

BIBLE STUDY TEXTBOOK SERIES

ECCLESIASTES

by

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SONG OF SOLOMON

by

Don DeWelt

PARAPHRASE AND ANALYTICAL OUTLINE

by Arthur G. Clarke

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ECCLESIASTES

Dedication	xiii
Foreword	xv
Introduction	1

OUTLINE

<i>Introduction: 1:1-11</i>	5
A. Author: Solomon (1)	5
B. Thesis: The vanity of all earthly things (2)	8
C. Explanation: (3-11)	12
1. Man cannot show a profit of all his labor under the sun (3)	12
2. Compared with the world, man is transitory and all of his efforts are futile (4-8)	19
3. History repeats itself and man forgets what has gone before (9-11)	23
I. A MAN OF WISDOM WORKS IN HARMONY WITH GOD'S PROVIDENTIAL BLESSINGS, OTHERWISE HE DISCOVERS ALL HIS WORK IS VANITY (1:12—6:12)	27
A. Experiments and Conclusions (1:12—2:26)	27
1. Experiments (1:12—2:11)	27
a. Unlimited resources for research (12)	27
b. Wisdom is used in exploring all that is done under heaven (13-18)	29
c. Wisdom is used in the exploration of sensuous pleasure (2:1-11)	41
2. Conclusions (2:12-26)	55
a. Value of this wisdom and pleasure stop at the grave (12-17)	55
b. The legacy of one's labor is often lost to fools when one dies (18-23)	61
c. Labor is good only when it is acknowledged as from the hand of God (24-26)	65
B. Acknowledgments that we must work under	

ECCLESIASTES — SONG OF SOLOMON

the rule of God's providence (3:1-22)	69
1. Man should adjust to live his life within the framework of God's providence (1-8)	69
2. Working outside the framework of God's providence results in frustration and defeat (9-22)	78
a. Man should work with an awareness of God (9-11)	
b. The ability to enjoy the fruit of one's labor is a precious gift from God (12-15)	
c. God's purpose is thwarted but not defeated by perversion of justice (16-22)	
C. Guidelines for working with God under all circumstances (4:1-16)	89
1. How to work under oppression (1-3)	89
2. Keep your motive for work pure (4-6)	94
3. Attain your riches for practical good (7-12)	96
4. Keep in mind that prestigious positions will soon be forgotten (13-16)	103
D. Guidelines for the work of worship (5:1-9)	107
1. Watch your step in God's house (1a)	107
2. Refrain from making a sacrifice of fools through hasty words (1b-7)	110
3. Recognize God as the Ruler over all (8-9)	119
E. Admonitions concerning the futility of riches (5:10—6:12)	123
1. Riches by themselves are vain (5:10-20)	123
a. They do not satisfy (10-12)	123
b. They may be harmful (13-17)	127
c. Exhortation to enjoy the riches God permits (18-20)	131
2. It is possible to possess riches which cannot be enjoyed (6:1-6)	135
3. Reasons why riches cannot satisfy (7-9)	143
4. Reasons why it is useless to strive for riches (10-12)	147

TABLE OF CONTENTS

II. A MAN OF WISDOM WHO WORKS IN HARMONY WITH GOD REAPS EARTHLY BENEFITS REGARDLESS OF ENVIRONMENTAL CIRCUMSTANCES (7:1—12:8)	152
A. Adverse circumstances teach worthwhile lessons but if improperly interpreted could lead to despair (7:1-22)	152
1. This lesson is taught by comparisons (1-14)	152
a. A good name is better than precious ointment (1)	152
b. Attendance at a funeral is better than attendance at a birthday party (2)	154
c. Sorrow is better than laughter (3)	156
d. Wisdom is better than folly (4)	158
e. A rebuke from the wise is better than the song of fools (5-7)	159
f. Patience is better than anxiety (8-9)	162
g. The now is better than the former days (10)	164
h. Wisdom is better than hasty judgment (11)	166
i. Wisdom is better than money (12)	167
j. Trusting God for tomorrow is better than knowing about tomorrow (13-14)	169
2. This lesson is taught even when the opposite appears to be true (15-18)	172
a. The wicked are rewarded and the righteous suffer (15)	172
b. Warnings against the wrong interpretations of life (16-17)	174
c. Choose the best in life (18)	177
3. Wisdom leads to proper attitudes and conduct (19-22)	179
a. Wisdom strengthens the wise (19)	179
b. Wisdom leads one to see his own sin (20)	181
c. Wisdom protects against false accusations and self righteousness (21-22)	183
B. Important lessons drawn from these observations (7:23-29)	185

ECCLESIASTES — SONG OF SOLOMON

1. Practical lessons can be learned, but the deeper things are unattainable (23-24)	185
2. Through intensive study, one comes to see the potential within men and women to do evil (25-28)	189
3. A final observation: Men seek evil devices (29)	195
C. Admonitions to use wisdom in the work of solving the problems of life (8:1—9:18)	197
1. Work in submission to the king (8:1-8)	197
2. Work even when one discovers the oppression of the righteous (9-13)	209
3. Work even when one cannot understand the working of God (14-17)	217
4. Work regardless of the similar fate of the godly and the ungodly (9:1-10)	221
5. Work with the awareness that God will control the final outcome (11-12)	232
6. Wisdom is declared to be the greatest guide in our work (13-18)	236
D. Illustrations of those who lack wisdom (10:1-11)	242
1. The foolish worker is in trouble (1-4)	242
2. Foolishness leads to humiliation (5-7)	246
3. Failures in life result from lack of wisdom (8-11)	248
E. Those who work contrary to wisdom are reprehensible (12-20)	251
1. Talkers and workers (12-15)	251
2. Rulers (16-17)	254
3. Warnings (18-20)	256
F. Exhortations to work in harmony with wisdom (11:1—12:8)	260
1. Trust God and be cheerful in all of your activities (11:1-8)	260
2. Enjoy the days of your youth (9-10)	269
3. Remember God in your youth (12:1)	272
G. Death comes to every man (2-8)	274

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Conclusion: 12:9-14

A. Man is admonished to work in harmony with God through the words of one Shepherd (9-12)	284
B. Man is admonished to fear God and keep His commandments (13)	289
C. Man is admonished to work in harmony with God because God will bring every work into judgment (14)	292
Epilogue	293
Bibliography	295

SONG OF SOLOMON

Preface	301
Introduction	305

THE SONG OF SONGS

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

by Arthur G. Clarke

Title — 1:1	315
I. <i>FIRST SCENE — The King's Palace — 1:2 to 3:5</i>	316
A. <i>Shulammite:</i>	
1. Sililoquy, 1:2-4	316
2. Appeal, 1:5-6	322
3. Sililoquy, 1:7	326
B. <i>Court Ladies:</i>	
1. Response, 1:8 (ironical)	328
C. <i>Solomon:</i>	
1. First Advance to Shulammite, 1:9-11	331
D. <i>Shulammite:</i>	
1. Narration to Court Ladies, 1:12 to 2:7	334
a. Explanation of her situation, 1:12	334
b. Estimation of her beloved, 1:13, 14	336

ECCLESIASTES — SONG OF SOLOMON

c.	Description of a conversation, 1:15 to 2:6	339
1.	Dialogue: Shepherd, 1:15	339
	Shulammitte, 1:16 to 2:1	339
2.	Dialogue: Shepherd, 2:2	344
	Shulammitte, 2:3a	344
3.	Aside to Court Ladies, 2:3b	344
4.	Appeal, 2:5, 6	344
d.	Adjuration to Court Ladies, 2:7 (first)	344
E.	<i>Shulammitte</i> :	
1.	Narration to Court Ladies (perhaps later), 2:8 to 3:5	351
a.	Invitation from the beloved, 2:8-14	351
b.	Intervention of the brothers, 2:15-17	358
1.	Their behest, 15	358
2.	Her avowal, 16	358
3.	Her request to the shepherd, 17	358
c.	Relation of a dream, 3:1-4	361
d.	Adjuration to Court Ladies, 3:5 (second)	361
II.	<i>SECOND SCENE — The Royal Procession — 3:6-11</i>	
A.	Remarks of the Spectators	367
1.	<i>First Speaker</i> : v. 6	367
2.	<i>Second Speaker</i> : vv. 7, 8	367
3.	<i>Third Speaker</i> : vv. 9, 10	367
4.	<i>Fourth Speaker</i> : v. 11	367
III.	<i>THIRD SCENE: The Lovers' Interviews — 4:1 to 5:1</i> .	375
A.	<i>First Meeting</i> (Jerusalem?)	
1.	Shepherd's monologue, 4:1-7	375
B.	<i>Second Meeting</i> (Jerusalem)	
1.	Prolepsis, 4:8 to 5:1	382
	(Chronologically coming between 8:4 and 8:5?)	
2.	Dialogue: Shepherd, 4:8-16a	382
	Shulammitte, 4:16b	391
	Shepherd, 5:1a	391
3.	Comment: Remarks of Wedding Guests or Shepherd's Companions, 5:1b	391

TABLE OF CONTENTS

IV. *FOURTH SCENE — The King's Palace —*
 5:2 to 8:4 Retrospect

A. *Shulammitte:*

1. Narration to Court Ladies of another dream
 5:2-7 394
2. Adjuration to Court Ladies, 5:8 (third) 400

B. *Court Ladies:*

1. Challenge, 5:9 (ironical) 400

C. *Shulammitte:*

1. Description of her beloved, 5:10-16 400

D. *Court Ladies:*

1. Inquiry, 6:1 407

E. *Shulammitte:*

1. Answer, 6:2 407
2. Avowal, 6:3 407

F. *Solomon:*

1. Interview with the Shulammitte, 6:4 to 7:10 407
 - a. Dialogue: Solomon, 6:4-10 407
 - Shulammitte, 6:11-13 416
 - Solomon, 7:1-9 419
 - (vv. 1-5 may be remarks of women attendants)
 - Shulammitte (interrupting the king) 7:9b, 10 419
 - (Her final avowal of fidelity to her beloved.)

G. *Shulammitte:*

1. Invitation to the Shepherd, 7:11 to 8:2 425
2. Aside to Court Ladies, 8:3 425
3. Adjuration to Court Ladies, 8:4 425

V. *FIFTH SCENE — The Homeward Journey — 8:5-14*

A. Villagers (or the Shepherd's Companions):

1. Inquiry, 8:5a 432

B. *The Lovers:*

1. Dialogue, 8:5b-14 432
2. Shepherd, 8:5b 432
3. Shulammitte, 8:6-12 432

ECCLESIASTES — SONG OF SOLOMON

a. Aspiration, 6, 7	432
b. Recollection, 8, 9	432
c. Declaration, 10	432
d. Information, 11	432
e. Repudiation, 12	432
4. Shepherd, 8:13	432
5. Shulammitte, 8:14	432
Bibliography	445

To
my wife Patsy
and our dear children
Vicky Lynn and Stephen Kehrer
Pamela Kay and Jay Link
and Jay
who together
have risen above the vanity
of this world
and have
“tasted of the heavenly gift.”

FOREWORD

Ecclesiastes is a negative, when once developed, produces an unbelievably sharp picture of modern man. Once the message of the book is sufficiently grasped and perceived, one is astounded at how crisp, up to date, and relevant the pictures are. Little would we suspect that such graphic word photographs were taken nearly three thousand years ago! It is possible, as Robert L. Short¹ has demonstrated, to capture today's various moods of work and play through the lens of his camera, and set the picture along side the corresponding truths of this marvelous book. There is nothing new under the sun!

The untiring and resourceful experiments of "the Preacher" are proposed and carried out with a single objective: to discover if man is capable of finding joy, fulfillment, and lasting satisfaction in things which are purely of a sublunary nature. His conclusion is that not only is such a pursuit futile, it is like "feasting on the wind."

His photographs reveal the true picture of life. He does not attempt to hide selfishness, hypocrisy, greed, oppression, tyranny, ambition, or social inequities. He tells it like it is. He has at least this much in common with the present generation.

He recognizes that God has control of His world. He senses a providential influence in all of life. It is just that his photography never brings God into sharp focus. He is always in the distance. He is there, but one can never quite make out His form. His influence and power are felt but no word is forthcoming to give one direction to life or an interpretation of the pictures of life. It isn't that the Preacher is disinterested in the answers, he simply cannot find them on his own. He writes, "Even though man should seek laboriously, he will not discover" (8:17).

From the beginning, man has had to earn his living by the

¹ Robert L. Short, *A Time to be Born and a Time to Die* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1973). This concept of Ecclesiastes as the "Bible's Negative Image of Christ the Truth" is demonstrated in his book.

ECCLESIASTES

sweat of his brow. This labor takes on many forms. It is evident from the Preacher's observations that even when one does not have to resort to physical labor for his daily needs that he still must labor with his mind. The advantage appears to be with the man who labors with his hands. He discovers his sleep to be sweet and peaceful as compared to the man who increases his wisdom and knowledge and at the same time increases his sorrow.

The basic question of the book is: Is there any profit in all of man's work which he does upon this earth?

Hard work! That is the key. Every man who has ever lived can identify with that. Labor and reward, labor and reward. This is the age-old principle, but does it really work? The paradox of life is that the richest men are often the loneliest men and those with the greatest wealth are the ones who possess the greatest need. This is the puzzle that must be sorted out and put together.

When the book is completed, the reader has discovered that no new road can be traveled. Man has traveled the road before. Each new generation appears to discover something new, but they are merely inventing new names to define and describe ancient pursuits.

The Preacher has succeeded in putting his finger on the emptiness of man. He has actually photographed the vacuum. His greatest contribution, however, is to lead the reader to see that the "want" of man is in the form of Jesus. The vacuum is Christ-shaped.²

² *Ibid.*, p. 100.

INTRODUCTION

It is important that we see in Ecclesiastes more than the woe of a disappointed preacher.

The book has been variously interpreted through the years offering vastly different "keys" to unlock its hidden meanings. Keys are important in interpreting much of the Bible, but they must always be in harmony with the immediate and greater context of the writer. They must never contradict the overriding purpose of God's revelation. Keys, therefore, must fit the lock before they are of value. Many approaches to the book have been discarded simply on the basis that the key did not work. It may be impossible to discover the exact key that satisfactorily reveals every nuance, or meaning, or hidden lesson contained in Ecclesiastes. It would be presumptuous to offer one's interpretation as the "only" workable key. However, there is a certain amount of confidence that must be demonstrated in writing a commentary on a book of the Bible. At the same time one comes to such a responsibility with humility and gravity of mind. It is this author's prayer that nothing offered will be contrary to the greater purposes of God or hinder His blessings on those who study.

The following limited examples of some of the themes pursued in the interpretation of the book run the gamut of human imagination and experience. These include such alleged "keys" as epicurean philosophy, fatalism, hedonism, pessimism, cynical materialism, sensuality and license, and existentialism. "To some it has presented itself as merely the sad outpouring of the deep melancholy of a world-weary monarch, sated with all that life can offer."¹ Others see in it the expressions of a repentant Solomon reconciled at last to the God whom he had forgotten. So divergent have been the interpretations that even skeptics and infidels have rejoiced over the fact that such a book is in the Bible. They see only the superficial meaning of some phrases, when taken out of context, which appear to contradict the rest of the Bible. In addition they hope to see

¹ George Granville Bradley, *Lectures on Ecclesiastes* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1898), p. 6.

ECCLESIASTES

in the book a humanistic and secular approach to life that excludes the necessity of God, and places emphasis on pleasure as the object of man's greatest good.

The purpose of the book is clearly stated in 12:13: "Fear God and keep His commandments."

Secondary purposes or themes are numerous. One prominent idea is that everything of this world is cursed to a transitory nature and thus one cannot find true enjoyments in either the collection of the earth's goods or the pleasure derived from them. To divorce one from a love of earthly things is a worthy endeavor. Another minor theme calls attention to the inequities of life and teaches that the godly ones should not be discouraged when they are caught by them. Numerous lessons may be derived from a study of the book but each should be kept subservient to the major purpose.

There is little dispute over the destiny of the book. It was primarily written to the godly in Israel. Like all other books of the Bible with the qualities of practical application, it must be accepted in the Christian age for its contribution to our understanding of and participation in the redemption process. It has been stated that Ecclesiastes asks the questions that the rest of the Bible answers.

If the book did nothing more than demonstrate the futility of living apart from God's grace and revelation, it would have a pertinent place in every age. If the average non-Christian individual would but read it today, it could bring him much more quickly to Christ. It would save him the difficult, arduous journey of a wasted life. He could see immediately that God is the only alternative to this world and its offerings, and that Jesus is God's first and last argument to man's claim to genuine fulfillment and peace.

The immediate recipients of the book were those godly people of Israel whose needs were to be met by the ministry of the Preacher's words. More than this, there is a message for the Christian and the non-Christian today.

Although there is general acceptance that the book was written to the godly in Israel, there are more important questions

INTRODUCTION

on this subject: to the godly of what age and by whom?

Opinions on these two questions generally center in two camps. The one holds the more traditional view that Solomon is the author and that he wrote to those of his own day. The other view, more widely accepted since the middle of the seventeenth century, subscribes to the theory that the book was written by one who impersonates Solomon, choosing to refer to himself as "the Preacher," or by the Hebrew term "Kohleth." They would say that the godly of Israel were those who lived under Persian or Greek rule from 400-200 B.C. For an example, let us give the words of Robert L. Short who maintains this view. He writes, "So, then, who was Ecclesiastes really? Ecclesiastes was an upper-class teacher of wisdom who lived in Jerusalem about three centuries before Christ. Beyond this there is little more about the man that we need to know—or indeed can know—in order to appreciate his book."² Although during the last three centuries the concensus of writers has been against the Solomonic authorship of Ecclesiastes, a new trend is developing in favor of ascribing the book to him. It is a well accepted fact that the universal consent of antiquity attributed the authorship of Ecclesiastes to Solomon. The traditional Jewish view subscribed to Solomonic authorship.

Our discussion shall assume Solomonic authorship. The date, therefore, would be approximately 985 B.C., or toward the end of his life. The original readers of his words would be those of his own day. Throughout the book Solomon may be variously referred to as the Preacher, Kohleth, Ecclesiastes or Solomon. Ecclesiastes is a transliteration in the English of the Greek equivalent for the Hebrew title. The Hebrew name for the book is Kohleth. It means to assemble as a congregation, and many believe for the purpose of receiving a message. Martin Luther rendered the title, *Der Prediger*, which simply means *The Preacher*. This title is consistent with the fact that in 1:1 the Preacher has certain words to

² Short, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

ECCLESIASTES

communicate to his audience and in 12:10 the Preacher "sought to find delightful words and to write words of truth correctly."

Ecclesiastes falls into two equal parts. The first six chapters establish the premise that all earthly things are futile and that the only way man can have personal satisfaction is to live within God's providential blessings. The last six chapters, or second half of the book, assume this premise and therefore proceeds to demonstrate that man can still reap earthly benefits regardless of environmental circumstances. Once man is led to see that earthly values cannot satisfy, he is ready for the conclusion of the book. The conclusion is really a three-fold admonition: (1) to work in harmony with God through the words of one Shepherd; (2) to fear God and keep His commandments; and (3) to realize that God will bring every work into judgment.

ECCLESIASTES

INTRODUCTION: 1:1-11

A. AUTHOR: SOLOMON, 1:1

TEXT 1:1

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

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 1:1

1. Name three distinctions claimed by the author.
2. What Bible character fits the description given in this verse?
3. From the evidence of this verse, would Solomon qualify as the Preacher?
4. Read 12:9-10 and list the goals the Preacher sets for himself.

PARAPHRASE 1:1

These are the words of the one who assembled the people in order to preach to them. In addition to being identified as a preacher, he is David's son and king in Jerusalem.

COMMENT 1:1

v. 1 This verse identifies the author of Ecclesiastes as "the Preacher," and "son of David, king in Jerusalem." Views vary sharply concerning the actual author of Ecclesiastes, but there is little doubt that Solomon fits this description. The name "Solomon" never appears in the book. This does not mean, however, that he is thus discounted as the author. The Jewish tradition held to the Solomonic authorship as did most non-Jewish writers until Hugo Grotius argued against this

possibility in 1644 A.D. Since that time modern critics have woven fanciful theories concerning possible authors. Even among conservative writers, there is an uncertainty as to whom the book should be ascribed. Recent tendencies, however, on the part of conservative scholars fashion a return to the more traditional view that Solomon wrote the book.

An overwhelming amount of evidence within Ecclesiastes sustains the contention for Solomonic authorship. The following list of internal evidence, consistent with Solomon and his day, is offered as worthy of serious consideration: (1) Verse one identified Solomon precisely; (2) The statement in 1:12 requires that the author be identified as a king in Jerusalem over Israel; (3) The extensive and elaborate experiments recorded in chapters one and two required wealth and opportunity available only to one of Solomon's greatness; (4) References such as 1:16 necessitate an authoritative position and identifies Jerusalem as the base of activity; (5) Collaborating evidence from I Kings, Song of Solomon, Nehemiah, and I Chronicles complements the information of 2:1-9 and thus confirms our contention; (6) The inequities identified with the close of Solomon's reign along with the social conditions created by his desire for self enjoyment are in harmony with the descriptions of 4:1-6 and 5:8; (7) The allusion in 4:13 to an old and foolish king (Solomon) and one who has come out of prison (Jeroboam's return from his exile in Egypt) to replace the king, fits the closing days of Solomon's reign explicitly; (8) A final reference noted is found in 12:9 where the author of Ecclesiastes has searched out and arranged many proverbs. This is in harmony with I Kings 4:32 where it is recorded that Solomon spoke three thousand proverbs.

Solomon is undoubtedly the one to whom we are indebted for this marvelous book. Read also II Samuel 12:24 and I Kings 1:39 to identify "the Preacher" of 1:1.

"The" words of the Preacher implies that a definite message is in the mind of the author and he intends to proclaim it to all who will hear. We are aware immediately that the Preacher is a proclaimer of truth. From the very first line in the book

we note the purpose of his writing. The definite article "the" suggests a specific message. The content and direction of thought are not revealed at this time. It is the discovery of that message and its practical application to life that shall be the reward for the diligent student of Ecclesiastes.

The goal of the Preacher's words is clearly stated in 12:10: "The Preacher sought to find delightful words and to write words of truth correctly." It is like a breath of fresh air to discover his intention so refreshingly isolated for all to see. There can be little doubt about his purpose. He wants to "find delightful words," and "write words of truth correctly." He clarified his purpose further by stating that a Preacher uses his words as "goads" to prod and drive toward a goal (12:11). He wants the truth of his message to be secured in the minds of his readers as surely as well-driven nails hold fast the carpenter's masterpiece. Although the lessons he teaches us may arise from his own experience, or out of the cultural situation of historic Israel as she struggled under her oft-times foolish king, the Preacher does not want us to miss the fact that it is God who gives us the book! He declares that the words "are given by one Shepherd" (12:11). Once we see that, regardless of the myriad approaches to the interpretation of the book, we must admit that there is a single well-defined purpose for its writing. Solomon eliminates the possibility of debate over this issue when he writes: "The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person" (12:13).

Any pathway taken to unlock the mystery of the book of Ecclesiastes has at least one inescapable criterion: it must lead to Solomon's stated conclusion.

