but know that God will judge your motives and actions.

<sup>10</sup> Banish emotional stress from your mind.  
and put away pain from your body;  
for youth and the prime of life are fleeting.

## 12

<sup>1</sup> So remember your Creator in the days of your youth –  
before the difficult days come,  
and the years draw near when you will say, “I have no  
pleasure in them”;

<sup>2</sup> before the sun and the light of the moon and the stars  
grow dark,  
and the clouds disappear after the rain;  
<sup>3</sup> when those who keep watch over the house begin to  
tremble,  
and the virile men begin to stoop over,  
and the grinders begin to cease because they grow few,  
and those who look through the windows grow dim,  
<sup>4</sup> and the doors along the street are shut;  
when the sound of the grinding mill grows low,  
and one is awakened by the sound of a bird,  
and all their songs grow faint,  
<sup>5</sup> and they are afraid of heights and the dangers in the  
street;  
the almond blossoms grow white,  
and the grasshopper drags itself along,  
and the caper berry shrivels up –  
because man goes to his eternal home,  
and the mourners go about in the streets –  
<sup>6</sup> before the silver cord is removed,  
or the golden bowl is broken,  
or the pitcher is shattered at the well,  
or the water wheel is broken at the cistern –  
<sup>7</sup> and the dust returns to the earth as it was,  
and the life's breath returns to God who gave it.

*Concluding Refrain: Qoheleth Restates His Thesis*

<sup>8</sup> “Absolutely futile!” laments the Teacher,  
“All of these things are futile!”

*Concluding Epilogue: Qoheleth's Advice is Wise*

<sup>9</sup> Not only was the Teacher wise,  
but he also taught knowledge to the people;  
he carefully evaluated and arranged many proverbs.  
<sup>10</sup> The Teacher sought to find delightful words,



and to write accurately truthful sayings.

<sup>11</sup> The words of the sages are like prods,  
and the collected sayings are like firmly fixed nails;  
they are given by one shepherd.

*Concluding Exhortation: Fear God and Obey His Commands!*

<sup>12</sup> Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them.  
There is no end to the making of many books,  
and much study is exhausting to the body.

<sup>13</sup> Having heard everything, I have reached this conclusion:

Fear God and keep his commandments,  
because this is the whole duty of man.

<sup>14</sup> For God will evaluate every deed,  
including every secret thing, whether good or evil.

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