Solomon arrives at an exciting, positive conclusion. His thorough examination of all things, and his extensive experimentations with greatness, work, and pleasure, led him to the frustration of dead-end streets and blind alleys. His conclusion in reality is a fresh, new beginning. The entanglements of the world of vanity are behind him and a clear new horizon looms before him. He draws his reader to the inescapable doorway

to the new life. A burst of heavenly sunlight drives all the meaningless experiments and observations of the past deeper into the ever darkening shadows of the outer periphery of little concern. His grip now is on his new found truth. He clings to it and to it alone. He has finally managed his priority list in such a way that life becomes worth living and filled with purpose and enjoyment. He has managed to bring into focus, in the center of his existence, the central truth alone worth knowing, and most importantly worth believing. He declares this single truth with a note of triumph: "Fear God and keep His commandments" (12:13).

It is a long, difficult journey from Solomon's opening statement that "all is vanity," and his final conclusion to "fear God," but at least the reader knows from the beginning the road Solomon intends to travel.

FACT QUESTIONS 1:1

1. What Bible character best fits the description of 1:1?
2. Until what year did both Jews and Protestants generally ascribe to Solomonic authorship?
3. List evidence within Ecclesiastes that supports Solomon as the author.
4. What is implied by the definite article "the" in reference to the words of the Preacher?
5. What is the Preacher's goal as clearly stated in 12:10-11?
6. The words of the book are given by whom? (12:11)
7. Could this reference be speaking of Divine inspiration? Cf. II Timothy 3:16.
8. What single truth does Solomon arrive at in the final analysis? (12:13).

B. THESIS: THE VANITY OF ALL EARTHLY THINGS 1:2

TEXT 1:2

- 2 "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity."

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 1:2

5. How many times is there a reference to "vanity" in this verse?
6. What does the Preacher include in his category of vain things?
7. List some popular meanings and some dictionary meanings given to the term vanity.

PARAPHRASE 1:2

"Empty and transitory," sighs the Preacher, "Everything is fleeting as a vapor and unfulfilling!"

COMMENT 1:2

v. 2 The Preacher's first declaration, "All is vanity," is not one of despair but one which simply states the truth concerning the nature of his world and everything in it. The Lord has cursed the earth (Genesis 5:29) as a result of Adam's sin. Therefore, Paul writes, "For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope." The fact that the earth and all that it contains has felt the curse of death, is in harmony with the message of the Bible. Study Genesis 3:17-19; Psalms 39:5-6; Genesis 5:29; Hebrews 1:10-12 and James 1:10-11 and 4:13-17.

We often ascribe the idea of vainness of false pride to the term vanity, but this is not the meaning to be given the term as it is interwoven throughout the Preacher's message. It is evident that it conveys the idea of a short life, as the proper noun "Abel" comes from the same Hebrew word that is here translated "vanity." The Hebrew term "hebel" is used thirty-seven times in Ecclesiastes.¹ Such extensive application of one

¹ Ernest W. Hengstenberg, *A Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (Rochester, Wn.: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1960), p. 46.

idea, discussed in each chapter except the tenth, demands a thorough understanding of its use.

The term is rich in meaning and usage as it appears over and over again in the book. No one term could possibly convey the meaning of each situation. *The New English Bible* has replaced the word "vanity" with "emptiness," while the *Anchor Bible* replaces "vanity" with "vapor." Listed here are terms which serve as synonyms or corresponding ideas. They are: vanity, futile, empty, meaningless, fleeting, pointless, incomprehensible, breath, vapor, unfulfilling, striving after wind, short-lived, Abel, transitory, temporary, sublunary, under the sun, under heaven and upon the earth.

Many lessons in the book are based on the conclusion that "All is vanity." It is vital, therefore, that one see the numerous possibilities contained in the word "vanity." When all of life and its hopes are qualified by sublunary restrictions and limitations, when everything a man has to remember, enjoy today, and look forward to, is limited to and qualified by experience in this life only, then one begins to sense the impact of the term. The term vanity, therefore, is applicable to everything that falls beneath the curse of sin. When man sinned, he began the process of death. As noted in Genesis 3:17-19, the process was passed on to man's world. Therefore, the "All" of Solomon's declaration is comprehensive enough to include both man and his world. There is a genuine pity associated with this truth. As the Apostle Paul has said, "If we have only hoped in Christ in this life, we are of all men most to be pitied" (I Corinthians 15:19). Or again, "If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (I Corinthians 15:32).

At the beginning of the book, we are confronted with the most basic question man can possibly ask: Is this life, in its toil, pleasures, possessions, challenges, and ambitions all there is to living, or is there a Word from God to give hope to man in the midst of his activities? It is in the face of this question that the Preacher embarks on his quest.

It is with deep gratitude to God that we study Ecclesiastes

with the wisdom of His final revelation. On numerous occasions Jesus pointed to the transitory nature of man and his world and always directed his hearers to a higher calling. It was indeed Solomon that Jesus had in mind, clothed in all his glory, when he drove home the lesson that “. . . not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions” (Luke 12:15). It is in the light of this truth that he challenges us, “But seek for His kingdom, and these things shall be added to you. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves purses which do not wear out, and unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near, nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your hearts be also” (Luke 12:31-34).

Solomon’s use of “vanity” does not convey the idea of “fatalism” because God is always present in the sense that He is the acknowledged Creator of this world (12:1), and in His providence He controls the ultimate outcome of all events.

FACT QUESTIONS 1:2

9. What should be included in the term “All” in the statement “All is vanity”?
10. Since the proper noun “Abel” is derived from the Hebrew term for vanity, what meaning should be ascribed to “Abel”?
11. How often does the term “vanity” appear in Ecclesiastes?
12. List some of the possible ways the Hebrew term “hebel” could be translated.
13. According to Paul’s reasoning in I Corinthians 15:19, what would cause man most to be pitied?
14. What did Jesus say concerning earthly possessions? Cf. Luke 12:15
15. “Fatalism” is the teaching that the world is controlled by fate. Why can we rule “fatalism” out as a possible interpretation to the book of Ecclesiastes?

C. EXPLANATION: 3-11

1. Man cannot show a profit of all his labor under the sun.
1:3

TEXT 1:3

- 3 What advantage does man have in all his work which he does under the sun?

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 1:3

8. Explain the meaning of "advantage" in the light of 3:9 and 1:22-23.
9. Man labors, but his work is restricted to what place?

PARAPHRASE 1:3

If all of man's efforts are for personal gain and satisfaction, when life is over, what does he possess that he can claim as his reward?

COMMENT 1:3

v. 3 This first question in the book gets to the heart of the Preacher's pursuit. It is not a question directed toward a lazy person. He is a worker! He has dreams and ambitions. He envisions great wealth and power. It is the advantage or profit that he is concerned with. This same proposition is close to Jesus' heart as he, too, raises the question, but is quick to offer an incentive to make our work worthwhile. He says, "For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for

his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds" (Matthew 16:26-27).

The term "advantage" or "profit" is only used in Ecclesiastes. It does not appear in any other Old Testament book. It is used several times by Solomon (1:3; 2:11; 3:9; 5:9, 16; 7:11). It means preeminence or gain. It may also mean "to remain or be left." The meaning here is that of a collected materialistic gain. The Preacher's contention is that man does not have an advantage or profit. He cannot hold on to anything. He toils, labors, plans, but it is like grasping the wind (4:16; 5:15).

This first question of the book offers a key to the reader. It is obvious that man will be engaged in making his living by the sweat of his brow (Genesis 3:19). Man and labor are not equal but they are inseparable. But what will be man's profit? This question must be held against the interpretation of the entire book. Even when there is a temporary profit (5:9; 7:11) it is short lived and unfulfilling.

Modern man, too, grows weary of facing the labor of each day, realizing nothing more than the financial compensation at the end of the week. The monotonous grind of daily routine of the Preacher's day resulted in the declaration, "I completely despaired of all the fruit of my labor" (2:20).

What a vastly different question is "What advantage does the *Christian* man have in all his labor?" Cf. Colossians 1:29; Hebrews 13:21; Revelation 14:13.

Solomon's question and answer are qualified by the phrase "under the sun." This restricts both his question and his answer. Just what restrictions the phrase places upon the inquiry and the place and meaning of the phrase in the book of Ecclesiastes now draws our attention.

The phrase "under the sun" implies a necessary restriction. What is to be included, and what is to be excluded? Since Solomon does not define the meaning for us, we are left to discover the meaning from the use of the idea in the context of the book. One cannot go outside Ecclesiastes for his answer as the phrase is no where else employed in the Bible.

Two other phrases used in the book apparently carry the same meaning. They are "under heaven," and "upon the earth." It is Solomon's purpose, through the use of these restricting phrases, to make his observations and conclusions believable. On occasion he expresses the futility of life "under the sun" with such words as, "who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime, during the few years of his futile life" (6:12)? Yet, he never qualifies his toil "upon the earth" by contrasting it to any after life or hope of eternal blessing. It is as if he is saying, if on this earth we find our complete experience and reason for existing—if this life is all there is, then "a live dog is better than a dead lion . . . for whoever is joined with the living, there is hope" (9:4. Life "under the sun" may not afford man the opportunity for enjoyment, but one must be alive in order to take advantage of such opportunity if it does come.

The restriction "under the sun" appears to be a self-imposed framework of interpreting the meaning of life as it is lived apart from the "verbal revelation" from God. Without the benefit of "words" from God, man is caught in a futile struggle to unravel and interpret the complexities of our transitory world. Thus, the phrase "under the sun" includes that which has to do with purely earthly things. The Preacher purposely closes off the influence of Heaven for the sake of his higher purpose: i.e. the vanity of all earthly things.

In a very real sense the "sun" can move about heaven mocking man, disappearing only to return again tomorrow, smiling upon the futile efforts of those who are so identified with sublunary affairs. Yet, for some, a new day dawns and as Malachi predicted, "For you who fear My name the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings" (Malachi 4:2). The Preacher is not ready to take us to the "new day" but intends to fully demonstrate that upon the earth, under heaven, and beneath the earthly sun, man toils and dreams but for little profit!

“UNDER THE SUN,” “UNDER HEAVEN,” AND “UPON EARTH”

A STUDY OF
 “UNDER THE SUN,” “UNDER HEAVEN,”
 AND “UPON EARTH”

IN ECCLESIASTES

Scripture Reference	That which is viewed by Solomon under the sun	Observations and Conclusions
1:3	All the work one does	What advantage?
1:9	Nothing that is new	Already has been done
1:13	All that has been done	A grievous task to discover
1:14	All the works that have been done	Vanity, Striving after wind
2:3	What good the sons of men might do	Vanity, Striving after wind, No profit
2:11	All of man's labor, activities and exertion	Vanity, Striving after wind, No profit
2:17	Work	Hated life, Grievous, Futile, Striving after wind
2:18	All the fruit of my labor	Hated it Must leave it to another
2:19	All the fruit of my labor	Vanity, Another will have control over it
2:20	All the fruit of my labor	I completely despaired
2:22	All labor and striving	Painful, Grievous, No rest, Vanity
3:1-9	An appointed time for everything	What profit?

ECCLESIASTES

A STUDY OF "UNDER THE SUN" . . . *continued*

Scripture Reference	That which is viewed by Solomon under the sun	Observations and Conclusions
3:16-19	Wickedness in the place of righteousness and justice	Vanity
4:1-2 4:3	Acts of oppression Evil activities	Congratulated the dead Greater congratulations to the one who never lived
4:7-8	Labor depriving me of pleasure	No one to whom to leave the wealth
4:15-16	Prominence and success are soon forgotten	Vanity, Striving after wind
5:13-16	Riches hoarded by their owner	Grievous evil, No advantage, Toiling for the wind
6:1-6	A man who has been given everything from the hand of God, but he cannot enjoy them and a foreigner enjoys them	Prevalent evil, Vanity, Sore affliction, Miscarriage is better, Ends in the grave, Never satisfied, No advantage over the poor, Futility, Striving after wind, Cannot argue with God, Increases futility, No advantage
6:12	Spends life like a shadow, Few years	No knowledge of tomorrow
7:20-24	No righteous man	Remote, Exceedingly mysterious

“UNDER THE SUN,” “UNDER HEAVEN,” AND “UPON EARTH”

A STUDY OF “UNDER THE SUN” . . . *continued*

Scripture Reference	That which is viewed by Solomon under the sun	Observations and Conclusions
8:9-13	Every deed done, Exercised authority to another's hurt, Dead are soon forgotten, Wicked receive burial, Men do evil continually, Sinner lengthens his life,	Futility
8:14	Righteous suffer as though they were the wicked ones, Wicked are blessed as though they were the righteous ones	Futility
8:16-17	Sleepless effort to discover wisdom and the task done, Saw every work of God	Cannot discover the work, Cannot really know
9:3	All that is done	An evil, One fate for all, Insanity in all men's hearts, All men go to the dead
9:6	All that is done: love, hate, and zeal	Have perished, Man no longer has a share
9:11	Race is not to the swift, Battle is not to the warriors, Bread is not to the wise,	Time and chance determine these things

A STUDY OF "UNDER THE SUN" . . . *continued*

Scripture Reference	That which is viewed by Solomon under the sun	Observations and Conclusions
	Wealth is not to the discerning, Favor is not to men of ability	
10:5	Folly is in the hand of the ruler, Princes sit in humble places	An evil
10:7	Slaves riding on horses, Princes walking like slaves on the land	An evil

The following three references employ the phrase differently. In each instance, the results are positive rather than negative. The Preacher's message to the man who lives "under the sun" is that he should resign himself to the Providence of God, enjoy one day at a time, and make the most of the "now." Salvation or eternal redemption are not the subjects under discussion for the man "under the sun." He is searching for the best way to live out the difficult days of his life.

5:18-20	God gives you a few years to eat, drink, and enjoy your labor	Good, Fitting, Your reward, Rejoice, Keeps you from remembering the past
8:15	Eat, drink, be merry, Enjoy pleasure and labor	God gives him these days of his life
9:9	Toil and labor with the woman you love	This is your reward Enjoy life

FACT QUESTIONS 1:3

16. What advantage does man have in all his work done under the sun?
17. What is meant by the word "advantage"?
18. What does Revelation 14:13 teach will happen to the Christian's works?
19. What two phrases, also used in the book, are equivalent to the phrase "under the sun"?
20. What limitations are considered by the phrase "under the sun"?
21. Why does Solomon say that a "live dog is better than a dead lion"? Cf. 9:4

2. Compared with the world,
man is transitory and all his efforts are futile. 1:4-8

TEXT 1:4-8

- 4 A generation goes and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever.
- 5 Also, the sun rises and the sun sets; and hastening to its place, it rises there again.
- 6 Blowing toward the south, then turning toward the north, the wind continues swirling along; and on its circular courses the wind returns.
- 7 All the rivers flow into the sea, yet the sea is not full. To the place where the rivers flow, there they flow again.
- 8 All things are wearisome; man is not able to tell it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor is the ear filled with hearing.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 1:4-8

10. When did man become a transitory creature? Cf. Genesis 2:17.

11. How is the term "forever" to be understood in verse 4? Cf. Hebrews 1:10-12 and II Peter 3:10-11.
12. In addition to the generations of men, what three things that God created are used to illustrate the routinism of our world?
13. Everything that man does see and hear, he describes how?

PARAPHRASE 1:4-8

Generations are indeed transitory in their coming and going as compared to the earth, which appears to remain forever. The sun rises and sets, staying within its orbit or tent,² and panting along mocks the futility of man. Likewise, the wind stays within its appointed circular courses and going toward the south and turning back toward the north it continues swirling along. The little wet-weather streams run to the sea, but the sea is never full. In due season they fill their banks and flow to the sea again, but the sea is never full! Man, in his trek about the earth, is never able to see everything or hear everything. All things continue in wearisome toiling; man cannot tell how much.

COMMENT 1:4-8

v. 4 Both man and earth share in the gloomy, monotonous routine of activities. Both man and earth are transitory. The tragedy manifests itself when men, the highest of all God's creatures and made from the earth, continually pass away while the earth remains. Solomon pictures the world as the stage upon which the tragic drama occurs. One generation

² This concept is not foreign to the Bible. In the *New American Standard Bible*, Psalm 19:4 is translated, "He (God) has placed a tent for the sun." Cf. Psalm 104:2. This is a picturesque description of what one should envision when considering man "under the sun." The "tent" closes out the higher values and confines man to knowledge and wisdom discovered only within the tent.

enters as the former generation exits. The events that take place within each generation are described in 3:1-8. They encompass one's life from the time of birth to the time of death. The Preacher does not see beyond the tent which God pitched for the sun and earth. From his observations he concludes that the earth remains forever. When he has reviewed how man spends his short span of life, with its numerous activities involving the "appointed time for everything," he raises the same question with which he opens his book: "What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils?" (3:9). Man doesn't seem to have any advantage, and the only advantage the earth has over man is in its duration. But even here, the word "forever" does not mean eternal. In Exodus 21:6, instruction is given whereby a servant is to serve his master "forever." It simply means "a good long time." Old Testament evidence of the transitory nature of the earth is found in Psalms 102:24-28.

Metaphorically, James implies that it is indeed the sun which destroys us. He says, speaking of man, "because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with the burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and its flower falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth; so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways" (James 1:10-11). It is in this same context that James reminds us that our life is but a vapor, and like the vapor will quickly vanish away.

vs. 5-7 The lesson of man's transitory nature and the futility of earthly endeavor is the purpose of this section. To look for more than this is to cloud the issue and perhaps miss the impact of the book.

The sun, the wind, and the rivers disappear, but unlike man, they are there again tomorrow! In our modern day we see and hear man's protest that the earth outlasts him. Such plaintive cries as "That lazy old sun ain't got nothin' to do, but roll around heaven all day," or, "Old man river, he don't say nothin', he just keeps rolling, he just keeps rolling along," demonstrates man's frustration and resentment in the light

of his own transitory existence. The sun stays within its own appointed limits but as it pants along it appears to actually mock as man works in endless endeavor to discover the profit of his labor. Likewise, the wind is confined to circular courses, and although it appears to pass on never to return, it inevitably finds its way back in its trek about the earth.

The streams, which once flowed freely and often furiously to the sea, may at times beg for water and appear to have lost their intended purpose, but in time they fill their banks and rush toward the sea again. Thus, they demonstrate, that unlike man they continue on forever!

Even though the sun, wind and streams continue on beyond the duration of any generation, they demonstrate the unwearied sameness of the procedure of the repetition of all things. Everything the sun shines upon is transitory by nature, even the sun itself. Man comes and goes, the sun comes and goes, the wind comes and goes, and the streams come and go.

Just as there is a sameness in the backdrop of nature, and a sameness in the "props" which appear upon the stage of life, so there is an identifying characteristic of sameness to be found in man. Since the fall, man and his world have at least one thing in common: "they have been made subject to vanity" (Romans 8:20). Solomon is sharing with us the conclusion of his initial observation. He remarks that man, like his world, is in ceaseless, monotonous, regular motion. Both are on a treadmill, it is just sad that man exits first.

v. 8 Two ideas are possible in translating verse eight. One suggests that all things are more wearisome than words can tell. The other suggests that it is wearisome to try and discover all things. The final thought in the verse is saying that man is unable to discover everything that should be seen or heard and thus the latter idea would be the most tenable. He does not intend to say that man cannot discover some truth or draw reasonable conclusions. Ecclesiastes is filled with numerous discoveries made under the sun. He is stating that when one pursues earthly knowledge, the eye cannot see it all nor the ear hear it all. But, even if he did, he would not discover

the meaning of it all. He knows enough to at least reach this conclusion.

FACT QUESTIONS 1:4-8

22. What is the "tragic drama" taking place?
23. What is the only advantage the earth has over man?
24. Explain the meaning of "forever" as it is used in verse 4.
25. What is the main purpose of this section?
26. What two ideas could come from the translation of verse 8?
27. Is man capable of attaining knowledge apart from the revelation of God's word? Explain your answer.
28. If man could discover everything going on in his world, he would still not have the answer to what important question?

3. History repeats itself and man forgets what has gone before.
1:9-11

TEXT 1:9-11

- 9 That which has been is that which will be, and that which has been done is that which will be done. So there is nothing new under the sun.
- 10 Is there anything of which one might say, "See this, it is new?" Already it has existed for ages which were before us.
- 11 There is no remembrance of earlier things; and also of the later things which will occur, there will be for them no remembrance among those who will come later still.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 1:9-11

14. Is Solomon contending that there is a sameness which marks all parts of man and his world?

15. What is Solomon's answer if man were to say, "See this, it is new?"
16. Does the "for them" of verse eleven refer to things or generations?
17. Since the "them" of verse eleven refers to the "earlier things" and the "later things," and these happen in every generation, why would someone call them new?
18. How is this truth illustrated in 2:16? Cf. 9:5.

PARAPHRASE 1:9-11

The sun shines on all the earth and exposes the routine sameness of all the events which continue on since creation. They shall continue on the same. There is nothing new under the sun! Is something new because you in your generation have not discovered it? Is something new simply because it was forgotten by one generation? No! Sometime in the past it existed as we now discover it. All generations are similar in that they fail to remember the former things and fail to acknowledge that the same events will happen in the future. However, the routine activities of all things continue on regardless of the attitudes men have toward them.

COMMENT 1:9-11

vs. 9-11 These three verses constitute his final arguments in this section. He has declared that everything has fallen beneath the curse of impermanent futility. Rhetorically he has questioned if man has any profit at all in all his work. He has illustrated that not only man, but man's world are caught in a routine sameness that is characteristic of every generation's experience. Man cannot tell everything, he cannot bear everything, and he cannot see everything. What he does perceive he concludes isn't new, but if man thinks it is, it is only because he does not remember what has gone before. History

repeats itself. His further observation is that since human nature and nature itself never change, not only are his peers guilty of forgetting what has gone before, but those who are to come will not remember the things of today.

Solomon is really saying, "He that has seen the present, has seen all things." Things are considered novel or new only because they have been forgotten. So intent is the Preacher on this point that he repeats himself in verses nine and ten.

Much of what Solomon writes throughout the book is based on this premise. For example, he speaks of how easily men are forgotten (9:6-7; 9:15). He instructs us to enjoy today and not to fret over a tomorrow which none is able to see (7:14; 9:7). He suggests that he sought to know wisdom, madness, and folly, and that each of these will be sought by the one who succeeds the king (2:12). There is no lasting memory of either a wise man or a fool (2:16). God knows that human nature is always the same and seeks to deal with man on that basis (3:15; 6:10).

There is dispute as to whether the term "things" in verse eleven refers to "former generations" and "later generations" or "former things" and "later things." The original terms could have either meaning. If one looks at the Preacher's writings in 9:6-7 and 9:15, he will discover that "generations" do fail to remember that which happened long ago. However, the context seems to be weakened by this interpretation. His "all" of verse two and his "earlier things" and "later things" of this verse encompass all the activities of each generation. This appears to be more in harmony with the question he seeks to answer: "What advantage does man have in all his *work* which he does under the sun?" (v. 3).

His message is simple. If one keeps his eyes upon this world alone, then his labor is worth very little. He discovers that all his labor becomes entangled in the gray maze of monotonous, endless activities of not only his own life and generation, but of every generation that "goes" and "comes." It all fades into a similar backdrop of routine acts of nature which he so vividly describes through the activities of the sun, wind and rivers.

His toil and effort on earth profit little. He discovers that he is caught in a purposeless web, a staircase to nowhere, the proverbial treadmill. His observations grow out of a life of one who has lived through the optimum of the excitement of youth as well as the experience of fulfilled dreams which he entertained in young manhood. Now, on the edge of departure from this world, with his eyes focused on earthly values alone, he wants to know what advantage, or profit, he can claim as his own in all his labor.

When man elects to face life and interpret its mystery apart from God's help, he inevitably will come to the same conclusion. Solomon has established an inescapable principle that a wise man works in harmony with the will of God, and God alone. The first half of his book illustrates the premise set forth in chapter one verses one through eleven. Many have asked, "What does the writer know of life?" Almost as if Solomon anticipated the question, he takes up the challenge and turns to the task before him. He is now determined to demonstrate the wisdom of his conclusion.

FACT QUESTIONS 1:9-11

29. What has fallen beneath the curse of futility?
30. In what sense is Solomon teaching that history repeats itself?
31. What is there in verse 11 that corresponds to the "all" in verse 2?
32. What conclusion will man reach in reference to the question of the purpose of life, if he lives all of it purely "under the sun"?
33. The first half of Ecclesiastes illustrates what premise?

I. A MAN OF WISDOM WORKS IN HARMONY WITH GOD'S PROVIDENTIAL BLESSINGS, OTHERWISE HE DISCOVERS ALL HIS WORK IS VANITY. 1:12—6:12

A. Experiments and Conclusions 1:12—2:26

1. Experiments 1:12—2:11

a. Unlimited resources for research 1:12

TEXT 1:12

12 I, the Preacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 1:12

16. How is "the Preacher" identified in this verse?
17. The Preacher should be identified, therefore, as what person?
18. Write down your own ideas as to what might be involved in the use of the past tense ("have been king") since Solomon is still king as he writes the book.

PARAPHRASE 1:12

I, the one who gathers together God's people in order to preach to them, became king over God's people, Israel.

COMMENT 1:12

v. 12 This verse is in harmony with 1:1 and restates the Preacher's position as king over Israel in Jerusalem. The experiments which immediately follow this verse, required great

wealth and resources. A close study of I Kings 1-11 is sufficient to establish the credibility of Solomon's claim to wealth and capabilities. He was in a position to propose and follow through on the ambitious goals of 1:13 and 2:1.

One major problem of this verse centers on the use of the past tense in reference to his reign over Israel.

The verb rendered "have been" could as easily mean "become," and thus the sentence would carry the idea that Solomon "became king" in Israel³ (note the Paraphrase). However, the purport of the verse does not hinge on the tense of the verb, but rather on the question as to whether the one who is to make the experiments has sufficient wealth and resources to carry them through. He may be saying, "I have been king, and still am!" At any rate, as king he has the authority and financial affluence to pursue his objectives.

Those who would argue for a non-Solomonic authorship interpret the past tense in this verse as implying that the author personified Solomon, as Solomon would not have used the past tense at a time when he was still the king.

The Berleburger Bible conveys the meaning of the verb as a description of the past that stretches into the future, "I the preacher have been king thus far, and am one still."⁴ There is a sense in which the past tense could be used in the latter part of Solomon's reign. The Lord took the kingdom from Saul while he still "looked" like a king. Samuel declared unto Saul, "I will not return with thee; for thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord hath rejected thee from being king over Israel." (Read I Samuel 15:24-35.) Even in Solomon's day the kingdom shook beneath him with unrest and discontent. Sacrifice to foreign deities took place on the sacred ground of Israel. Jeroboam and Rehoboam stood waiting to claim their respective sections of the kingdom when it divided. Indeed, the "handwriting was on the wall." It is reasonable,

³ H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Ecclesiastes* (Columbus, Ohio: The Wartburg Press, 1952), p. 52.

⁴ Hengstenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

therefore, that Solomon could think of himself and the glory of the past as something that would never be reclaimed and thus in the last days of his reign to realize his control over Israel was indeed a thing of the past.

Another view concerning the tense of the verb is called the "citizen-king" concept. It maintains that Solomon speaks through two voices in the book. One voice is as king over Israel, and the other voice is that of a citizen who views "from afar" the happenings in Israel. It is believed that such a view explains the use of past tense in the verse.

Perhaps there is some basis for each of the views under consideration. At any rate, history records that Solomon reigned over Israel until his death. Perhaps the simplest explanation is to accept the possibility that Solomon is saying "I, the Preacher *became* king over Israel in Jerusalem."

FACT QUESTIONS 1:12

34. What major problem is suggested in this verse?
35. Give evidence that Solomon could easily have been the one who carried out the experiments proposed in 1:13 and 2:1.
36. Explain from the example of King Saul how Solomon could be spoken of as a king in the past tense while he is still reigning.
37. Explain the "citizen-king" explanation as it pertains to the tense of the verb in this verse.

- b. Wisdom is used exploring all that is done under heaven.
1:13-18

TEXT 1:13-18

- 13 And I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom concerning all that has been done under heaven. It is a grievous

- task which God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with.
- 14 I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind.
 - 15 What is crooked cannot be straightened, and what is lacking cannot be counted.
 - 16 I said to myself, "Behold, I have magnified and increased wisdom more than all who were over Jerusalem before me; and my mind has observed a wealth of wisdom and knowledge."
 - 17 And I set my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly; I realized that this also is striving after wind.
 - 18 Because in much wisdom there is much grief, and increasing knowledge results in increasing pain.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 1:13-18

19. What is Solomon now determined to do?
21. What tool will he use with which to explore?
23. What is it that he wishes to explore?
24. What does he call the task?
25. Who gives such a task to men?
26. Once he had explored all the works, what conclusion did he reach?
27. Mention some things in life which are "crooked."
28. What are some things which are "lacking"?
29. Who could be compared to Solomon in regards to his increased wisdom?
30. In addition to observing wisdom, what other two things did he study?
31. Upon examining these things, what conclusion did he reach?
32. When one increases wisdom and knowledge "under the sun" what will he receive in return?

PARAPHRASE 1:13-18

I was determined, assessing all my resources, employing all my energies, and guided by my mind, to ferret out and examine the roots, turning everything from side to side, until through wisdom I had explored all that has been done within the limits of the world. To examine and explore all things is a longing placed in man's heart by God Himself. However, it is a grievous, unrewarding task because what is discovered does not bring satisfaction or reward to man's mind. Everything the sun shines upon, I have seen. The conclusion I have reached is the same: nothing discovered upon the earth will fully satisfy man's longings; everything is as filling as feasting on the wind! Let me illustrate what I have just said: man tries to bring harmony to the overwhelming chaos of past and present events, but he despairs because it is a futile effort. Also, there are so many things lacking among the pieces of life that one cannot even count them, let alone find them! Speaking to myself I said, "Your effort was successful in that you expanded your wisdom far beyond that possessed by any who have ever ruled in Jerusalem. Your unlimited resources made it possible that you could examine heretofore unexplored areas of wisdom and knowledge." Certainly it is no secret to myself that I explored every facet of life. I was determined to learn about the disorder of proper thoughts and subsequent consequences. I was determined to learn about evil and wickedness as they are entreated by others. Once again, I concluded that such knowledge is as satisfying as feasting on the wind! As I expanded my understanding of the various aspects of wisdom and knowledge, I discovered that my capacity to suffer grief and pain had also been increased. Not only is this true, but the increased information actually increased my sorrow.

COMMENT 1:13-18

vs. 13-18 Solomon's purpose is clearly defined. He wants

to explore all that is done under heaven. He will do it with his mind guided by wisdom. He sees it as a grievous task, vain and futile.

The term "mind" in verse 3 is a much better translation than "heart" which appears in the King James Version. Almost without exception the use of "heart" in the Old Testament should be thought of as the mental faculties. The idea here is to convey the fact that it is to be a mental procedure. He restates his determination to study and to know in 1:17 when he says, "I set my mind." He does not bring a bias to his work. Neither is he interested in simply accumulating facts. He desires to see the nature of "why" and "how" things work.

"Seek" and "explore" are not synonymous. "Seek" carries the idea of studying that which is near at hand while "explore" suggests taking a comprehensive overview of something at a greater distance. Or, as Barton has stated it: "'Search' means to investigate the roots of a matter; 'explore' to explore the subject on all sides."⁵ He does not leave a stone unturned in his quest to discover all that has been done under heaven. He is dealing, however, with that which has felt the blow of Adam's fall. He explores everything that comes within his power to see or hear. He is faced with endless observations but his conclusion is that all of it is afflicted with the mark of the vanity of this world. He calls it a "grievous" task and "striving after wind."

Since the task is grievous and drives one to despair, why say that God has given this task to man?

That is just the point! God has not given it to other than man. Nothing in all of God's creation, except man, concerns itself with the "why" of the activities of our world. Man, however, is restless until he discovers the why. Augustine's admission to God was that men are restless until they find their rest in Him. This quest for God in all the things around us is a futile pursuit. The reason it is unfulfilling is that it is directed

⁵ Leupold, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

toward God's creation, and not toward the mind of God which interprets God's creation. In Jesus' day the mind of God was revealed to man in the fullest sense. It was under these circumstances that Jesus said, privately to his disciples, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see, for I say to you, that many prophets and kings wished to see the things which you see, and did not see them, and to hear the things which you hear, and did not hear them" (Luke 10:23-24).

False gods are worshipped throughout the world. False idols are established in every land. Why? Because these are expressions of man's frustrations and despair. He is searching in harmony with the grievous task in his mind, yet his results are inconsistent and unrewarding. His ultimate frustration is depicted by the Athenians in their erecting an altar to an unknown god! We hear Solomon say that God "has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end" (3:11). It is an "affliction" because man is honest enough to admit that God is only longed for, not discovered. He must also admit, as Solomon does, that the mark of sin is so heavy upon both man and his world that nothing can really be changed, and that which is lacking in man and nature is still lacking. Man is not capable of remaking his world or himself. Cracks can be plastered, and cosmetically treated, but not healed. On our own, we can be pretenders and mask wearers, but we really can't make the crooked straight or add to man's account in order to make him acceptable before God.

Man is crooked and lacking, but God is not responsible for this. It was man who violated God's order, and thus suffers the consequences of sin. He and his world stand out of joint and in debt before God. God placed the curse upon both man and the world because of sin. In a sense it can be said that God bends things and people out of shape. But it is only in the sense that God made the righteous rules which were violated by men, and God placed the subsequent punishments upon that which violates the rules. It is in the light of this truth that

Solomon admonishes us, "consider the work of God. Who is able to straighten what he has bent?" (7:13). Man is in debt to God. Solomon in all his wisdom cannot help. Paul goes a step further and declares that even the world cannot help. "Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through wisdom did not come to know God, God was well pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe . . . we preach Christ crucified . . . because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (I Corinthians 1:20-25).

Another reason why the task is grievous has to do with the accomplishment of the very thing he started out to do. He wanted to explore all that had been done on the earth. He wanted to increase his wisdom and knowledge. He states that he accomplished this task to the degree that he (1) magnified and increased his wisdom more than any who had ruled over Jerusalem before him, and (2) his mind had observed a wealth of wisdom and knowledge. It is grievous because he admits that the more he learns, the greater his pain and grief. The deeper one penetrates the true nature of man, and the more knowledge one has concerning the inequities of life's struggle, the more disappointed he is with what he learns. His grief is actually compounded when he discovers that although he is a wise man, in this case greater than any who have lived before him, that he is still helpless and unable to bring justice to his own affairs. In addition, he is unable to correct the anomalies in the affairs of those about him.

In verse 17, he decides that he will also observe all he can concerning "madness" and "folly." These words are usually associated with wickedness and improprieties. He contrasts these with "wisdom" which he actually employs in his pursuit. One example of Solomon's observation of madness and folly is found in 10:12-13 where it is stated, "the lips of the fool consume him; the beginning of his talking is folly, and the end of it is wicked madness." He associates folly and madness

with the fool not the wise man. It is one thing to share in something, and something else to know of it through observation. It appears that Solomon is observing it rather than experiencing it. We read 7:25, "I directed my mind to know . . . the evil of folly and the foolishness of madness." Cf. 2:12.

Solomon's experiment was a success. That is, if he wanted merely to seek and explore by wisdom all that has been done under heaven. It was not successful if its objective was to bring him peace and satisfaction. His observations concerning it are (1) it is grievous, (2) it is an affliction, (3) it is vanity and striving after wind, (4) it increased my grief and my pain.

FACT QUESTIONS 1:13-18

38. What is the goal of Solomon's first experiment?
39. Why is mind a better translation than heart (v. 13)?
40. What evidence is there that Solomon was determined?
41. What is the difference between "seek" and "explore"?
42. What happened in the world that makes the study of it a grievous task?
43. Why say that God gave this grievous task to man?
44. Idols and gods are evidence of what within man?
45. Give evidence from Ecclesiastes that God does not intend for man to find out His work from observations under the sun.
46. What does "crooked" and "lacking" mean?
47. In what sense is God responsible for it?
48. Why was Solomon's increased wisdom also a matter of grief?
49. Why was his grief "compounded"?
50. What words are associated with madness and folly?
51. In what way was Solomon's first experiment a success?
52. In what way was it a failure?

A STUDY OF
SOLOMON'S USE OF THE TERM GOD IN ECCLESIASTES

In 1:13, the reader is introduced for the first time to Solomon's own selection from the Hebrew language for God. It is of particular interest because there are numerous alternatives. That is, Solomon could have used other Hebrew terms than the one selected. The term for God appears forty-one times in the book. He also speaks of God as Creator and the Shepherd. He uses the pronouns "He," "His," and "Him" ten times. Thus, there are fifty-three direct references to God in the book.

Solomon selected the term Elohim for God. Never once did he employ the term Jehovah. There is a distinction that is often made between the two names. Jehovah is the name for God which communicates the idea that God covenants with His people, entering in a more personal relationship than what may be indicated in the use of Elohim. Elohim is the term used to speak of God as He is discovered, not in a covenant pact, but through the evidence of nature.

Perhaps one should exercise caution by reading more into the limited use of Elohim in the book than the author intended. There are two lines of reasoning, however, that are offered for his choice of the term Elohim to the exclusion of the term Jehovah. We shall discuss them separately.

The first one suggests that Solomon was growing old and lost the joy and closeness he once knew with God. It is argued that it would be inappropriate for him to choose the name for God that implies warmth and friendship. Solomon, it is thought, had forfeited this right.

The other argument appears to be more plausible. It speaks more to the intent and purpose of the book. It is reasoned that the name Jehovah speaks of the God of divine revelation and covenant relationships, and is, therefore, excluded from Solomon's writings because it is his purpose to discover truths on his own through his own wisdom and experimentation. It is not Solomon's intention to pretend that God does not exist,

A STUDY OF WISDOM

or that God is not interested in His world and that which is contained in it. Quite the contrary, God's concern for man and man's need to be concerned about God is the conclusion of the whole book. It is Solomon's intention to demonstrate that man is hopelessly frustrated if all he has as his guide is the evidence of nature. Elohim is the God of providence and creation. He may be discovered in that sense by all men. God's glory is manifested through the work of His hands in both the heavens and the earth. Cf. Psalms 19:1.

The purpose of the book is best served by thinking of God as Creator rather than the revealer of propositional truth. If the choice of the word Elohim best does this, then perhaps this is the purpose behind the exclusive use of the name in Ecclesiastes.

A STUDY OF WISDOM AS IT IS USED IN THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

The Bible gives various meanings to our English word wisdom. The diagram on page 40 illustrates at least three different kinds. One can see that the wisdom "from above" involves revelation and speaks to the higher level of behavior that is characteristic of those who walk with God. The wisdom "from below" is just the opposite. It involves the individual in those activities associated with the one who carries out the will of the Devil. James speaks of this wisdom as "earthly, natural, demonic" (James 3:15). The wisdom discussed in Ecclesiastes is neither that which is from above, nor that which is from below. The wisdom pursued and employed by the Preacher (Solomon) is best described as that which is discovered "under the sun." This wisdom is discussed in the following passages: 1:13, 16, 17, 18; 2:3, 9, 12, 13, 21, 26; 7:11, 12, 19, 23, 25; 8:1, 16; 9:10, 13, 15, 16, 18; 10:1, 10.

According to the preacher, this wisdom is available to every man who is willing to pursue it. It is not evil of itself. It should

be learned and followed. Both the godly and the ungodly employ it (Cf. Diagram, page 40, I, III). However, it will not bring lasting satisfaction although it has certain advantages over other things which can be possessed. It is despised by some and sought after by others. It may be used to discover knowledge and can be magnified and increased. It strengthens, excels foolishness, protects its owner, causes the face to shine, and brings success. It is better than weapons of war and may deliver one from the hands of his enemy. It will increase the ability to use an inheritance for good. It is limited in its usefulness to this world and cannot be found in the grave. Because it is so identified with the futility of this world, of which it, too, is a part, there is the logical conclusion that in much wisdom is much grief.

Solomon's experiments explained in the first two chapters were not independent of his life-long work. What we see in these two sections are the detailed procedures and the motivating forces behind his work. He is speaking of his pursuit under heaven and under the sun of all that has been done. It was written of him that "he spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon even to the hyssop that grows on the wall; he spoke also of animals and birds and creeping things and fish" (I Kings 4:33).

In what sense does Solomon stand in first place in respect to the possession of wisdom? There can be little doubt that he does! (I Kings 3:12) His wisdom is a testimony to his amount of knowledge, not that he was the most righteous or morally sound man who ever lived. The poor of necessity looked up to him. They had neither the resources nor opportunities for such pursuit. However, kings and queens also looked up to him and marveled over his wisdom and knowledge.

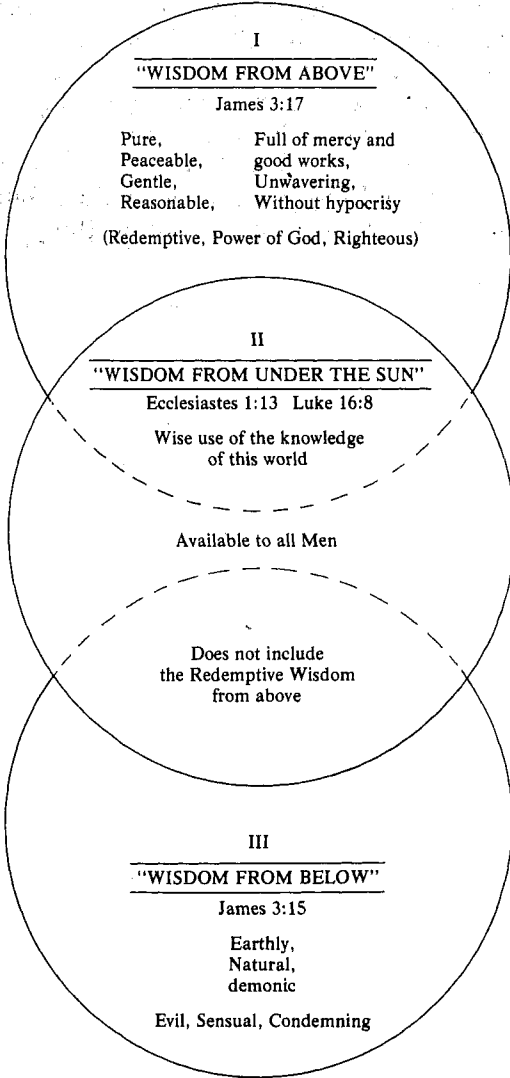
Solomon's reputation as a wise man became the talk of the East country and Egypt. It is written that his "fame was known in all the surrounding nations" (I Kings 4:31). So extensive was his fame that "all the earth was seeking the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom which God had put in his heart" (I Kings 10:24).

A STUDY OF WISDOM

The wisdom discovered "under the sun" is available to both the Christian as well as the non-Christian. At times the unbeliever demonstrates better use of such wisdom, often referred to as common sense, than does the believer. It is in this context that Jesus said, ". . . the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light" (Luke 16:8). The ideal Christian would avoid the wisdom from below, he would accept and follow the wisdom from above, and he would skilfully employ the wisdom found "under the sun" to the best of his advantage and to the glory of God.

ECCLESIASTES

DIAGRAM "A"
THREE KINDS OF WISDOM AVAILABLE TO MAN



- c. Wisdom is used in the exploration of sensuous pleasure.
2:1-11

TEXT 2:1-11

- 1 I said to myself, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself." And behold, it too was futility.
- 2 I said of laughter, "It is madness," and of pleasure, "What does it accomplish?"
- 3 I explored with my mind how to stimulate my body with wine while my mind was guiding me wisely, and how to take hold of folly, until I could see what good there is for the sons of men to do under heaven the few years of their lives.
- 4 I enlarged my works: I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself;
- 5 I made gardens and parks for myself, and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees;
- 6 I made ponds of water for myself from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees.
- 7 I bought male and female slaves, and I had homeborn slaves. Also I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem.
- 8 Also, I collected for myself silver and gold, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men—many concubines.
- 9 Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me.
- 10 And all that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor.
- 11 Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 2:1-11

33. How many times do the words "I," "my," and "myself" appear in this passage (vs. 1-11)?
34. What obvious conclusion is drawn from this observation?
35. How many times in this same passage does Solomon indicate that his plans and great works were for the enjoyment of others?
36. Solomon now turns to what specific area of activity (v. 1)?
37. After experiencing laughter and pleasure, what is Solomon's conclusion?
38. He is still searching for the answer to what question (v. 3)?
39. Give proof from two different verses in this section that all of his activities were guided by wisdom.
40. List five of the works which he built and/or enlarged.
41. What two distinctive categories of slaves did he possess?
42. What did he say concerning the proportion of his livestock in comparison to others who owned flocks and herds?
43. Name the items of personal pleasure mentioned in verse eight.
44. What did Solomon claim as his reward for all his labor?
45. Upon reviewing all of his activities (v. 11), list the three attitudes he has toward them.

PARAPHRASE 2:1-11

Addressing myself, I said, "Look, let me experiment with all the pleasures which appeal to my senses, and see the good that can bring me enjoyment." What enjoyment did it bring me? That which came of it was as satisfying as feasting on the wind. I had something to say concerning the laughter and merrymaking which came of my experiment with pleasure: "It is madness." And of pleasure itself I said, "It does not accomplish a thing." I extended my experiment to the pleasures of the table. I stimulated my body with wine and yet my mind always remained in control of every situation. I thought

fulfillment could be found in silliness, the opposite of wisdom, so I put my hand to folly and asked, "What good is there for the sons of men to do during the few days of their short lives as they lived them under heaven?" I planned and carried out great undertakings. I planned them for myself. I was not satisfied with building just one house for myself, so I built houses. I planted vineyards for my own personal gratification and enjoyment. I designed and constructed a paradise of shade trees and winding paths where I could enjoy their beauty and the relaxing benefits of my parks. Throughout my gardens and parks, I planted all kinds of fruit trees. I needed to irrigate a forest of growing trees, so I constructed pools for myself. I owned many servants. Some I purchased for myself, both male and female. Others I had born in my own house and considered them in a special way as sons of the house. I collected large amounts of silver and gold. I gathered it together for myself. I also amassed treasures typical of kings and rulers of provinces. I provided male and female singers for my own enjoyment and satisfaction. I indulged myself with the pleasure of men—concubine after concubine. None could boast of the possessions and luxuries at my command. I was greater than any who had been before me in Jerusalem. I surveyed the purpose of it all through the eyes of the wisdom which is under the sun. This kind of wisdom I retained as a constant companion. I did not deny my eyes anything they wished to see. If my thoughts ran to embrace any pleasure, and I desired it, I provided it for myself. Did I receive a reward from all that I had done? Yes. My heart was delighted that I had accomplished for myself everything that I proposed—this was my reward. Now I must return to my original question: What good is there for the sons of men to do the few days of their short lives that they live under heaven? I kept that question in mind and considered all the things that I had done and the energy I expended, and my conclusion is that all of it is unfulfilling, futile, and striving for the wind. None of it is profitable for the man who lives under the sun.

COMMENT 2:1-11

What good is there for the sons of men to do under heaven? This is the question that troubles Solomon (1:13; 2:3). His desire to know the answer is insatiable. In his first experiment he set his mind, guided by wisdom and knowledge, to discover the causes and results of all that had been done under heaven. His experiment was successful, it just did not yield satisfaction. He discovered that his reward was mental pain and sorrow rather than the desired mental health and peace. He now considers the possibility of the answer coming from another area of research "under the sun." It is "pleasure" that now intrigues him. He is not unlike the rest of us in his desire to experience the pleasures of life. The motivation behind Solomon is one of personal gratification. Nothing of the loving, philanthropic nature of concern colors his activities. It is indeed misanthropy. His self-centered desire is a matter of record. He states, "I said to myself, 'Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself.'" The grammatical construction "dative of interest" (for myself) appears eight times in these eleven verses. In addition, there are thirty references to the pronouns "I" and "my" in this limited summary of his pursuit of pleasure. It is manifestly evident that if the answer to his question is to be found in this area of life, he intends to discover it.

One should not be unduly critical of Solomon. His experiments are not hedonistic. He is not sensually lusting after base and inordinate things. He wishes only to come alive to the pleasures to be received through the senses. He wants his answers to come to him within the framework of the demonstrable. He is interested in seeing, feeling, smelling, tasting, and hearing. He declares that he did not withhold any pleasure from his heart.

Although Solomon does not mention it in the text, it is a matter of record that his resources to carry out such an experiment were unlimited. It was written that ". . . silver and gold were as stones in Jerusalem" (I Kings 10:27). He had successfully

increased his kingdom ten times beyond what he had inherited from his father. By his own declaration he proclaimed that he had increased in wealth more than all who had preceded him in Jerusalem.

vs. 1 The "Come now" of this verse indicates a new direction. We have explained it as the exploration of sensuous pleasure. As in the other experiment, he states his conclusion at the beginning. Futility marks his pursuit. He should not have been surprised, for from his own pen had previously come the words, "Even in laughter the heart may be in pain, and the end of joy may be grief" (Proverbs 14:13). He declares the reality of this.

That which is being tested is the question concerning what is good for man in the few years he has on this earth. This appears to be the key question in the book. It was asked in 1:3 and also in 1:13. The question is clearly stated here in 2:3. Although he does not arrive at the answer in this section, he does state conclusively that he had discovered what is good for the sons of men to do during their lives as they live them under heaven. Note his conclusions:

- (1) "There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen, that it is from the hand of God" (2:24).
- (2) "I know there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one's lifetime, moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor—it is the gift of God" (3:12-13).
- (3) "Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat to drink and enjoy oneself in all one's labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward. Furthermore, as for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, He has also empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor; this

is the gift of God" (5:18-19).

- (4) "For who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime, during the few years of his futile life? He will spend them like a shadow. For who can tell a man what will be after him under the sun" (6:12)?
- (5) "So I commended pleasure, for there is nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat and to drink and to be merry, and this will stand by him in his toils throughout the days of his life which God has given him under the sun" (8:15).
- (6) "Go then, eat your bread in happiness, and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works" (9:7).
- (7) "Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life, and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun" (9:9).

As important as the theme is, it is to be understood as a minor chord which he sounds, a half step less than the major theme. The theme is recurring, appearing no less than seven times as noted above, yet it only leads man to the logical conclusion as he views life under the sun. It is in this light alone he turns to examine the evidence of his quest. The major theme speaks to the emptiness of what is thought of as a full and fruitful and enjoyable life when it is lived without the redeeming nature of grace and apart from the direction of God's revelation. We have purposely jumped ahead of Solomon. We have read the conclusions, which at this time in his experience, he is eager to discover himself. It is important, therefore, that we realize that at this point in his experiment, he is steeped in the details of one of his most elaborate undertakings.

v. 2 Laughter is associated with pleasure. He has learned

to laugh much because he has had great pleasure; but once again he admits to the superficial nature of this unrewarding experience. He labels his laughter as "madness," and asks of pleasure, "What does it accomplish?" Laughter, madness, and pleasure should be thought of as harmless delights in this context. Neither does madness convey the idea of mental insanity, but rather boasting and foolishness. His conclusion is that there isn't any true, lasting value in the exercising of sensuous pleasure. Note this additional commentary on this subject in 7:3, 6 and 10:19. In like manner, Jesus taught that the presence of laughter is not necessarily a sign of genuine joy (Luke 6:25).

vs. 3-8 In this section, Solomon turns to three additional categories of pleasure which he pursues. The first involves him with food and folly; secondly, he is engaged in aesthetic improvements; and finally he seeks cultural improvements and the pleasures of possessions. One is reminded of the admonition of John, "Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If any one loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh (food and folly) and the lust of the eyes (aesthetic improvements) and the boastful pride of life (cultural improvements and pleasures), is not from the Father, but is from the world" (I John 2:15, 16). Solomon does each of us a favor in that he comes to the same conclusion (v. 11), and thus saves us the necessity of learning this lesson the difficult way.

(1) Section one: food and folly. (v. 3)

"Wine" could represent all the pleasures of the table as well as just the enjoyment of wine. It would be understood as the part used for the whole. So elaborate were King Solomon's tables that the Queen of Sheba was totally exhausted in her praise (I Kings 10:5). One should not understand his statement as an abandonment to strong drink. He assures us that his mind continued to guide him wisely.

"Folly" implies the harmless nonsense that so often accompanies the pleasure of dining with friends. We should understand this to be the lowest level of his pleasurable pursuits.

The following descriptions represent those experiments which he carried out on the middle level. Solomon identifies them as the enlargements of his works.

(2) Section two: aesthetic improvements. (vs. 4-6)

Although the Temple was the most important and most elaborate of Solomon's contributions, no mention is made of it in this section. The reason is obvious. Solomon is discussing only those items which he planned and designed for personal satisfaction, the Temple belonged in a special way to the people as well as to the king. In reality it was God's Temple and thus it would be out of place to mention it along with those things programmed for sensuous delights.

(a) *Houses*. For a detailed explanation of Solomon's houses, read I Kings 7:1-12 and 9:19. His endeavors were almost unbelievable in scope. He built numerous buildings and public works in Jerusalem. He spent thirteen years building his own palace. It included the armory and the Hall of Judgment. He built a "house of Pharaoh's daughter" (I Kings 7:2-8). He built a citadel (I Kings 9:24; 11:27) or huge fortress to protect the temple. He founded cities in distant lands (I Kings 9:18), built store-cities and chariot towns, national works of great importance, and rebuilt and fortified cities throughout his kingdom.

(b) *Vineyards*. David possessed vineyards that Solomon undoubtedly inherited (I Chronicles 27:27, 28). It is also recorded in Song of Solomon 8:10, 11 that he possessed his own vineyard.

(c) *Gardens*. The term is synonymous with the Greek term for paradise and suggests pleasantries and beauty. There is a reference to "a king's garden" in II Kings 25:4. Note also Song of Solomon 4:16. A detailed description of gardens in Palestine cannot be found in the Bible although they are often mentioned. They were generally believed to be walled inclosures with winding paths and canals of running water to provide for the many shade and fruit trees. This is in harmony with the information in this section. One can almost see the

sweet-smelling, aromatic blossoms inviting travelers to the cooling arbors and refreshing streams.

(d) *Parks*. The terms "parks," "gardens," and "forests" are used interchangeably. From the context in Nehemiah 2:8 and corresponding references, the emphasis is on trees and forestry. Such parks also contained fruit trees and herds of animals.

(e) *Ponds*. Besides the aesthetic value of pools or reservoirs, they served a practical purpose. Pools supplied the water for the irrigation of the growing trees. Because of the long extended periods without rain, sometimes lasting three to four months, the ponds provided an essential and vital supply of water. Evidence of the water supply at Etham is the most celebrated of the pools ascribed to Solomon. There were three large pools ranging in length from 380 feet to 582 feet and in width from 207 feet to 250 feet. They varied in depth from 25 to 50 feet. The pools were located a distance of ten miles from Jerusalem but because of the natural contour of the Judaeian hills, the water traveled nearly 15 miles to the enormous reservoir beneath the city. The origin of the aqueduct is uncertain. The history of Jerusalem has always included a struggle on the part of the people to discover and supply water for their needs. However, in Solomon's description, no mention is made of the utilitarian purposes of the pools, either for Temple needs or the needs of the people. He is searching for the answer to the question: Is there any good in the beautiful?

(3) Section three: cultural improvements and pleasures of possessions. (vs. 7, 8)

This third and highest level upon which he experiments involves the pleasures derived from developing cultural projects and accumulating earthly wealth.

(a) *Slaves*. Solomon purchased some slaves, captured others and had some born in his own house" (I Kings 9:20-22; 10:4-8). Those who were born in his house were called "sons of the house (Genesis 15:3)" and were often more desired than other slaves. Solomon's interest in horses alone required literally

thousands of slaves to care for his extensive holdings. It was stated that he had 40,000 stalls of horses, a similar number of chariots and 12,000 horsemen (I Kings 4:26). It was said of the Queen of Sheba, as she observed the elaborate attention given to the king by his servants, that "there was no more spirit in her" (I Kings 10:5). She had not believed the colorful reports; however, upon personal observation she confessed that she had not been told half of what was true!

(b) *Flocks and herds.* Solomon's provision for one day included, among other things, ". . . ten fat oxen, twenty pasture-fed oxen, a hundred sheep besides deer, gazelles, roebucks, and fattened fowl." Read I Kings 4:22, 23 and 8:62, 63. The large number of dedicatory sacrifices offered to God at the consecration of the Temple, suggests the magnitude of his flocks and herds. He offered the Lord 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep on that one occasion. Cf. I Chronicles 27:29-31.

(c) *Silver and gold.* The statement, "I collected for myself silver and gold" is more flagrant than it appears on the surface. God specifically commanded the king not to multiply gold for "himself." The detailed accounts found in the Bible depicting Solomon's inordinate desire for gold and silver supports his contention. In the face of the prohibition (Deuteronomy 17:17), Solomon made silver and gold as common in Jerusalem as stones (II Chronicles 1:15). The following record of Solomon's extensive use of gold is included here to impress the reader with the magnitude of his personal quest. It is found in II Chronicles 9:13-21 and is followed immediately with the declaration, "So King Solomon became greater than all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom." It reads:

"Now the weight of *gold* which came to Solomon in one year was 666 talents of *gold*, besides that which the traders and merchants brought; and all the kings of Arabia and the governors of the country brought *gold* and silver to Solomon. And King Solomon made 200 large shields of beaten *gold*, using 600 shekels of beaten *gold* on each large shield. And he made 300 shields of beaten *gold*, using

three hundred shekels of *gold* on each shield, and the king put them in the house of the forest of Lebanon. Moreover, the king made a great throne of ivory and overlaid it with pure *gold*. And there were six steps to the throne and a footstool in *gold* attached to the throne, and arms on each side of the seat, and two lions standing beside the arms. And twelve lions were standing there on the six steps on the one side and on the other; nothing like it was made for any other kingdom. And all King Solomon's drinking vessels were of *gold*, and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon were of pure *gold*; silver was not considered valuable in the days of Solomon. For the king had ships which went to Tarshish with the servants of Hurum; once every three years the ships of Tarshish came bringing *gold* and silver, ivory and apes and peacocks."

(d) *The treasure of kings and provinces.* If the treasure is that of great wealth, Solomon qualified (I Kings 4:21, 24; 10:14, 15). If it means he possessed such treasure unique to kings and not the common man, he also qualified. He controlled provinces and exacted tribute from them; these provinces boarded or neighbored his own country of Palestine and were in addition to the districts of his own country. There were twelve districts in Israel and each district provided Solomon's needs for one month of the year (I Kings 4:7). Solomon reigned over all the tribes and nations between the Mediterranean and the Euphrates. The promise God gave in Genesis 15:18 was thus fulfilled. Solomon was a dictator. Everything depended upon his will. Although he was not a man of war as his father David had been known, he still subjected the people of his land to his every desire. In addition to Israel, he ruled the Philistines, the Moabites, the Edomites, the Amonites, the Canaanites, the Hittites and the Syrians. So vast was his wealth that he was greater than all other kings of earth. It was estimated that he provided for 10,000 people in his service.

(e) *Male and female singers.* From the reference out of David's life (II Samuel 19:35), singers were employed to entertain

and lighten the spirit. These singers were for Solomon's personal enjoyment and should not be confused with the male singers of the choir within the Temple. They were chosen solely because of the satisfaction they brought to the king.

(f) *The pleasures of men.* This euphemistic phrase suggests the sexual enjoyment of men. The translators of the New American Standard Version suggest that "concubines" represent what is meant by the pleasures of men. This is in harmony with Solomon's experience as he had 700 wives and 300 concubines (I Kings 11:3).

This text, however, has been widely disputed. The Septuagint translates it "a male cupbearer and a female cupbearer." Both the Syriac and Vulgate agree with this. The King James Translation renders it "Musical instruments, and that of all sorts." Other translations supply a variation of ideas. Some of these are: "plenty of all sorts," "combination of tones," "captives," "litters," "coaches," "baths," "treasures," "chests," and even "demons." The original Hebrew expression appears but this one time in the whole of the Bible, and thus the difficulty of determining the proper translation.

v. 9 In this verse he sets forth two ideas which qualify his experiment. The first suggests the extensive nature of his experience. He said that he excelled all who preceded him in Jerusalem. This would include David and Saul and very likely implies any of the Jebusite kings of various chieftains who ruled prior to that time. The second suggests that he was always mentally in control of his activities as elaborate as they may have been. He states, "My wisdom also stood by me." He never lost sight of his objective that he stated in verse three. The type of wisdom that remained with him is not to be confused with the "heavenly" wisdom from above. It is the exercising of common sense and earthly propriety . . . it is the wisdom known to those who live "under the sun." The words "stood by me" carry the idea of "served me" and bring into sharper focus the purpose and value of this kind of wisdom. Solomon was committed to every pleasure conceivable to the mind of man. The only criterion was that his pleasurable experience

would not violate his "under the sun" wisdom. As we have noted, this opened the door to endless opportunities for one who had at his command the wealth and resources as the world's richest king.

v. 10 In this verse he speaks of his reward. One would expect glowing and colorful descriptions of an exuberant heart declaring, "I have found it!" A lifetime of searching and millions of dollars expended would surely bring one to the end of the rainbow where the treasure would be discovered and the fortunate man who pursued it could, with the deepest satisfaction, share such fulfillment with his friends. However, no such manifestation of joy is forthcoming. There is a deficiency that manifests itself in his answer. There is a positive note, but it is the rather subdued admission that his reward was simply the fact that he did everything his heart desired. This, however, isn't what he was searching to discover. He wanted to do everything in order to find out what profit there is for the sons of men in all the activities of their days upon the earth. His heart was pleased. In other words, the earthly desires were fulfilled and thus the earthly needs were met. He had at least accomplished this.

v. 11 Solomon is after a profit. He intends to review all his labors, satisfied that he had exhausted every opportunity for some new thrill of experience. One panoramic flashback over his life brought into focus all the fruit of all his labors. He searches in his mind's eye to discover something of lasting value, something that abides. He isn't interested in speaking to the empty feeling within the one who has so indulged himself, but rather to the "profit" that comes to one who has thus so lavishly lived. He doesn't deny the emptiness, such grief, he admits, is very much the fiber of one who lives "under the sun." His conclusion is pointedly harsh: "there was no profit under the sun." Men today should learn this lesson from Solomon. Who can find the time or the resources to run the course as skillfully as Solomon? Even if he does, the signpost at the end of the road points to "no profit." How unlike the Christian who discovers that in Christ are "hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 3:2).

FACT QUESTIONS 2:1-11

53. What is the question Solomon now seeks to answer?
54. Explain why Solomon's first experiment (1:13-18) did not bring satisfaction.
55. What general area now intrigues him in this second experiment?
56. What motivation is behind his activity?
57. How often does he refer to himself in these eleven verses?
58. What is the kind of pleasure that he seeks?
59. How common were silver and gold in Jerusalem?
60. Solomon asks, "What is good for man?" Find the verse in chapter two where he states this question.
61. What two verses in chapter one alluded to this same question?
62. From your study of the list of answers to this question, give five things Solomon indicates as good for man to do.
63. Name the three categories of pleasure to be pursued by Solomon.
64. Explain how they correspond to a degree with the teaching in I John 2:15, 16.
65. In what two ways could the term "wine" be understood?
66. Why isn't the Temple mentioned in Solomon's list of great works?
67. How many years did it take for Solomon to build his own house?
68. The term "garden" corresponds with what other English term that comes to us from the Greek?
69. What two purposes did the ponds serve?
70. What is the difference between slaves and home-born slaves?
71. What was the total number of oxen and sheep sacrificed at the dedication of the Temple?
72. Why is Solomon's statement that he collected silver and gold for himself more flagrant than it appears?
73. From the description found in II Chronicles 9:13-21, list the various items which were covered with gold.

74. What is the distinction between "districts" and "provinces?"
75. How were Solomon's needs met each month?
76. Solomon fed from his table approximately how many people?
77. What purpose did the male and female singers serve?
78. What is meant by the term "euphemistic?"
79. Why is there such difficulty in translating the latter part of verse eight?
80. What translation seems the most appropriate from the context?
81. In what ways does he qualify his experiment? (Cf. v. 9)
82. Define the kind of wisdom Solomon used.
83. What satisfaction came from his experiment? (Cf. v. 10)
84. What "profit" did he discover?
85. What was his final conclusion? (Cf. v. 11)

2. Conclusions 2:12-26

- a. Value of this wisdom and pleasure stop at the grave. 2:12-17

TEXT 2:12-17

- 12 So I turned to consider wisdom, madness and folly, for what will the man do who will come after the king except what has already been done?
- 13 And I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness.
- 14 The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I know that one fate befalls them both.
- 15 Then I said to myself, "As is the fate of the fool, it will also befall me. Why then have I been extremely wise?" So I said to myself, "This too is vanity."
- 16 For there is no lasting remembrance of the wise man as with the fool, inasmuch as in the coming days all will be forgotten. And how the wise man and the fool alike die!
- 17 So I hated life, for the work which had been done under the sun was grievous to me; because everything is futility and striving after the wind.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 2:12-17

46. List the six reasons stated in this passage (vs. 12-26) that led to the conclusion that all is vanity and futility.
47. What could be expected of the man who succeeds the king? v. 12
48. Although wisdom excels folly, and it is better to be wise, what fate comes to both the wise and the foolish?
49. Give proof that Solomon numbered himself among the wise. v. 15
50. What will happen to the memory of both wise men and fools?
51. Why did Solomon hate life and consider his work grievous?

PARAPHRASE 2:12-17

I turned my attention to another matter. I was interested in making a comparison of wisdom with foolishness and stupidity to determine the value of wisdom. My intention as king was to thoroughly examine this proposal. I did examine it with greater detail than any man who preceded me or any man who would follow me. I reached the conclusion that wisdom is an advantage over folly just as light is an advantage over darkness. The wise man walks in the light as he is guided by the eyes in his head. The fool, the one who practices folly, goes forward blindly, stumbling along the path. Yet they are both influenced by chance and fate. Then I said to myself, "I am a wise man, but one day I shall lie in the grave along side the fool. What advantage has my wisdom been to me?" Looking at it from that angle, I concluded that this too was futility. Death brings both the wise man and the foolish man to common ground. Not only do both die, but before many days pass, the memories of both have been forgotten. There is no lasting memory of either the wise man or the fool! All of my labor under the sun has thus been interpreted as clutching for wind, unrewarding, and only a vapor. I concluded that since this is true, I hated life.

COMMENT 2:12-17

"I turned" does not indicate a new experiment, but additional conclusions to be drawn from testing the meaning of life with pleasure. He has already indicated that he is aware that history repeats itself. He stated that God seeks what has passed by (3:15); that what happens in the future has already happened in the past (1:9). He is manifesting this same truth when he draws our attention to the question, "What will the man do who will come after the king except what has already been done?" In this question, Solomon indicates that one will come after the king. Is Solomon speaking only of one who might experiment in the same manner, if such were possible, or is he speaking historically of one who is already standing in the wings waiting his turn to rule over the kingdom? It is difficult to determine. However, the import of his question appears to be that whoever follows, whether in his authority or by his example, will certainly reach similar conclusions. Human nature is the same generation after generation.

One should not conclude that Solomon's experiment was a failure. He did what he proposed to do as stated in verse twelve. He said that "his heart was pleased because of all his labor" (v. 10). The experiment, however, did not yield the satisfaction that he sought. His dilemma is found in the fact that he did not discover "what good there is for the sons of men," and he now admits that the one who follows him will not discover the answer either!

"I set my mind" (1:17), and "I turned to consider" (2:12), should be understood as similar statements. In each instance, the objective is to know wisdom, madness and folly (cf. 7:25). Wisdom here is the "earthly" wisdom previously discussed. Although it is not of the high level where "wisdom from above" is discovered, it still excels madness and folly as light excels darkness. Madness and folly have been identified as foolishness and silliness which is so often associated with those who are caught up in the sheer enjoyment of earthly things.

The metaphor is wisely chosen in verse thirteen. Wisdom

is likened to light while folly is likened to darkness. The contrast is sharpened in Ephesians 5:8 and I Thessalonians 5:5, because light is the symbol of truth from God, and darkness is the symbol of sin. It should be noted that Solomon makes a similar distinction in 2:26 when he identifies the wise man as the "good" man, and the foolish man as the "sinner." Solomon admits to the availability of a particular earthly wisdom that gives an advantage to men. In 7:11, 12 and 19, he states that wisdom is (1) good and an advantage to men on this earth, (2) a protector to those who possess it, and (3) gives strength to a wise man. In 9:18, he writes that (4) wisdom is better than weapons of war, and in 10:10, he speaks of wisdom (5) as bringing success. It is this kind of wisdom that excels foolishness as light excels darkness. Note the following comparisons and conclusions made in the remaining section of chapter two.

THE WISE MAN

THE FOOLISH MAN

COMPARISONS

Light	Darkness
Eyes are in his head	Walks in darkness
Same fate (death)	Same fate (death)
No lasting remembrance	No lasting remembrance
Will be forgotten	Will be forgotten
In the coming days he will die	In the coming days he will die

CONCLUSIONS

1. If one labors with wisdom, knowledge and skill only to accumulate a great legacy, he will discover this is futile and striving for the wind (vs. 19-21).
2. If collecting and gathering a great fortune is your primary goal in life, your days will be filled with pain and grief and your nights will be restless (vs. 22, 23).
3. One should resolve to eat, drink and enjoy labor one day at a time as this is the gift of God (v. 24).
4. There is joy that comes to the good man who understands

that he should enjoy life day by day. However, to the sinner who collects and gathers for his own satisfaction, there will be no joy but a realization that all that he has gathered will be given to the good man (v. 26).

There is a difference that is discernable between one who practices common sense and keeps his eyes within his head, and one who seeks folly and thus walks in darkness. Solomon had written, "Wisdom is in the presence of the one who has understanding, but the eyes of the fool are on the ends of the earth" (Proverbs 17:24). However, there is the recognition that even to the wise man death is an inevitable companion who never discerns between the wise man or the fool. It is in the light of this conclusion that Solomon states that he hates life. In addition he confesses that his work, even the fruit of his labor, is grievous, futile, and striving after wind. Vanity has once again robbed even the wise man of any possible profit of his labor under the sun.

The fact that both the wise man and the fool share equally in many ways is a recurring theme throughout the book. It is discussed in 6:6, 7:2 and 9:2, 3. One of the real tragedies of living is the fact that one must die. The tragedy is compounded because through man's natural eye, he cannot see beyond the grave. If indeed the premise is correct, that is that all activities qualified by the phrase "under the sun" do not have the redemptive nature of the higher values, then it is possible to interpret Solomon's despair. David wrote of this when he said, "even wise men die; the stupid and the senseless alike perish, and leave their wealth to others" (Psalms 49:10).

It is in view of the fact that both the wise man and the fool die and go to the grave that Solomon despairs of being "extremely" wise. His extreme wisdom is the fruit of his life-long labor, and yet what does it profit him? He is certain that the wise man has no advantage over the fool in this respect (6:8, 11). Of course one dare not assume these conclusions in the light of Christian hope. However, to the man who is restricted to only that which can be interpreted "under the sun," death

terminates everything! This is why Solomon amplifies this conclusion with the observation in 9:3, 4: "This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men . . . they go to the dead. For whoever is joined with the living, there is hope; surely a live dog is better than a dead lion."

The concept of "the coming days" is also important to the Preacher (v. 16). In the days to come, *how* will a man be remembered? More to the point, however, is the question of *will* he be remembered? There is surely some profit in the awareness that one's reputation continues on in the minds of one's countrymen. Especially would this be true if one were a wise man. However, this is not to be under the sun! His original premise in 1:11 underscored how quickly things are to be forgotten. Later in his book he offers two illustrations of this same tragic truth. He speaks of a young man who rises from adverse circumstances to become king. The multitudes, tired of the former king, throng to his side and offer their allegiance. However, he declares that in time even the new king will not be remembered (4:13-16). He speaks further of the dead who no longer have a reward. Their reward would have been for them to have been remembered. However, they no longer have a share in all that is done "under the sun." No one remembers them.

There is a relentless correlation between the results of participating in fleeting things and the nature of the things themselves. His conclusions are consistent with the means employed in reaching them. It is not surprising, therefore, to hear him say that he "hated life," that he questioned his endless endeavors to become wise, that he looked upon all his work as a grievous, empty, futile task. His thoughts were simply corresponding with the kind of wisdom, madness and folly which he sought. There is a sense in which the very wisdom which he found became the greatest kind of folly.

FACT QUESTIONS 2:12-17

86. Give three references from Ecclesiastes that Solomon understood that history repeats itself.
 87. What is meant by "the man who will come after the king?" Give two possible interpretations.
 88. Who ever follows the king will reach what conclusion concerning Solomon's primary question concerning profit?
 89. In what sense was Solomon's experiment found in the first eleven verses unsatisfactory? In what sense was it successful?
 90. Identify and define the three objectives which Solomon "turned to consider."
 91. List the five good qualities that "earthly" wisdom affords.
 92. Who is the one who walks in darkness?
 93. "The wise man's eyes are in his head" means that he has what? (Cf. Proverbs 17:24)
 94. Why does Solomon say he hates life?
 95. Why did he despair of being extremely wise?
 96. Will either the wise man or the fool be remembered after they die?
 97. Give an illustration found in Ecclesiastes chapter four that confirms your answer.
- b. The legacy of one's labor is often lost to fools when one dies.
2:18-23

TEXT 2:18-23

- 18 Thus I hated all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun, for I must leave it to the man who will come after me.
- 19 And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the fruit of my labor for which I have labored by acting wisely under the sun. This too is vanity.
- 20 Therefore I completely despaired of all the fruit of my

labor for which I had labored under the sun.

- 21 When there is a man who has labored with wisdom, knowledge and skill, then he gives his legacy to one who has not labored with them. This too is vanity and a great evil.
- 22 For what does a man get in all his labor and in his striving with which he labors under the sun?
- 23 Because all his days his task is painful and grievous; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is vanity.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 2:18-23

52. Why did Solomon hate the fruit of his labor (vs. 18-20)?
53. What three tools did Solomon use to accumulate his legacy?
54. State the qualifying phrase found in verse twenty and twenty-two that proves Solomon's labor had no eternal value.
55. Find the verse in this passage that corresponds with the basic question asked in 1:3.
56. What keeps men from restful sleep (v. 23)?

PARAPHRASE 2:18-23

I labored and achieved more than any man who had been before me. Yet, I hated my achievements because now I must leave them to some man who will follow me. The basic tragedy is that I have no knowledge of the one who shall follow me. He could be a wise man, or he could be a fool. I have collected everything through wisdom, and now who ever follows me will have complete control over my fortune. What fleeting satisfaction! What vanity! Therefore, I turned my heart aside to despair as I thought of all the works I had accomplished, and the great fortune I had accumulated upon the earth. Why do I despair? I labored with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and now I must give this legacy to one who had not labored in this manner. This is not only futility, it is a great evil. I ask

again, "What profit does man have in all his toil and stress as he struggles upon the earth in the few days of his short life?" For all his days he labors at his task accompanied by pain and grief. Even at night he remembers the vexation of his work and his mind has no rest. This too is vanity.

COMMENT 2:18-23

The Preacher turned toward the past and surveyed the fruit of his life-long endeavor. He had amassed a fortune and collected riches beyond his highest expectations. However, as he contemplated the future and the one who would inherit all that he had gathered together, he grew bitter and cynical. He could designate the next king, but the people would not likely listen to the advice of an old and foolish king. He might dream of the kingdom remaining united but in his heart he realized it was but a dream. He would have little control over these matters. What if the one who follows him is a fool? He had acquired the greatness of his kingdom through wisdom, knowledge and skill. He now senses that it could slip into the hands of one who exercises little of these attributes and thus he will inherit wealth and power which he neither deserves nor can properly handle. His conclusion is that he thus "hated life." There are no forthcoming answers which satisfy him. He carries his burden into his bedchamber and is thus robbed of sleep (v. 23).

Did Solomon have cause to worry? One has sufficient evidence to recite the history of Israel following Solomon's death, and he discovers not one but two men who ascended to his throne. The kingdom did divide. In Solomon's closing years, his foreign wives turned away his heart from the Lord (I Kings 11:1-8). The author of Chronicles is silent on his closing years, but in I Kings we read that he loved "many foreign women" (I Kings 11:1). Solomon also had many adversaries. Among them were Hadad the Edomite and Rezon of Damascus (I Kings 11:9-25). However, the most dangerous of his foes had

to be Jeroboam. Jeroboam had been appointed to a prominent position in Solomon's kingdom. In addition to his own personal designs on the throne, he had the encouragement of the prophet Ahijah. The aggression and zeal of Jeroboam were manifested throughout the kingdom, and when Solomon suspected him he fled to Egypt for his life (I Kings 11:26-40). It is thought by some that the "lad" who comes out of prison to take the place of the king (4:14) is a direct reference to Jeroboam. It is true that upon Solomon's death, Jeroboam did return from Egypt to assume the leadership of the ten tribes. Rehoboam, Solomon's son, was proclaimed king in Jerusalem.

Perhaps there is a prophetic sense in which the words of Solomon predict the historical situation of his day. However, this interpretation is not vital to understanding the message of the book. One may readily see that Solomon's despair is based on two entirely different premises: (1) he will *not* be remembered for all his great works, and (2) he is uncertain who will inherit his fortune. It could easily be a person who has little regard for wisdom and much regard for silliness and jest.

Either way, Solomon will lose control over all the "fruit" of his labor. This is the inevitable result of laboring "under the sun." How different is the picture for the Christian who one day shall rest from his labor with the sweet peace that his works will follow after him (Revelation 14:13)!

The "legacy" is of major consequences to the one who has acquired it because he applied wisdom, knowledge, and skill in the task of gathering and collecting. The term "skill" may also be translated "efficiency" which suggests hours of toiling and perfecting of trades. He is not like the one who came upon his fortune through happenstance or chance. Solomon has designed and labored toward such an end. He has placed his whole heart in his work. His fortune represents an entire lifetime of tireless effort and toil. Some of the magnitude of his despair is sharpened by his question concerning profit. He asks, "For what does a man get in all his labor and in his

striving with which he labors under the sun" (v. 22)? His answer: He gets nothing! Thus he declares, "I hated all the fruit of my labor." In addition he says, "I completely despaired of all the fruit of my labor." He places a label on the fruit of his labor. It reads: "This too is vanity and a great evil."

- c. Labor is good only when it is acknowledged as from the hand of God. 2:24-26

TEXT 2:24-26

- 24 There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen, that it is from the hand of God.
- 25 For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him?
- 26 For to a person who is good in His sight He has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, while to the sinner He has given the task of gathering and collecting so that He may give to one who is good in God's sight. This too is vanity and striving after wind.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 2:24-26

57. List the three simple things in life that one is instructed to recognize as coming from the hand of God.
58. Who gives man enjoyment?
59. What is the condition that one must meet to receive God's blessings of wisdom, knowledge and joy (v. 26)?
60. What happens to the "sinner's" legacy?

PARAPHRASE 2:24-26

Man is not able of himself to find satisfaction in his work or in his pleasure such as eating and drinking. However, if a

man finds a temporary satisfaction in his labor or his pleasure, he must recognize that it is entirely from the hand of God. For who can eat and who can find enjoyment apart from God? Let us consider what happens to the one whom God favors and also to the one who offends God. To the person who is good in God's sight, God gives wisdom, knowledge and joy. To the sinner, however, God gives the vexing task of collecting and heaping up a fortune under the sun. Then the one who offends God must give it to the one who is good in God's sight. My conclusion is that this too is as unfulfilling as feasting on the wind.

COMMENT 2:24-26

This is the first time in Solomon's book that he reaches above the "sun" and speaks of God. As previously noted, however, it is not in the sense of a warm, covenant relationship. Rather, he speaks of God as the *Creator* who is in complete control of His universe. God's laws govern our world. There is enjoyment to be found in one's labor, but it is only when God blesses or permits. There are two classes of people who are identified. One is the "good" man who receives approval from God, and thus enjoys his labor. The other is the "sinner" who does not find this approval from God. Perhaps the intention here is to explain that a wise man, in this instance the good man, works in harmony with God's laws as he interprets them through the revelation of God through nature. As a result he pleases God and finds favor. On the other hand, the sinner is literally one who offends God. He sets aside the rules he discovers in this world. As a result he runs contrary to what he knows to be the better way to live. When one does this, he does not discover wisdom, knowledge or joy.

Solomon employs the term "joy" in much the same way that it is understood today. It carries the idea of cheerfulness and satisfaction with life. It is used three other times in Ecclesiastes and in each case the NASV renders it differently.

They are: "pleasure," (2:10); "joy," (2:26); "gladness," (5:20); "cheerful," (9:7). In each reference it speaks to the excitement of discovery and living life to its fullest each day. This kind of "joy" does not come to the man who is motivated by greed, or gathering wealth and possessions for his own use. The sinner has a grievous task because he gathers and collects with selfish intent. The good man is quite different. His wisdom does not bring grief. His knowledge does not bring sorrow. His joy comes to him because he finds satisfaction in the labor within a single day. This conclusion is clearly stated: "Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one's labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward" (5:18).

The sinner does not enjoy what he has gathered. This has been the basic premise of the book thus far. Not only has Solomon demonstrated this to be true, but what the sinner has gathered and collected for his own use will be inherited by one who is "good" in God's sight. This principle of retribution is taught in Proverbs 28:8 which reads: "He who increases his wealth by interest and usury, gathers it for him who is gracious to the poor." Again he writes: "The wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous" (Proverbs 13:22).

The vanity of "striving after wind" of verse twenty-six, does not refer to the activities of the good man. It has reference to the sinner who is collecting and gathering fruit of his labor, but will not enjoy it because it will soon belong to another. (Read carefully 2:11, 17, 18.)

The fact that the good man recognizes that his enjoyment is from "the hand of God," should not be interpreted in the context that God has given him a detailed rule book by which he works and lives to increase his joy. Rather, it is simply that the good man realizes that food and drink are gifts, which he acknowledges to be from God, and he finds genuine joy in the use of them. There is a definite moral involved. If avarice is the foe which keeps one from enjoying life, then setting oneself free from such a vain sin would result in the daily

satisfaction with life that Solomon is discussing.

To try and discover happiness where God has not ordained that happiness can be found, has always been man's failing. Jesus redirects men's minds to those higher and nobler efforts which result in genuine happiness. Never has it been that joy results from the pursuit of joy. Our Lord's beatitudes underscore the truth that when one seeks higher values such as purity, peace, and righteousness, that "blessedness," in this case "joy," overtakes him, and he discovers that he is experiencing real joy where God has ordained that it is to be found.

The division of chapter three at this particular verse is unfortunate. The same theme is under consideration in all twenty-two verses. In 3:9 the basic question is asked once again: "What *profit* is there to the worker from that in which he toils?" The entire chapter is an amplification of chapter two. How can man discover a profit from his labor? First, by submitting to the fact that God does things appropriately in His own time. Second, eat, drink, work, and do good in one's lifetime. Third, do not be discouraged by the similar fate (death) of both man and beast as man does not have the knowledge to see his future, and thus he should be happy in his activities day-by-day. The profit is limited but it is there. Joy is his reward. Solomon states it clearly: "Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one's labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; *for this is his reward*" (5:18).

FACT QUESTIONS 2:24-26

108. What attitude does the "good man" have toward God's control of the world?
109. What attitude does the "sinner" have?
110. Give the three synonyms used for "joy" in Ecclesiastes.
111. Who cannot experience this joy?

112. There is a limited profit (reward) that is available to one who labors under the sun. What is it? Cf. 5:18
113. What will happen to that which the sinner collects and gathers?
114. Does joy result from pursuing joy?
115. Jesus taught us that we will find joy if we pursue what?
116. What subject comes under discussion in chapter three?
117. What basic question is once again raised?
118. Give three ways one can find a share of profit even under the sun.

B. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS THAT WE WORK UNDER THE RULE OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE 3:1-22

1. Man should adjust to live his life within the framework of God's providence. 3:1-8

TEXT 3:1-8

- 1 There is an appointed time for everything, And there is a time for every event under heaven—
- 2 A time to give birth, and a time to die;
A time to plant, and a time to uproot what is planted.
- 3 A time to kill, and a time to heal;
A time to tear down, and a time to build up.
- 4 A time to weep, and a time to laugh;
A time to mourn, and a time to dance.
- 5 A time to throw stones, and a time to gather stones;
A time to embrace, and a time to shun embracing.
- 6 A time to search, and a time to give up as lost;
A time to keep, and a time to throw away.
- 7 A time to tear apart, and a time to sew together;
A time to be silent, and a time to speak.
- 8 A time to love, and a time to hate;
A time for war and a time for peace.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 3:1-8

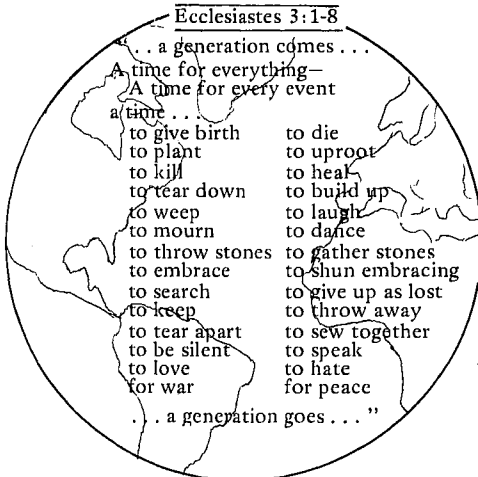
61. Give evidence that God's creation is orderly. (v. 1)
62. Compare translations of the first line of verse two. What variations do you find?
63. What might have to die in order for a particular generation to be healed? (v. 3)
64. What experience usually occasions mourning?
65. Look up the term "dance" in a Bible concordance. After reading several of the references, how would you describe dancing as it is pictured in the Bible? Would you equate it with the modern dance?
66. If the first part of verse five is figurative, and the second line is speaking to the same subject, what single idea is under consideration?
67. List some dreams from your own life that you have searched for and found. List others you have given up as lost. (v. 6)
68. When is silence "golden?" When is it "yellow?"
69. List some things the Christian "hates" and therefore should wage war against.
70. List the objects of each of the twenty-six infinitives.
71. List the objects of the four prepositions "for." (vs. 1, 8)

PARAPHRASE 3:1-8

To everything there is a season, and a time to every delight under heaven. There is a time for all things to be born, and everything in due season will die; man can take advantage of the seasons and plant when he should, but the time will come when that which has been planted will have to be uprooted. Self-discipline and social justice require the destruction of evil, but a time will come when both the people and their land will be healed; so there is also a time to wreck, and tear down that which is beyond repair, and there is a time to build anew. Many events of life will sadden the heart and cause one to weep, just as other events make the heart merry and result in

laughter; since death comes to all, there will be seasons of mourning. On occasion, joy shall also overwhelm one and find expression through dancing. There is an appropriate time for making love, and just as appropriately there is a time to refrain; there is a time when an embrace is proper, and also a time when wisdom leads one to refrain from embracing. Fortunes are sometimes gained because one knows the times for searching, but it is also true that they are often kept because good judgment is exercised in refraining from excess; even our present possessions are retained with discretion, and we find wisdom in discarding or sharing with others that which is no longer of value to oneself. There is a time when clothing should be discarded, and a time when it should be mended and used again; the same kind of judgment is in order with the control of the tongue: silence is often golden. On the other hand, words fitly spoken have great power and should be said. Love encompasses all that is holy and good, and there is a time when it should be demonstrated to your fellow man; hate is reserved for that which is evil, and yet there is a time when it should also be exercised—there is a time for war, and a time for peace.

DIAGRAM "B"
THE EVENTS OF ONE GENERATION
UNDER HEAVEN



COMMENT 3:1-8

In this section the reader is confronted with seven parallel passages demonstrating the theme that God, the Creator, is in control of His world. More than this, it illustrates the various activities which take place in the lifetime of one generation. The Preacher has observed that one generation passes away while another generation moves in to take its place (1:4). Here he gives a detailed account of the activities of each generation from birth to death.

Parallelisms were popular with the writers of the Old Testament. One is tempted to be carried away with the poetic beauty of the passage and possibly miss the message which it contains. This popular passage from Ecclesiastes has made its way into the forms of art, poetry and song in our present generation. It should be emphasized once again, however, that the theme discussed in chapter two is still under consideration. Some have written that this is an unrelated insertion of material without appropriate relationship to the context of the discussion, but a cursory reading of the two chapters together would dispense with such an argument. The lesson is that God controls through orderly laws and principles. Man may run contrary to God's appointed times and seasons, but if he does, he will experience frustration and failure. The "good man" of the preceding chapter attempts to live in harmony with God's order, while the "sinner" has little regard for it.

Certain qualities mark the comparisons. (1) The list is rather extended. This may serve the purpose of demonstrating that the many sides of life are under God's control, or it may have been Solomon's intention to show the various activities of man from the time of his birth until the time of his death. (2) Nothing evil is included in the list. Some of the activities are difficult to interpret as to exact meanings, but nothing needs to be placed in the category of immoral behaviour. This is very clear. The contrary is actually true. Since the second line of the couplet partially explains the first line, the meaning of each line interprets the meaning of the other. The meaning of the

event must be in harmony with the parts of the comparison. Nothing in any of the descriptions suggests evil activities. Hate, kill, rend and war are all extreme in nature, but are approved by God under qualifying circumstances. (3) Some events are inevitable. It is obvious that no one has control over the time of his death (8:8). We are also subjected to a "time" to give birth, to weep and to heal. These circumstances of life are beyond our control. God controls them in the sense that His laws are active in His world. It is improper to read predestination into the passage. (4) Some events can be experienced at one's own discretion. Man controls such activities as loving and refraining from love, deciding what to keep and what to cast away. Even in these areas, however, there are times and seasons within God's order when good judgment dictates policy. (5) Sometimes one works contrary to the seasons. One may keep silent when he should be speaking. He may laugh when he should be mourning. The wise man interprets the times and adjusts his activities accordingly.

Jeremiah stated this truth when he said, "I know, O Lord, that a man's way is not in himself; nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23). Solomon himself had written, "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord" (Proverbs 16:33). He has also written that he sees the activities of life as coming from the hand of the Lord (2:24).

v. 1 The arrangement of man's activities as he lives out his life is now under consideration (cf. introductory remarks for this section). This verse is not intended to suggest that all things are predetermined or that man has no choice in arranging certain times or events. If this were true, the distinction between the "good man" and the "sinner" would be inappropriate. In addition, there would be little meaning given to admonition and rebuke found throughout the book. (5:1ff; 11:1ff; 12:1ff are but examples.) This verse acknowledges what has previously been taught: there is nothing new under the sun, and God seeks that which is past (1:9; 3:15). The events peculiar to every generation are set forth. No intention

is made for chronological order or arrangement. Each generation may experience different events at varying times, but generally speaking each generation will experience all the events.

v. 2 The Hebrew word rendered "be born" is passive and would best be translated "give birth." This idea is more in harmony with the parallel "time to plant" and therefore comes close to the original idea. The purpose is to illustrate the beginning and end of a thing. Everything else happens between these two events. While "birth" represents the animal kingdom and "plant" represents the vegetable kingdom, the intention is not to be comprehensive of all things, but rather representative of *beginnings* and *ends*.

v. 3 Both Deuteronomy 32:39 and Hosea 6:1 suggest that it is God's prerogative to tear, wound, smite and kill, even as it is His prerogative to heal, to bind up, and to make alive. Man is also involved in these activities as he exacts judgment and pursues justice. The term "kill" here will not allow cutting but does allow capital punishment. Both the execution of criminals, and killing necessitated by the need to protect the innocent, would be allowed. Killing which results from war would probably be excluded as it is specifically mentioned in verse eight. The verse suggests the necessity of judgment and appropriate punishment if there is to be a time of healing and building up.

In the spiritual relationship the principle is also valid. Paul's rather lengthy discourse on this subject in I Corinthians chapter five clearly illustrates the necessity of tearing down before there can be a season of restoration.

v. 4 One doesn't live long before he experiences both laughter and weeping. These human emotions are common to all men in every age. Mourning suggests a deeper sorrow than weeping, while dancing may be thought of as the sheer physical display of inner joy. Jesus spoke to both of these activities when he said, "But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market places, who call out to the other children, and say, 'We played the flute for you,

and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn' " (Matthew 11:16, 17). Dancing in the Bible times should not be confused with the modern-day dance. Biblical dancing was the unrehearsed, spontaneous exuberance resulting from a great physical victory, or some festive occasion.

v. 5 An attempt to escape or skirt the obvious has led to far-fetched and varied conclusions concerning the first part of this verse. Since the verses are couplets, and each line parallels the other, then the clear statements of "a time to embrace," and "a time to refrain from embracing," would suggest that "a time to cast away stones," and "a time to gather stones together," is a euphemistic description of sexual love. The fidelity of a monogamous union finds proper expression and fulfillment in such acts of love. God has placed natural desires within both men and women which result not only in the propagation of the race, but also in the holy mystery of oneness that exists between husband and wife. Such an interpretation as this does not appear to meet with any difficulty. This makes the first part of the couplet harmonious with the second part. It speaks to a vital and major part of life's experience which is not discussed elsewhere in this section. Finally, the absurdity of most interpretations necessitates a clearly defined and logical explanation of the verse.

Some of the more popular but unacceptable interpretations of gathering and casting stones are listed: (1) building or demolishing houses, walls, cisterns and similar works made from stones; (2) marring an enemy's field by casting stones upon it (II Kings 3:19, 25); (3) stoning as a form of capital punishment; (4) clearing land or vineyards of stones (Isaiah 5:2).

v. 6 "Easy come, easy go," is an idiom which may speak to part of the lesson of this verse. The first section appears to refer to that which man acquires either through his own ingenuity or by his good fortune. In like manner he may find his possessions slipping away from him in a manner beyond his control. The latter part of the couplet suggests that man sometimes decides what he keeps and what he chooses to discard. Earthly wisdom enables one to take advantage of both

situations. He will take advantage of the opportunities offered through God's providence, and he will also exercise discretion in the wise use of that which he has gathered or collected.

Benevolent acts could be under consideration. They are part of the Preacher's message (11:1-6), and Solomon had written, "There is one who scatters, yet increases all the more, and there is one who withholds what is justly due, but it results only in want. The generous man will be prosperous, and he who waters will himself be watered" (Proverbs 11:24, 25). This principle is also taught in many of the New Testament books. An example is found in II Corinthians 9:6-15.

v. 7 Since the tearing of garments was commonly associated with mourning among the Jews, it is easy to see such an application of this verse. Also, the tear was to be mended after an appropriate period of mourning depending upon the nearness of the relationship of the deceased person. However, mourning and weeping have previously been included in the listing of events, and it isn't likely that such would be the intention in this verse. What then is the category of activities to which he speaks? Once again the second comparison offers a clue. Wisdom dictates the practical value, or lack of it, of many things possessed in life. We finally give up on certain garments while others are mended or patched. Clothing was of great value (II Kings 5:5; II Chronicles 9:24). In like manner, wisdom is manifested in the ability to know when to keep silent and when to speak. There were occasions when Jesus chose to remain silent (Mark 14:60, 61; 15:4, 5). There were other times when His words were like "apples of gold in settings of silver" (Proverbs 25:11). How penetrating is James' sermon on the control of the tongue (James 3). (Cf. Proverbs 17:28; 15:23) Solomon is speaking to a vast area of life in which the daily events are of major significance.

v. 8 Unlike verse five, "love" here has as the opposite "hate," and the comparison is "peace." It is unlike the conjugal love of the former verse and should be understood as more comprehensive of the affairs of men. In times of peace, all of man's activities should be expressions of love, as he moves about

in his relationship with his family and his fellow man. However, when war is necessary, there should be foundational issues which require the hatred of just men. The seriousness of war speaks to the issue of life and man's ability to distinguish between that which is to be loved and thus defended, and that which should be destroyed because it is the recipient of man's justifiable hatred.

The infinitives represent a more personal, individual activity, while the preposition "for" speaks in each instance to general categories which involved multitudes at the same time.

We have refrained from giving the couplets an unwarranted spiritual or Christian interpretation, as this would be out of character with the purpose of the book. We have also withstood the temptation, to which many others have yielded, to see God's activities with Israel or the church in each of the events. The greater context of the passage assures that God's laws are in effect in God's world. He is very much in control. However, the emphasis is undoubtedly on the activities of men. Solomon is giving us an overview of the total life of one generation. He stated it clearly in the beginning that there is a time for everything and every event under heaven (v. 1). His objective, at this point in his book, is to bring man to see that there is nothing better than to resign himself to the work and pleasures of the day, recognizing that this is a gift to man from the hand of God. It is not the activity of God but of man that is foremost in his mind. His very next question substantiates this contention: "What profit is there *to the worker* from that in which he toils?"

FACT QUESTIONS 3:1-8

119. What kind of an "account" is Solomon picturing?
120. What themes are under consideration?
121. Explain what will happen to man if he elects to live contrary to God's appointed times and seasons.
122. Define the "good man."

123. Define the "sinner."
124. Give two reasons why this list of the activities of each generation is rather long.
125. Name four "extreme" activities of men that are listed.
126. Give at least one example of an inevitable event that man experiences.
127. Explain why verse one should not be interpreted as teaching predestined times and events.
128. State the purpose of verse two.
129. What kind of killing would be included by the context of verse three.
130. Distinguish between weeping and mourning.
131. Explain what is meant by "an euphemistic description."
132. Give an example of such a description and explain its meaning.
133. What will earthly wisdom enable a man to do? (v. 6)
134. In what way is the term "love" in verse eight to be thought as different from the same term in verse five?
135. What is Solomon's overall "objective" at this point? How does verse nine substantiate your answer?

2. Working outside the framework of God's providence results in frustration and defeat. 3:9-22

TEXT 3:9-22

- 9 What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils?
- 10 I have seen the task which God has given the sons of men with which to occupy themselves.
- 11 He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end.
- 12 I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one's lifetime,

- 13 moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor—it is the gift of God.
- 14 I know that everything God does will remain forever, there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take away from it, for God has so worked that men should fear Him.
- 15 That which has been already, and that which shall be has already been, for God seeks what has passed by.
- 16 Furthermore, I have seen under the sun that in the place of justice there is wickedness, and in the place of righteousness there is wickedness.
- 17 I said to myself, “God will judge both the righteous man and the wicked man,” for a time for every matter and for every deed is there.
- 18 I said to myself concerning the sons of men, “God has surely tested them in order for them to see that they are but beasts.”
- 19 For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same. As one dies, so dies the other; indeed, they all have the same breath and there is no advantage for man over beast, for all is vanity.
- 20 All go to the same place. All come from dust and all return to dust.
- 21 Who knows that the breath of man ascends upward and the breath of the beast descends downward to the earth?
- 22 And I have seen that nothing is better than that man should be happy in his activities, for that is his lot. For who will bring him to see what will occur after him?

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 3:9-22

72. Explain why 2:24, 3:1-8 and 3:12 could be an answer to the question raised in verse nine.
73. What has God given the sons of men? (Cf. v. 10)
74. Even though God has placed the desire in men to know the ways of God, will they discover it? (Cf. v. 11)
75. What is the “gift” from God? (Cf. vs. 12, 13)

76. Explain what is meant by "God seeks what has passed by. (Cf. v. 15).
77. What stands in the place of justice and righteousness?
78. Both the righteous and the wicked will come before God for what reason?
79. What similarities exist between men and beasts? (Cf. vs. 19, 20)
80. What difference between men and beasts is suggested? (Cf. v. 21).
81. Does Solomon know that man's spirit will go upward when he dies? (Cf. 12:7)
82. What is man's lot? (Cf. v. 22)
83. Can man see into the future? Give evidence for your answer from the text.

PARAPHRASE 3:9-22

When man shares in all the events of life, and toils throughout the short time he has to live here under the sun, what profit does he have to hold in his hand? I have been around. I have seen the work that God has assigned to the sons of men to occupy them as they toil and labor during their lifetimes. Also, I clearly understand that God makes every thing right for an appropriate time. There is indeed a specific time and season for every affair under heaven. God has placed in the minds of men the desire to know and the ability to wonder concerning all the events, but men are unable to discover or find out the work of God from the beginning even to the end. I know that among men there is nothing better than to find pleasure and joy in one's lifetime. However, God does have a gift for men. It is not to understand the mysterious ways of God, but it is to be happy and find pleasure in living and see good in all of one's labor. One other thing I willingly admit: whatever God does will endure, nothing can be added and nothing can be subtracted. God works in this consistent way because of His very nature, and in order that men may stand

in awe of Him. In addition, consider this! God will see to it that history repeats itself. That which was, now is; and that which is to be, has already been. (Is there anything of which one might say, "See this, it is new?")

Let us look more closely under the sun. We shall discover disturbing things. I saw in the place where justice should be found that wickedness was there. I saw in the place where there should have been a just man, that there was an evildoer. I said to myself, "Beware, evildoer! God will judge between you and the righteous man." And I also understand that there is a time when God will judge every delight of man and every deed. I said to myself, "God lets things happen so he can purify the sons of men. In God's time, the true issues will be clearly seen, and men's real attitudes will be revealed. God permits men to see, that in themselves, they are only animals." Man really has no advantage over the animals. They both are subject to chance. They both suffer the same event: death comes to both. Both have the same breath. They are both subject to futility. Both go to the same place. Both come from the ground, and both are returning to the ground. Who among you can say that you know the spirit of man which ascends on high, or the spirit of the beast, which goes downward to the earth?

I am now more convinced than ever that man can do nothing better than rejoice in his works, do good in his lifetime, and make the most of each day. This is man's lot. No man can see what will occur in the future. Who can enable man to see what even tomorrow will bring?

COMMENT 3:9-22

v. 9 In this verse, we see a return to the original question of the book (1:3). It is not necessarily introducing the material which is to follow, although this basic proposition is still under consideration, but it reflects on everything that has been stated previously. For the use of "profit" or "advantage," see the comments on 1:3. That in "which he toils" refers to all of

man's activities which are mentioned in 3:1-8.

v. 10 Solomon's personal experience was very comprehensive. One need only review the details of his life, as referred to in chapters one and two, to be convinced that he is correct in saying that he has viewed the activities of men. He has called attention to the major areas of men's interests, and demonstrated how each generation finds itself engaged in the same activities. He calls it an evil (grievous, sorry) task (1:13; 2:26), that has occupied men in each generation. He declares that God has given the task to the sons of men, and in the next verse he explains what he means by saying that God gave it.

v. 11 The song writer picked up the theme of this verse with the words, "Everything is beautiful in its own way." Solomon declares that God made everything beautiful (appropriate) in its time. To say God set "eternity" in the heart, is another way of saying that God gave men the "task" of occupying themselves. The meaning of the Hebrew word is widely debated. The context leads one to believe that it is speaking to a desire that God has placed in the heart to search out and to know. Hengstenberg writes that the word is never used except for "unmeasured time." Some translate the word "world" while others prefer the idea of a "sense of the infinite." One translation (The Anchor Bible) uses the term "enigma" to convey the idea intended. Every man does have the desire to explore the meaning of all the events of life, but it is not within him to discover the answers. A sense of awe does come to the mind when one thinks of the Creator (the Infinite One), but this only compounds his frustrations. An awareness of the differences that exist between men and the rest of God's created beings only intensifies the desire to probe and discover more and more. Yet, it is clearly stated that man will not find out the work which God has done. For additional study on man's desire to know and discover, study the following passages from Ecclesiastes: 7:23, 24, 29; 8:7, 17; 9:1; 11:5.

The "beginning and end" of God's work probably refers to the work which God does in relation to one's lifetime. This would be in harmony with the next verse as well as with 3:1-9.

Some do explain it as the work of God that extends from eternity to eternity, but this appears to be out of harmony with the obvious purpose of the Preacher in this section. Because the task is grievous, one should not attribute the task itself to God. It is not God's fault that man does not have success in his investigation.

v. 12, 13 The five-point exercise suggested here is at least a key to deriving some profit from life even if it is very meager. Man is instructed to (1) rejoice, (2) do good, (3) eat, (4) drink, and (5) see good in his labor. This same message is emphasized in 2:3, 24; 3:12, 13, 22; 5:18; 6:12; 8:15; 9:7. This reward is called a "gift" from God. Sometimes it is spoken of as coming from the "hand" of God (2:24; 5:19). God is recognized as the One who provides. Whatever one includes in his enjoyment of life, it should be with the approval of God. Two clear statements undergird this truth. They are: "Go then, eat your bread in happiness, and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works" (9:7). And, "Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood. And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes. Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things" (11:9).

v. 14, 15 Not only is everything God has made beautiful, good and appropriate, but all that He does is perfect. God is a complete Being, and therefore has complete order in all His creation. When one realizes this, and looks beyond it to see the nature of God, he stands in awe of Him. Each of the admonitions and challenges the Preacher sets forth in the book is based on the true nature of God. For example, he admonishes his audience when they go to the temple to worship God, that they should remember God is in heaven and they are upon the earth (5:1, 2). In other words, they are the "created" beings while God is the "Creator." Men should recognize that God is the perfect, complete and authoritative Governor of His world. Men should learn to "fear" God (12:13).

Because of this, the Christian appreciates the completeness

of God. He says with the author of Hebrews that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever" (13:8). We place our trust in the complete work of Christ (Hebrews 9:28) which was offered but once for our sins. We trust the complete sovereignty of God (Acts 17:24). We abide in His complete wisdom set forth in the act of saving grace. But to the reader of Ecclesiastes in Solomon's day, nothing of the blessings we have in Christ were realized. The context of this passage must be explained in the light of the frustration expressed in verses ten and eleven. As man routinely experiences the events of life, he sees that God's laws are in complete control of the times and the seasons. He learns to respect God because of His consistency and power, but he does not share in the knowledge that belongs only to God.

Some events appear to contradict God's sovereign control and completeness of order in His world. However, the statement, "God seeks what has passed by" assures the reader that any violation of the rules is only temporary, and in due season everything will return to proper order as it has always been.

It is precisely to this problem that the Preacher now speaks. He is primarily concerned through the remaining section of this chapter with one very apparent inequity: wickedness in the place of righteousness and justice. He then draws numerous observations concerning this. In the first section of chapter four, he is concerned about another problem. This time it is the oppression of innocent people with the authority on the side of evil men. He illustrates the violation of God's rules through two more examples. One has to do with an inordinate desire for earthly riches, while the other speaks to the fickleness of the citizens of the land. In each situation, he admits to the futility of the whole affair, and in view of the fact that God works out the times and seasons of justice, he resigns himself to the fact that "nothing is better than that man should be happy in his activities, for that is his lot" (3:22).

The obvious corruption in both places high and low throughout the world does not disturb the inner peace of the Christian.

He has the advantage over the Preacher in Ecclesiastes for he knows Him who brings peace (John 14:27). He is not limited in his understanding to the message preached through nature, but has the "final word" from God in the person of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1).

v. 16 There is little doubt in the Preacher's mind that God's control of His world will eventually set all things right—but this justice must have its appropriate time. In the meantime, life must be faced for what it is. It must be endured as it comes. This leads to some sobering observations. He discusses one such observation here: God's order is being prostituted by the corruption of evil men, and evildoers have control of the authoritative positions. Thus, justice is sacrificed for the sake of wickedness.

v. 17 Since he knows that God's laws will ultimately bear their own fruit, he muses to himself concerning the future state of the evildoers and also the righteous men. The translation in the NASV appears to be saying that both the wicked man and the righteous man will fall into God's judgment. While this is undoubtedly true, the better rendering is that God will judge "between" the wicked man and the righteous man. It is the wicked man who is in hard straights with God. The latter part of the verse speaks to the total concept that God makes everything appropriate in its time. It is in this context that the Preacher says, "for a time for every matter and for every deed is there."

v. 18-20 So intense is the corruption of justice that he is led to conclude that man is no different from animals in many respects. God "has surely tested them" is to be understood that God has given them sufficient opportunity and time to declare their true character. The pressures of both authority and responsibility test a man. Some translate "test" as "purify" which implies that God waits patiently through the various experiences of life until He separates, winnows and proves men. The strength of the original text suffers some loss with the insertion of "but beasts," or especially "but as beasts," as the idea is that "they are beasts." Numerous illustrations

from history could be cited to verify this contention. When man is left to himself, without the benefit of the heavenly wisdom, he proves his beastly nature. When God elects to withhold punishment of sin for a season, the heart of man is set to do evil continually (8:11).

Note the similarities between men and beasts that are given:

- (1) Both have the same fate: death;
- (2) Both have the same breath;
- (3) Both are subjected to a short life (corruption);
- (4) Both go to the same place (grave);
- (5) Both come from dust;
- (6) Both return to dust;
- (7) One does not have an advantage over the other.

One can clearly see the differences between men and beasts; this is not the issue. It is the Preacher's purpose to convince his audience that once men begin moving in the direction of wickedness and forsake justice and righteousness that they become as beasts.

v. 21 This is a difficult verse to translate because the Hebrew has three possibilities. (1) It may be a question (2:19); (2) It may suggest "maybe"; or (3) It actually affirms through a question (8:1). The correct understanding, therefore, will come through a study of the context, and in this case, a study of the greater context.

There is little doubt that Solomon is writing through inspiration. In addition to such statements as II Timothy 3:16, there is the internal claim of Ecclesiastes 12:11. The difference in the destiny of the "breath" or "spirit" of the beast and the man is clearly taught in 12:7: "then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it." But, it is not the differences but the similarities that are under consideration. Therefore, it is not a question of debate as to the differences between men and beasts, or of the obvious destinies of each, but what Solomon is saying is this, "Who can understand their spirits?" Or to put it differently, he is saying, "It is difficult to believe that man can behave with

such beast-like characteristics! Who can understand the spirit of either?"

v. 22 This would make the final thought of the chapter a very natural conclusion. The Preacher knows that the spirit of man will return to God who created it. This is not his concern at this point. His question concerns the profit to be gained by the one who has to live out his life in the short span of time and in the difficult days ahead (3:9). He recognizes that life under the sun is a grievous task. He now admits that it is filled with social injustices. He knows that in God's due season he will see how God works to bring about justice and order, but it is far from him to explain the ways of God. He is assured only of God's consistency, and thus on the basis of God's past performance, he concludes that man should not fret over either what he does not know or what he cannot change. In the light of this reasoning he says, "And I have seen that nothing is better than that man should be happy in his activities, for that is his lot. For who will bring him to see what will occur after him?"

Some see in the twenty-first verse a simple acknowledgment on Solomon's part that some do not take to heart the differences that exist between men and beasts. While this does not satisfy the context, it does offer an idea that is needful. There are many ways in which men and beasts are similar, but there is also a vast way in which they differ. One cannot read the book without recognizing the challenge on every page to rise above the eroding pressures of life and get the most from living. One is challenged to exercise wisdom, worship God correctly, demonstrate benevolence, and remember God. The differences between men and beasts are obvious. Further, sinners would not liken themselves to beasts. It would take a preacher to do that! The man who is under consideration in the closing verse of this section is not the evildoer. He is the "good man." He cannot see the future or the events which shall befall him, but he is convinced that he will trust God and be happy in the activities of the day. This does not mean that the Preacher will not soon be in the valley of despair, looking again at the

activities under the sun, and pointing out the discouraging events of life. However, for the moment, he has his readers on a high plateau, receiving a fresh breath of air before descending once again to the reality of life "under the sun."

FACT QUESTIONS 3:9-22

136. Solomon makes it clear that in this section he is seeking to do what? (Cf. v. 9)
137. What does "which he toils" have reference to? (Cf. v. 9)
138. In what sense can it be said that God gives this "task" to men?
139. What does the term "eternity" mean as it is used here? What do you think the meaning of the word in the context is?
140. What is meant by "the beginning and end?"
141. What five things is man instructed to do if he wants to show a profit? (Cf. vs. 12, 13)
142. Give evidence from Ecclesiastes what enjoyment from the hand of God means with God's approval.
143. What brings man to stand in awe of God?
144. Has God lost control of His world because some events are out of harmony with His expressed will? Discuss.
145. What is the first evil that is apparent to the Preacher? (Cf. v. 16)
146. Will both the wicked man and the righteous man be judged? Discuss.
147. Explain the purpose of the testing of men. (Cf. v. 18)
148. What does "purify" imply?
149. Why does he go to such lengths to show the similarities between men and beasts?
150. Read verse twenty-one from different translations. Give three reasons why the verse is difficult to translate.
151. Is the debate here over the eternal nature of man's spirit? Discuss.
152. Write out your own paraphrase of verse twenty-two.
153. List the reasons Solomon came to this conclusion.

**C. GUIDELINES FOR WORKING WITH GOD
UNDER ALL CIRCUMSTANCES 4:1-16****1. How to work under oppression 4:1-3****TEXT 4:1-3**

- 1 Then I looked again at all the acts of oppression which were being done under the sun. And behold I saw the tears of the oppressed and that they had no one to comfort them; and on the side of their oppressors was power, but they had no one to comfort them.
- 2 So I congratulated the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still living.
- 3 But better off than both of them is the one who has never existed, who has never seen the evil activity that is done under the sun.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 4:1-3

84. What new inequity does Solomon now observe?
85. What qualifying phrase (v. 1) places the restrictions on this activity?
86. Give evidence that the oppression was severe.
87. What increased the tragedy of the oppression?
88. Did anyone comfort the oppressed?
89. Who received congratulations? Why?
90. Who is better off than either the dead or the living?
91. What qualifying phrase appears again in verse three?

PARAPHRASE 4:1-3

Then I turned to look closely at all the acts of oppression under the sun. Just as I had previously been confronted with the problem of corruption of justice, so now I see the oppression

of the helpless. I witnessed the tears of the oppressed. What compounds their tragedy is that they have no one to comfort them, and the authority is on the side of the oppressor. They themselves have no avenger. Both of these inequities were foremost in my mind, so I sang the praises of the ones already dead. I said, "Congratulations to the dead who died long ago for they are more fortunate than the living who are still alive." Then it occurred to me that the one who is truly the fortunate one is neither the dead nor the living, but the one who has never existed. He is better off than both of them because his mind has not been filled with the knowledge of the evil activities done under the sun.

COMMENT 4:1-3

v. 1 "I looked again" indicates that he is considering the same theme in this section that he was discussing in chapter three. The "again" implies that a new illustration of injustice or the inequities of life is under consideration. On two occasions the qualifying phrase "under the sun" appears in these three verses which indicates that what one observes is apart from heavenly values. The act of social injustice that now arrests Solomon's attention illustrates the vanity of all earthly things and endeavors.

One is confronted with a very basic problem that is common to all men of every age: Why is it that wicked men prosper and often have the authority on their side, while the righteous are often poor and suffer oppression? Since this is often the situation, and it appears to be so in Israel at this time, one is lead to the erroneous conclusion that wickedness pays profitable dividends while godliness results in poverty and affliction. If one interprets the meaning apart from the "heavenly values," the conclusions could indeed be very dismal. The extreme statements of the Preacher in these three verses must be understood in this light. If one fails to interpret his observations in the light of the "under the sun" restrictions, he finds the

Preacher contradicting himself later on in his message. However, Solomon knew what we know about the justice of God. He knew that God is patient, long-suffering and correct in all of His dealing with men. It is from this vantage point that he writes, "Although a sinner does evil a hundred times and may lengthen his life, still I know that it will be well for those who fear God, who fear Him openly. But it will not be well for the evil man and he will not lengthen his days like a shadow, because he does not fear God" (8:12, 13).

Because of similar circumstances today, one of the most difficult things is for the Christian to keep his priorities in order. There are certain values which belong within the inner circle, next to the heart, in one's life. At the same time, there are "things" which must be kept on the periphery, and constantly challenged to keep them from eroding the truer values or invading the inner circle where "things" have no claim. Yet, how many people do you know who are living purposeless lives simply because they have allowed themselves to be deceived by the riches of this world, or the pleasures derived from participation in such evil deeds of injustice that meet the Preacher's searching eyes in our text? The extreme observations of verses two and three would be the most plausible in the world if this life were all there is to living. The young man struck down in the prime of his life; the young mother left without guardian, provider or companion; the poor, neglected and often persecuted by wicked men who grow fat from withholding what should be shared with the less-fortunate, or even at times what is rightfully theirs; they all cry out to the emptiness of living and the futility of the life that thousands must endure on the face of the earth. However, such was the situation described in detail by James (5:1-6), and in view of all that Jesus Christ means to the Christian he was able to admonish them to steadfastness and joy with the words, "You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door" (James 5:8, 9).

What is the oppression? In 5:8 we are instructed again not to be "shocked" by such oppression as it may very well be commonplace among us. In any system where men govern men, authority is often corrupted. It may be that in carrying out the necessary instructions of the king in accomplishing his great works (cf. 2:1-11), that the result was that which the Preacher now observes. There were many areas where authority could be violated and the process of graft take place. With a king so obsessed with the desire for personal pleasure, many such violations of justice could go unnoticed throughout the land.

The intensity, and perhaps widespread influence, of the oppression was evident in the actual tears of the poor. If they only had a just man who was in an authoritative position to plead their cause. But no! The authority is on the side of those who are persecuting them. They might turn to one another for some word of encouragement, but this would be hurt turning to hurt. They needed healing. Yet, there was no one to heal them.

It is not a picture of a merciless tyrant holding all the people under the authority of his rule. It is rather the picture of a thoughtless king who has only his own interest at heart and closes his eyes to the cries of the innocent who are trampled in his pursuit of pleasure and personal satisfaction. Perhaps enough people in the land were enjoying the superfluity, or overflow, of the king's wealth. In this case those who suffered were not numerous enough to mount any meaningful rebellion against the wickedness of those in high places.

v. 2 When the Preacher contemplated such a sight, he quickly decided that the fortunate ones were those who have already died and do not have to share in this travesty of justice. Congratulating the dead is a rather dramatic, picturesque description demonstrating that such behaviour would actually be humorous if it were not so serious.

v. 3 Upon more serious contemplation, he decided that there is one who is better off than either the living or the dead, and that is the individual who has never been born! He is not

speaking of abortion in order to shut out the life of one before he sees the light of day, but rather the one never conceived or possibly miscarried (6:3). Such a one will never have to feast his eyes upon the evil activities taking place in the midst of what has once been a nation noted for her justice and righteousness.

FACT QUESTIONS 4:1-3

154. What does "I looked again" indicate?
155. Does he consider his observations in the light of heavenly values? Discuss.
156. What "basic problem" is under consideration here?
157. What truth, shared by the Christian, does Solomon explain in 8:12, 13?
158. Write out a priority list for yourself as you are living life today? Would it be arranged differently if all "things" were removed from the top?
159. What does James teach us that motivates toward steadfastness?
160. What is the oppression spoken of in verse one?
161. How could such oppression be explained in the time of Solomon?
162. Why could not the oppressed people organize their forces to protest the evil?
163. Did the oppressed have even one just man to plead their cause?
164. Who had the authority?
165. Who were the truly fortunate ones? (Cf. v. 2)
166. Is abortion recommended by Solomon in verse three?
167. What evil thing will never be witnessed by the unborn?

2. Keep your motive for work pure. 4:4-6

TEXT 4:4-6

- 4 And I have seen that every labor and every skill which is done is the result of rivalry between a man and his neighbor. This too is vanity and striving after wind.
- 5 The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh.
- 6 One hand full of rest is better than two fists full of labor and striving after wind.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 4:4-6

92. What motivates the labor and the development of skill?
93. When one labors and develops skills for this reason, it is all what?
94. The fool in this case is a fool because he is what?
95. He actually tries to live off of what?
96. If verse six is the statement of the lazy fool, what is he actually saying?
97. If verse six is the observation and conclusion of Solomon, what is he saying?

PARAPHRASE 4:4-6

I noticed something else that is empty and just like striving after the wind. There is a man jealous over the success in this world of his fellow man. He will practically kill himself to keep up with his neighbor. He works and develops his skills, and is motivated solely by the desire to keep up or surpass his neighbor's success. This type of rivalry is futile. On the other hand, there is the foolish, lazy man who lies down, folds his hands and lives off his own flesh. I said, "It is better to have a quiet moment and one handful of rest than to have two handfuls if it is acquired by such futile rivalry as I have seen."

COMMENT 4:4-6

Another example of the futility of life now comes into the Preacher's view. Is the goal of life to become the most successful person in your community? Many today would say yes. At least their activities betray that desire. Human nature hasn't changed. The clear-cut picture of rivalry serving as the motivating factor for work evidently possessed the hearts of men in Solomon's day as it does today.

v. 4 It has been asked, "If the motive is tainted, how can the fruit actually satisfy?" This is the case here. Since it stems from a jealous spirit, and a desire to excel one's neighbor that the individual labors, he discovers that his accomplishment is unrewarding. Once he can honestly say, "I have accomplished more, and gathered and collected more than those around me," what does it really mean? The satisfaction is very fleeting. The term "skill" suggests that one spends hours in developing the ability to produce something that will bring an earthly profit. He is willing to labor tirelessly and become expert in his affairs, but since it was motivated by an unworthy desire, it accomplishes nothing.

v. 5 By "fool" we are to understand a sluggard or stupid person. He is in contrast to the individual who works skillfully as the fool does not have the wisdom to develop expertise in any area. His slothfulness, that leads him to the comfort of the couch, and causes him to fold his hands and sleep during the day-light hours, is despicable, but he concludes that he isn't any worse off than the wise man who is improperly motivated to such extreme industry. "Consumes his own flesh" is not a reference to cannibalistic practices, but the excess energy of his body is consumed through indolence rather than productive work.

v. 6 The problem confronted in this verse is not one of translation, but rather to whom should the statement be attributed? Is it spoken by the fool or the one writing the book? If it is the testimony of the fool, he is actually saying that he will not become conspirator in such folly as driving himself

to working day and night just to keep pace with his neighbor! On the other hand, if the Preacher is making the remark (cf. the Paraphrase, v. 6), then the statement is to be interpreted as somewhat of a compromise between the two extremes and is more in harmony with the stated conclusions of the book (cf. 3:12, 22). The fool has not chosen the wiser way as both men under consideration reach the same conclusion. Slothfulness and improperly motivated industry are both unrewarding and vain. "One hand full of rest" could easily be understood as saying, "Don't get on the treadmill. Just take life day-by-day and rejoice and do good in your lifetime."

FACT QUESTIONS 4:4-6

168. What motivated the man to labor and develop his skills?
169. Is the fruit of one's life satisfying if the motivation is tainted? Discuss.
170. What does "skill" suggest that is not suggested by labor?
171. Why could not the fool be skillful?
172. How should one explain the statement, "consumes his own flesh?"
173. What is the problem in understanding verse six?
174. If it is the fool who is speaking in this verse, what is he saying?
175. If the verse is to be understood as another conclusion of Solomon, which is in harmony with his former conclusions, what is Solomon saying? Discuss.

3. Attain your riches for practical good. 4:7-12

TEXT 4:7-12

- 7 Then I looked again at vanity under the sun.
- 8 There was a certain man without a dependent, having neither a son nor a brother, yet there was no end to all his

labor. Indeed his eyes were not satisfied with riches and he never asked, "And for whom am I laboring and depriving myself of pleasure?" This too is vanity and it is a grievous task.

- 9 Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor.
- 10 For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up.
- 11 Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone?
- 12 And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 4:7-12

98. Solomon calls the man's labor what?
99. What motivated the man to labor so tirelessly?
100. What did he fail to ask?
101. Were his eyes ever satisfied with his riches?
102. In what kind of a task was he involved?
103. What important thing did he deprive himself of because of his labor?
104. List the four advantages given in this section of companionship.
105. What is the lesson taught by the "cord of three strands?"
106. Do you think loneliness is an appropriate theme for this section? Discuss.

PARAPHRASE 4:7-12

I saw still another example of futility and unrewarding labor under the sun. I saw a man who lived a solitary life as he did not have a family. He had neither son nor brother. Yet, he labored endlessly and was never satisfied with the wealth he

accumulated. He never stopped and asked of himself, "For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of contentment?" His life was lonely, empty and miserable. He experienced the affliction of the grievous task which God allows to come to men who so labor under the sun.

Two are better than one because they prove in many different ways to be an advantage to each other. One reward for laboring together is obvious: if either one falls, his companion will help him up. But consider the tragedy of the one who falls and has no one to help him up. Will his riches come to his rescue? Consider another example. If two sleep together, they keep warm; but what of the lonely man who has no wife? Can one be warm alone? In many situations where one may be overpowered by adversaries, it would be possible for two to resist such and escape unharmed. Common sense teaches that a cord of three strands is not broken quickly.

COMMENT 4:7-12

Although we suggest here that the theme is that riches should be used for practical good, there is also the theme that friends or companions may be of much greater value than wealth. These two ideas run concurrently through these verses. It is obvious that money will not bring comfort, warmth, protection, companionship, or personal satisfaction. Yet, men have always faced the temptation to accumulate wealth for wealth's sake. This illustration is justifiable in the Preacher's mind as it represents a major area of concern in every age. It was typical of those who lived when Jesus was on the earth in the flesh. Indeed it was Jesus who taught us that riches are deceitful (Matthew 13:22; Mark 4:19). They will lead one to believe that they bring lasting fulfillment and satisfaction, while in reality no amount of riches will do that. In addition, Jesus taught that they may have an adverse effect and not only fail to satisfy but shut out or "choke" the very means by which one can find personal enjoyment. As the reader shall

see, much of what Solomon says in the following two chapters simply amplifies this same theme.

v. 7 It is noteworthy that he labels such concern for wealth "vanity." He knows. He was not one to take opinion polls or inquire of rich friends what such a desire for money and possessions did to their lives. He wanted first-hand information. He wanted to speak authoritatively on the subject so he became the richest man of his day. Yet, he calls it unfulfilling and empty. Of course, there is the ever-present safeguard for his observation. He is talking from the "under the sun" viewpoint. There is neither virtue in poverty nor evil in wealth. It is the attitude one has toward riches that becomes the issue.

v. 8 Note the improper attitudes of the one he describes. (1) He was not gathering a fortune with a view to the security of an heir or companion. (2) There was no end to his labor. His sole purpose in life was to collect more and more riches. (3) He became exceedingly wealthy, and yet he was never satisfied with the amount he had collected. (4) He deprived himself of what might have been meaningful pleasures to him. Money appears to satisfy because it seems to be saying that it is the answer to every problem, but perhaps this is the very deceitfulness that Jesus was talking about. Rather than finding that it resolves one's problems, it becomes the very entanglement that produces loneliness, jealousy, frustration, worry and distrust. Numerous present-day examples of extremely wealthy men could easily be given as vivid illustrations of this very truth. The man never stopped and asked himself, "And for whom am I laboring and depriving myself of pleasure?" His attitude was not one of compassionate, benevolent concern. It rather spoke to selfishness and greed. Thus, it is truly empty and a grievous task.

v. 9 It appears that Solomon has now turned to the value of companionship rather than riches. However, he is only illustrating that riches are of value if they are properly acquired and subsequently shared with a friend. In verse nine the idea of "a good return" suggests a profit. This is the basic question before him. Since the accumulation of wealth, regardless of

how much, does not bring satisfaction or produce a profit when it is collected with the improper attitude, what does? A friend does. As a matter of fact, wealth is an improper choice to make if it robs you of your friends. There are many choices in life which are based on choosing between two things when it is obvious that one cannot have both simultaneously. He cannot isolate himself with his riches thinking this will bring him enjoyment and at the same time divide his riches with a friend. Life is just that way. In his hour of need, the rich man turns to his fortune for help only to realize what James meant when he wrote: "Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire" (James 5:1-3). But it is different with a friend. While it is true that two would have a greater return for their labor than one, this is obviously not the intent of the statement. One can use only so much wealth and then everything beyond this becomes excessive. The rich man of verse eight was undoubtedly past this point. It moves the idea of profit or "return" into the area of the spiritual or emotional where one shares in the value of a personal friend.

v. 10 Undoubtedly the intention is to refer back to the miser with the statement—"But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up." In what sense does he fall? The most obvious is a physical fall which could occur on the dangerous and narrow roads of Palestine. In such a case, to have a companion to assist would be of great value. The idea may just as well be applied to moral falls and thus one would have a friend indeed if he encouraged and led one back to repentance (James 5:19, 20). The idea, however, which seems to best fit the context would be a "financial collapse." When one sees his fortune slip from his hands quickly, which occurs often without warning, then it is important to have a friend come to the rescue. Many men have experienced the loss of financial security and terminated their own lives because

no friend was standing close by with a helping hand. When a man purposely shuts out close friends because he has no time to cultivate them, or he intentionally remains aloof of meeting needs or ministering to those in lesser circumstances than himself, he has made the choice of a fool. Jesus recognized the wisdom of choosing the better part when he sent his followers out "two by two" instructing them that they should not be concerned for the physical things of life (Luke 10:1, 4).

v. 11 Once again the miser is in the center of the stage. How can "one" be warm alone? It is obvious that he has sufficient resources to purchase warm coverings for his bed, but this doesn't seem to be the implication of the verse. There is an inner warmth that comes because of close friendship. One shares in kindred goals and intents of the heart. It is possible that Solomon could have reference to poor circulation in old age and the warmth of a physical body stimulates circulation and produces some comfort in such circumstances. Solomon knew of his father's experience with Abishag who was selected purposely to attend the king and lie with David to keep him warm (I Kings 1:1-4).

v. 12 The term "alone" appears again to indicate that the rich man who stands by himself is the common denominator for this illustration too. The implication of the "threefold cord" is that if one friend is of greater value than riches, then there is truly great strength in having two genuine, trusted friends. Many things may overpower an individual, but in like manner those who willingly come to our rescue may deliver us from many different kinds of circumstances. Endless examples could be given to illustrate this truth. The tragedy here is that regardless of the opposition or the adversary, the man doesn't have a single friend to assist him in his need. Even when the dust of battle clears and you know you and your friends have lost, there is often warmth and inner peace in realizing that you had those who cared and personally sacrificed of themselves or possessions to defend you. Any such allusion in this verse to the Godhead or the Father, Son and Holy Spirit by the reference to the threefold cord would be out of harmony

with the context and purpose of the book. It cannot be denied that if God is for us, no one can stand against us (Romans 8:31), and we have no greater friend than Jesus (John 15:14, 15), but these are New Testament applications which are only based on principles that are taught in this text. Of course, the Christian rejoices and thanks God for the truth!

It is obvious that each of the verses in this section is related. The miser is the principle character and the vanity of riches is the central theme. Much is said for true friendship. It is a simple matter once again of a proper arrangement of one's priorities in life. Many people are obsessed with money and other forms of riches. Nearly everyone wants more than he presently possesses. It is an important lesson that overrides the examples and observations, and it is a lesson that will appear many times before the Preacher is completed with his message. One should be impressed with the threat a wrong attitude toward wealth is to the soul. A prayer of thanksgiving should be offered to God for constantly placing the signposts before our eyes to keep us from the deceitfulness of riches and forewarning us that they may easily choke out the Word of life.

FACT QUESTIONS 4:7-12

176. Identify the two themes which are developed concurrently in this passage?
177. In what way are riches deceitful?
178. What is meant by the statement that "there is neither virtue in poverty nor evil in wealth?"
179. What four improper attitudes did the miser possess?
180. What will riches produce when they are improperly collected?
181. What is Solomon illustrating in verse nine?
182. What does the rich man turn to in his hour of need? Will he find comfort?
183. What is most likely meant by "return" in verse nine? Why is money not intended?

184. Identify who is intended by "one who falls"?
185. What three possibilities could be meant by "falls"?
186. Which one do you think best answers the context? Discuss.
187. Name the three ways one may be kept warm.
188. What is the real tragedy of the man who stands alone?
189. Is the "threefold cord" intended to be an allusion to the Godhead? Discuss.
190. Who is the principal character in this section?
191. What is the central theme?
192. For what should a Christian constantly thank God?

4. Keep in mind that prestigious positions will soon be forgotten. 4:13-16

TEXT 4:13-16

- 13 A poor, yet wise lad is better than an old and foolish king who no longer knows how to receive instruction.
- 14 For he has come out of prison to become king, even though he was born poor in his kingdom.
- 15 I have seen all the living under the sun throng to the side of the second lad who replaces him.
- 16 There is no end to all the people, to all who were before them, and even the ones who will come later will not be happy with him, for this too is vanity and striving after wind.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 4:13-16

107. What adjectives describe the "lad"? In contrast, how is the king described?
108. What has the king lost the ability to do?
109. Under what circumstances was the lad born?
110. Where did he come from to become king?
111. To whom did the "throng" give allegiance?
112. What will happen to the popularity of the lad who became

king?

113. Such an experience is described in what two ways (v. 16)?

PARAPHRASE 4:13-16

A young man, poor in earthly treasures but rich in wisdom, is better than a king, if the king is old and foolish and will no longer listen to reason or heed the warning of his counselors. Not only does the young lad rise from poverty to become king in the very land where he was born, but he comes out of prison to assume the highest position in the land. The young man's popularity was great. As successor to the throne, he drew multitudes to his side. He now stands in the former king's stead and his name is praised throughout the land. As great as he was in the eyes of his followers, and as many as sang his praises in his hour of triumph, there is tragedy which befell him too. The next generation will not rejoice in him. They will care nothing about him. I view this as another example of futility and grasping at the wind.

COMMENT 4:13-16

Although the subject changes from the deceitfulness of riches to the fleeting popularity of even a king, the same general lesson is pursued. Solomon is setting forth argument after argument to substantiate the fact that life lived under the sun is futile. The example is of the poor lad who assumes leadership of the land and is first praised and then forgotten. Solomon explains it once again in detail and then identifies such activity as "vanity and striving after wind." The example not only reveals the lack of personal fulfillment on the part of the former king and the lad who became king, but it also reveals the fickle attitude of citizens of the kingdom. One is immediately reminded of the behaviour of the Jews in the days of Jesus when at one moment they are proclaiming Him as "the Son of David,"

and the one who comes "in the name of the Lord" (Matthew 21:9), and shortly after the same people are crying for his blood (Matthew 26:66).

Many have interpreted this section as prophetic, stating that the fulfillment came upon Solomon's death and the coming of Jeroboam to reign over the ten tribes to the north. (Cf. discussion on 2:18) While the parallel is evident and one would not want to argue strenuously against such an interpretation, the important lesson in this section should not be overlooked. Of course, if Solomon is the king who is old and foolish, and Jeroboam is the one who comes out of prison (figurative for his exile in Egypt), then the futility of the entire experience becomes much more exasperating to Solomon. It would not take much imagination to hear him declare, "Vanity! Vanity! Vanity!"

v. 13 The two extremes are clearly stated. The lad is poor, in prison, yet wise. The king is old, foolish and set in his ways. The country will be better served by the lad than the king. It is possible that the situation could be an historical one unknown to us today but clearly seen by those in the days of Solomon. A neighboring country could have just experienced such a change of rule. But neither is this important to the understanding of the text.

The present king will no longer accept advice or counsel. Undoubtedly he began his rule humbly which is typical of many in the early days of control. However he has grown self-sufficient and no longer will he entertain ideas or suggestions. The term "kesil" (foolish) actually means he proved himself to be a stupid fool. Although there are three words in the Hebrew translated "fool" in our language, this particular one is used some 24 times in Proverbs alone. It is not a complimentary term as one may conclude by reading the references where it is used in Ecclesiastes: 2:14, 15, 16; 4:5, 13; 6:8; 7:6; 10:12, 15.

It does not necessarily follow that it is because of the wisdom on the part of the young man, through crafty and cunning ways, that he became king. It is just that the land is better

off with such a lad who is wise than a king who has become foolish.

v. 14 It is important to Solomon's conclusion that he demonstrate the extremes. In this verse he pictures the lad as having been shut up in prison. One wonders if the king saw him as a threat to his throne and had him imprisoned. On the other hand, he was born in the most unlikely home to ascend to the throne. He was born a citizen of the land, but in very poor circumstances. To realize that one can rise from unlikely circumstances to become king, to supplant one who already has control, demonstrates the lack of security of life even in the highest office of the land. This is what Solomon intended to communicate to his readers.

v. 15 For a little while the new king will bask in the moment of triumph. He may have dreams of enduring, being remembered and his name proclaimed throughout the land for the remainder of his days, but such a dream will not become a reality under the sun! His success, like the miser's money, glistens only when the sun shines. Once the fleeting moment of success is past and the multitudes realize that what they have is another human being like themselves, his popularity will be a thing of the past.

v. 16 So typical of the word vanity is this verse. In one short breath one reads of the multitude thronging to his side, singing his praises and leading him to believe that he is indeed their redeemer. In the same short verse, however, the scene has changed completely and we picture the very next generation asking, "Who is he?" They do not have the same respect for him and are no longer happy or satisfied with his rule. The final utterance of the Preacher in this section is the oft-repeated conclusion of all matters experienced under the sun. He declares, "This too is vanity!"

FACT QUESTIONS 4:13-16

193. What general lesson does the example of the "lad" teach us?

194. Why did the citizens of the country accept the young lad? Why later was he rejected?
195. Why was the first king rejected?
196. How does Solomon identify this whole affair?
197. If the lad who came "out of prison" is to be understood in a prophetic sense, who would he be, and where did he come from? Discuss.
198. How would this same verse be explained if it were interpreted historically?
199. What is the meaning of the Hebrew term "kesil"?
200. In the text, on whom does this term reflect?
201. What demonstrates the insecurity of the king's office?
202. The miser's money and the young lad's success have what in common?
203. What is Solomon's final comment in this section?

D. GUIDELINES FOR THE WORK OF WORSHIP 5:1-9

1. Watch your step in God's house. 5:1a

TEXT 5:1a

1a Guard your steps as you go to the house of God,

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 5:1a

114. Since vanity is still under consideration, where are we now to guard against it?
115. What would the house of God be in Solomon's day?
116. Why should one guard his steps when going to the temple?

PARAPHRASE 5:1a

Watch your step when you come to the temple. Remember it is God's house.

COMMENT 5:1a

For the first time the Preacher resorts to admonition. It is direct and extended. He is concerned about the possible corruption of the heart as it reaches toward God in worship. He is observing the citizenry making their way to the temple, turning their feet toward the proper places, and moving through the correct procedures. However, he is also aware that their approach is more formalistic than genuine, more ritualistic than contrite. Since God is the object of worship and therefore has ultimate worth, to worship Him in word only would be ultimate folly. The "house of God" is undoubtedly the temple as the synagogue has not been established, and there was not a plurality of houses where God was worshiped.

"Guard your steps" is to be taken figuratively for examining your heart. Make sure your motives are pure and in line with your external orthodoxy. The Preacher is not implying that one should not approach God in the temple or that external acts are unimportant. He is suggesting that it is possible to give the appearance of worshiping God correctly when actually nothing is happening between you and God. The vanity of hypocritical worship is but another illustration of the vanity of all things. It is likely that his insertion of vain worship at this particular place has a very definite purpose. It is because men are out of step with God that they are out of step with one another. An improper approach to worship leads to the inequitable situation discussed in chapters one through four and also the illustrations which follow. God may be supplanted by numerous other loves. The Preacher is extremely pointed in this application (cf. 5:8-10). We are drawn to the evil activities of men which undoubtedly result from an improper attitude in God's house. Men oppress the poor, deny justice and righteousness, and have an unhealthy love for money and abundance. One way to escape the futility of the things of this world is to be in harmony, in act and spirit, with the will of God.

Much is made of this passage by those who hold to a late

date and non-Solomonic authorship. It is argued that the short-lived joy and dedication of the people to the things of God after the Exile was but a "flush of enthusiastic faith." The people soon developed a hardening of heart. One could see the outward signs of worship were in harmony with the rules, but the spirit of the act was far from what God desired. They cite such passages as Nehemiah 13:10-20 and Malachi 1:8 as evidence. One could not argue successfully against the lack of spiritual sincerity on the part of Israel, for it is manifestly denounced in the Minor Prophets. However, to conclude that such hypocrisy was limited to that particular generation, and that the rebuke and admonition of the Preacher would not be just as applicable in Solomon's day, is also indefensible. As a matter of fact, men in every generation have been guilty of meaningless sacrifices in worship. From the time of Cain and Abel to the present day the history of man has been the same in respect to worship. Every age needs a clear voice calling men back to outward form and inward feeling; to truth and spirit; but not only to sacrifice, but a detailed adherence to the will of the One to whom the sacrifice is offered. Read I Samuel 15:22; Isaiah 1:10-17; Jeremiah 7:33; Proverbs 21:3; Mark 12:40. Surely in the day of Solomon, with the corruption of justice and the erection of altars of false gods on the very soil of Israel, there was a need to admonish men to greater consistency in their performance in the house of God. Similar instruction is found in Proverbs 1:15-16 where Solomon indicates that the direction of one's steps betrays the intent of the heart.

FACT QUESTIONS 5:1a

204. What is it that now concerns the preacher as he observes the citizenry?
205. Identify the house of God. Why would it not be the synagogue?
206. How should one understand the admonition to "guard

- your steps”?
207. What is likely the reason for the insertion here concerning the need to worship God correctly?
 208. List the sins listed or suggested in 5:8-10. What proper attitude would eliminate this evil?
 209. How would you meet the argument that this type of hypocrisy had to be during the time of Malachi?
 210. Give evidence that men have always had a tendency to go through acts of worship, but in doing so failed to do all that God commanded.
 211. What does Solomon suggest may be learned concerning one’s intentions by simply watching the direction of the feet?
2. Refrain from making a sacrifice of fools through hasty words.
5:1b-7

TEXT 5:1b-7

- 1b and draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools; for they do not know they are doing evil.
- 2 Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your words be few.
- 3 For the dream comes through much effort, and the voice of a fool through many words.
- 4 When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it, for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow!
- 5 It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay.
- 6 Do not let your speech cause you to sin and do not say in the presence of the messenger of God that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry on account of your voice and destroy the work of your hands?
- 7 For in many dreams and in many words there is emptiness. Rather fear God.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 5:1b-7

117. Give evidence that the "sacrifice of fools" is evil.
118. How can one commit evil and not know it? Discuss.
119. What reason is given why one should not be hasty or impulsive?
120. What is likened unto a dream?
121. What is likened unto much effort?
122. List numerous vows taken by Christians today. Are some of these the sacrifice of fools? Discuss.
123. What is it that God does not delight in?
124. When is it better not to vow?
125. In what way can your speech cause you to sin?
126. Since the temple is the house of God, who is the "messenger"?
127. What is the opposite of speaking "many words"?

PARAPHRASE 5:1b-7

Approach the house of God with a spirit that prepares your heart to be slow to speak but swift to hear. A man is a fool who offers God empty words. Such a man offers the sacrifice of fools, and he is not even sensitive concerning his evil deeds. It is improper for you to stand before God and speak without seriously weighing your words. Think! It will benefit your sacrifice if you remember the differences between God and you. He is in heaven, and you are upon the earth! Very likely you will be a man of few words if you keep that truth in mind.

When one engages in many different activities during the day and is occupied with busy work, he will toss and turn upon his bed, and his head will be filled with dreams. Also, a fool is known by his much talk. A fool is also known by making meaningless vows before God. If you do make a vow, don't be late in paying it! God doesn't delight in fools. Pay what you vow to pay. Consider this; it is actually better that you do not vow than vow and do not pay.

It is the problem of your tongue again. Your speech can cause you to sin. Think about that. And consider, too, that it won't help to run to the priest of God and say that it was all a big mistake. The priest will be there to collect what is now rightfully God's, and you will find no escape. Why should God be made angry by your many words and you find the work of your hands destroyed?

Let it be a warning to you—dreams and meaningless promises are feasting on the wind and empty. Simply show respect to God!

COMMENT 5:1b-7

The purpose of this section is to prevent one from acting the part of a fool in the most important of all activities of men. One is personally responsible for his own behavior when he comes before God. Evidently one can rise above the circumstances around him and behave in such a way that will number him among the wise. It is to the wise, or the potentially wise, that the Preacher addresses himself as he suggests that one should not be "shocked" at what he sees in the perversion of worship or justice (v. 8)—just be certain that you "guard your steps as you go to the house of God."

The activities of the fool as described in this section are not to be emulated. The reader has been introduced to such "fools" before (cf. 4:5, 13). It is a term which suggests stupidity and ignorance rather than evil or brutishness. It does not carry the idea of one who is perverted or wicked, but rather one who is lacking in common sense and the ability to do things correctly. Note the following characteristics of the fool that the wise man will avoid: The fool fails to listen to God; he offers an unacceptable sacrifice; he is ignorant of his own evil activities and is hasty and impulsive in his speech; he fails to remember that he is the created one and God is the Creator; he expends pointless energy in meaningless activities; he is either late in paying or fails to pay the vow he made to God;

more than this, he made the vow even though he realized that he would not be able to pay it; he attempts to go back on his word, making God angry with him and thus having his work destroyed; he discovers that both his dreams and promises are empty; and, in addition to all of this, he fails to fear God which is the ultimate duty of man (12:13).

v. 1 One does not see a picture of a hardened, rebellious, heretic who sets himself against God and is in opposition to all that is holy. The individual observed as a fool attends worship. He is not a fool because he comes to stand before God, but because he does not come to listen, but to talk. And in the talking he yields to the temptation to promise much more than he is capable of delivering. James undoubtedly had these words in mind when he wrote, "But let every one be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God" (James 1:19-20). The leaders of Israel had a solemn responsibility to read the Law to the people. In like manner, the people had a solemn responsibility to listen to the Law. One of the last acts of Moses was to command the people to observe all the words of the Law. The reading, hearing, and observing of the Law, preceded the ability to fear the Lord. Moses said, "Assemble the people, the men and the women, and the children and the alien who is in your town, in order that they may hear and learn and fear the Lord your God, and be careful to observe all the words of this law. And their children, who have not known will hear and learn to fear the Lord your God, as long as you live on the land where you are about to cross over the Jordan to possess it" (Deuteronomy 31:12-13).

To "draw near to listen" would be tantamount to bringing their behavior into harmony with the expressed will of God. This would mean that the many grievous sins being committed throughout the land would cease. To "hear God" has the same force as obeying God. (Cf. I Samuel 15:22; Jeremiah 7:33; Hosea 6:6.) The foolishness depicted is heightened because the one who offers the sacrifice of fools has not stopped long enough to listen to find out what he should be doing,

and he is thus ignorant of the fact that he is doing evil.

The "sacrifice of fools" is not a sacrifice of blood or physical substance. It is rather the words hastily and impulsively offered to God. It would include promises which cannot be kept or meaningless chatter that slips so easily from the lips but never finds its way through the heart. Evidently "words" have always been considered "sacrifices" to God. When one comes to God through Jesus Christ, he should be aware that he "continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to his name" (Hebrews 13:15).

v. 2 The goal here is to keep your words few and mean what you say. The motivation for making your word sacrifice a thoughtful one is the fact that you are standing in the presence of God. It is the Creator that you have come to worship. You have been instructed where to go and what to do when you arrive. Now, don't play the part of a fool and negate your worship act. "To bring up a matter" suggests that what is about to be discussed originates from the imagination of the worshiper rather than from the command of God. Since God has not commanded the vow, perhaps it would be better if you did not make it.

Sacrifices of fools are not limited to hasty promises. Vain repetitions, which of course are repeated without feeling and become just so many empty words, are also considered unacceptable sacrifices before God (Matthew 6:7).

There isn't any doubt in the mind of the Preacher that God and man are not equal. The strong assertion of this verse that "God is in *heaven* and you are on the *earth*," clearly manifests the distinction between God and men. The temple was built for God, not man. The worship is before God, not man. The "fool" is man, not God. The entire context indicates an awareness that the author is cognizant of God's preeminence. The fact that he speaks of man being of the "earth" implies that he was *created* from dust and therefore should not forget his rightful place. It is on the basis of this distinction between God and man that he makes his appeal. When man comes before God his words should be few. This same idea is under

consideration in 6:10. Here Solomon argues that man (Adam) knows that he came from the ground (adamah). He states it clearly when he says "it is known what man is." It is in the light of this argument that his appeal is to the common sense of the one who has been created. Such a one should keep his guard up when he comes before the Creator and protect himself against the temptation to offer the sacrifice of fools.

A classic example in contrast between the fool who cries loud and long for his god to hear and the one who comes before God in correct fashion is given in I Kings 18:25-40. Here the prophets of Baal cried from morning until noon and again they "raved until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice." Yet the account states, "there was no voice, no one answered, and no one paid attention." In what took less than twenty seconds for Elijah to speak before God, he offered a meaningful prayer that resulted in fire falling from the Lord which consumed his sacrifice, along with the wood and the stones and the dust and licked up the water that was in the trench."

v. 3 It is because of the "multitude of business" or the task in which the individual is embroiled that he dreams. The dream, which is an experience that is shared by most, is declared in this instance to be the result of much activity. In like manner, a man is discovered to be a fool because of his many words. Dreams are not necessarily the mark of a fool but stand in this instance only as a comparison to illustrate his point. Once more he is insisting that our words should be few.

vs. 4-6 He now turns from the subject of prayer to that of vows. One is considered a fool if he is either late in paying his vow to God or fails to pay it. In either situation, God does not find pleasure in such activity, or lack of it! As noted above, the vow stems from the mind of the worshiper and not from God. Vows were not a part of God's commands and the laws governing them so indicate. "When you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay to pay it, for it would be sin in you, and the Lord your God shall surely require it of

you. However, if you refrain from vowing, it would not be sin in you. You shall be careful to perform what goes out from your lips, just as you have voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God, what you have promised" (Deuteronomy 23:21-23).

There is a time when it is better not to vow. Such a time obviously, is when you vow but do not fulfill it. A promise is binding among men of integrity. How much more so a promise before God! Yet, if God does not command the promise, how foolish is one who makes promises that he neither intends to keep nor has the ability to keep.

Vows have come into vogue among many churches today. There are faith-promise rallies, faith-care rallies, and numerous methods of either raising financial commitments or time and/or talent commitments through the use of special days and programs. Whereas there is nothing wrong with such activities, and in many churches much good results from them, a proper text in preparing the people to come before God with their "promise" would certainly be the passage under consideration here. Sometimes zeal in promoting for new records and higher goals exceeds wisdom exercised in the practical application of attaining them. The Preacher has a wise word for the church today: "It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay."

The idea of your "speech" in verse six could just as easily be "mouth," or "tongue." Yet, Jesus taught that it is indeed the "heart" that causes one to sin (Mark 7:21). The heart in this instance finds expression through the mouth and more specifically in the form of a hasty vow. Now, new words must be formed as you come before the "messenger of God" (the priest) and confess that it was indeed a mistake! However, both the irresponsible vow and the appeal to the priest are to be avoided. The priest acts only as a representative between you and God. This is why God is angry at your appeal and not the priest. Your vow was made to God and now the covenant has been established. God expects payment. To utter such a vow or make such an appeal places one in the position that his words cause God to become angry with him. God's anger is

now directed toward the individual (fool), and nothing he does will succeed. God destroys the work of his hand. The one in Solomon's day could expect some act of judgment from the Lord. Not all evil was immediately recompensed, however, and thus the ones who were guilty of offering the sacrifices of fools continued in such activity for a time (8:11).

Verse seven is a summary. It captures both the idea of empty prayers and empty vows and admonishes toward a more positive, fruitful activity: fear God. It is not to be assumed that the Preacher considers everyone who reads his message as guilty before God. He is suggesting that there are those who will follow the foolish ways and that one should avoid that pathway. In Wisdom Literature, the concept of "fearing God" has a marked prominence in the priorities of men and also a distinct meaning. It is both the doing of good and the departing from evil. David wrote, "Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. Who is the man who desires life, and loves length of days that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it" (Psalms 34:11-14).

Solomon has now completed his discourse on formalistic worship and the futility of such. He ends the discussion with a positive emphasis. He declares that the better way is to fear God. He has given sufficient cause why one is indeed a fool should he follow the way of thoughtless, insincere prayers or vows. Strong religious terminology such as God, temple, priest, sin, vows, and sacrifice, offer a marked and inescapable relationship to religious behavior. Perhaps his appeal is more direct and carries the feeling of admonition because of the seriousness of the matter. Nothing is of graver consequence than man's relationship to God. Perhaps he could not refrain from "preaching" in the light of this truth.

FACT QUESTIONS 5:1b-7

212. What is the most important of all activities of men?
213. One should not be "shocked" at perversion in what two areas?
214. What does the term "fool" imply in this context?
215. List the ten characteristics of fools as described in this section.
216. What temptation does the fool yield to as he stands before God?
217. According to James 1:19-20, the fool should have followed what advice?
218. What objective did Moses have in mind when he commanded the people to always have God's law read publicly?
219. To "hear God" is equal to what?
220. What is the "sacrifice of fools"?
221. How could one negate his worship act?
222. Give evidence that Solomon does not think of man as equal with God.
223. How long did Elijah speak before God?
224. How long did the prophets of Baal cry to their god?
225. Are dreams the mark of a fool? Discuss.
226. In the making of vows, when would one be considered a fool?
227. Does the vow originate in the mind of the worshiper, or is it a command of God? Discuss in the light of Deuteronomy 23:21-23.
228. When is it better not to vow?
229. Jesus taught that evil issues from what area?
230. Why, then, does Solomon say that your "speech" causes you to sin?
231. Who is the "messenger of God"?
232. Define the "fear of the Lord." (Cf. Psalms 34:11-14.)
233. Why does Solomon turn to "preaching" in this section?

3. Recognize God as the Ruler over all. 5:8-9

TEXT 5:8-9

8 If you see oppression of the poor and denial of justice and righteousness in the province, do not be shocked at the sight, for one official watches over another official, and there are higher officials over them.

9 After all, a king who cultivates the field is an advantage to the land.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 5:8-9

128. One should not be shocked at what two areas of inequity?
129. Is there a "line" of authority in the land? Explain.
130. What kind of a king is an advantage to the land?

PARAPHRASE 5:8-9

Do you not see the way the poor are being oppressed, and the denial of righteousness and justice that is found throughout the land? This should not shock you. At least don't allow it to have this effect. It will help to remember that every official in the land has a higher official watching over him—even the king. There is an advantage in having a king over the whole cultivated land, for by his authority he approves the endeavors of men and defends his subjects against wrong, unnecessary burdens, and violence,—poor government is better than no government at all!

COMMENT 5:8-9

Disharmony among men is the inevitable result of hypocritical worship. One should not be shocked at whatever he

sees throughout the land when men fail so miserably in their response to God. Once Judas had betrayed Jesus, it was a short step to press into the forbidden inner section of the temple to desecrate it by casting the price of blood upon the floor. In like manner, when men make a mockery of public worship, going through the outward forms but denying the true spirit of worship, corruption runs rampant throughout the land. It is *only* when men are right before God that they are capable of living together in peace and harmony.

Oppression, corruption, unrighteousness and denial of justice are common sights in any land where God is truly shut out of the heart. The poor are especially susceptible to oppression for they have neither the means nor the authority to champion their own cause (note the comments on 4:1). The rich men, wielding some authority, failed to justly deal with the decisions which involved the poor. If the authorities were in a proper relationship with God, none of the evils mentioned would be tolerated in the land. Note the words of Micah 6:8: "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

Why should one not be shocked at such behaviour? These two verses have been variously interpreted. It is clear that certain evils are common throughout the land. It is not clear, however, what is meant by "one official watches over another" or what is meant by "a king who cultivates the field." Whatever the interpretation, it must be the reason why one should not be shocked at the prevalent evil in the land.

There is an implied line of authority in control. Perhaps Solomon is suggesting that each person who is above another is taking advantage of him and practicing similar graft and corruption. Since this practice is so open and permeates the entire society from the lowest to the highest level, then one should not marvel at the matter. The purpose, however, is to comfort the poor who seem to be at the very bottom, and are not, themselves, taking advantage of another. He speaks to them in verse nine with the comforting thought that the king

(and in this instance many believe it to be a reference to God) is over the entire cultivated land—that is, the land where all the activities are taking place. This truth, that God will bring about ultimate justice and that all evil deeds are recorded and will one day be destroyed, is in harmony with the major theme of the book. It is not comforting to one who is imprisoned or denied daily bread, to realize that some day even the “officials” will come into judgment before the true “King,” but it is all the comfort they have. There is an advantage to having such a King.

Solomon is not building a case for the farmer by suggesting that a land who has a king who is interested in and participates in agriculture is a blessing to the land. Although some translations lend themselves to this interpretation, it should be noted that the purpose of the Preacher in this section is to bring comfort to the poor and explain why they should not be shocked at the prevalent evil in the land. If the king is a man and not God, as seems most reasonable, then in the whole land there is an advantage to realize that a final authority exists and that although he will, on occasion, close his eyes to improprieties and even be guilty himself of similar charges, he will be called into judgment before God.

On this verse, Martin Luther has written the following observations which prove to be good advice for Christians today:

The book consequently teaches thee to let thine heart have rest and peace, and not to trouble and worry thyself over much when things go wrongly, but to accustom thyself to be able to say, when the devil brings malice, injustice, violence, and burdens on the poor, ‘Such is the way of the world, but God will judge and avenge it.’ And again, when thou seest things going well, learn to say, ‘God be praised, who, after all, so rules, that we do not merely suffer evil and injustice, but receive also much good.’ Moreover, let every man, according to his rank, and God’s command, do his work with the best industry: other things let him commend to God; let him be patient and wait for Him who

is able to find out and judge the ungodly and unjust. He that cannot lift a great stone, let him leave it lying and lift what he can. Wherefore, when thou seest that kings, princes and lords misuse their power, that judges and advocates take bribes and allow causes to sink or swim as they can, being wise and sensible thou wilt think within thyself,—‘God will sometime bring about a better state.’

Futility is still the theme. How fleeting is life, and all too often how very fleeting the pleasures of life. One great lesson gained from reading Ecclesiastes is the awareness that men have *always* been troubled with the fact that any truly enjoyable experience on earth is very transitory, and in some cases never experienced by those who sojourn here. The Preacher’s message brings us to a deeper appreciation of Jesus and the revelation He brings us. Those who have experienced the grace offered through Christ have found the secret of finding joy in the midst of the temporary. He also has discovered an explanation of the corruption, denial of justice, and oppression of the poor. It does not mean that the Christian either approves or tolerates such when it is within his power to rectify wrong, but it does mean that such evil does not destroy him and he is able to triumph in victory even when he is the recipient of the injustice.

FACT QUESTIONS 5:8-9

234. What is the inevitable result of hypocritical worship?
235. Why are the poor usually the ones who suffer the most?
236. What is meant by “one official watches over another”?
237. Do the officials practice evil? Explain.
238. In what way is discovering the purpose of Solomon a key in interpreting the verses?
239. Is Solomon praising the farmer? Discuss.
240. What possible meanings are given to verse nine?
241. What theme is Solomon still illustrating?
242. What advantage does the Christian have over the person

in Solomon's day? (Discuss in the light that he lives in a similar world where corruption is so prevalent?)

E. ADMONITIONS CONCERNING THE FUTILITY OF RICHES 5:10—6:12

1. Riches by themselves are vain. 5:10-20

a. They do not satisfy. 5:10-12

TEXT 5:10-12

- 10 He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income. This too is vanity.
- 11 When good things increase, those who consume them increase. So what is the advantage to their owners except to look on?
- 12 The sleep of the working man is pleasant, whether he eats little or much. But the full stomach of the rich man does not allow him to sleep.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 5:10-12

- 131. What attitude toward money will keep one from being satisfied with it?
- 132. What is identified as vanity?
- 133. What else must be increased when one increases his possessions?
- 134. What advantage does the poor man have over the rich man?

PARAPHRASE 5:10-12

If the love for money becomes one's objective in life, money will never satisfy. He will never have enough to cause him to say, "I am content." His profits will always be looked upon as insufficient regardless of how great they are. This is but another illustration of vanity. What profit is there in accumulating riches? The more you collect and gather, the more people are required to care for them. You then have the added responsibility of providing for all these people. Your necessities of life are provided by only a fraction of what you possess, and all you can do with the excess is look upon it with your eyes. Observe a single example: One who labors and eats little or much finds that he is not incumbered with worry. His rest is profitable and his sleep is sweet. But the price one pays for being satiated is sleepless, restless nights.

COMMENT 5:10-12

Note the absence of such statements as "I turned to consider," and "I looked again." The reason is that Solomon is not turning to a new subject or even a different illustration of the same subject. He is returning to the vanity of all things as it is demonstrated through love for money and possessions. He has discussed this before in 2:10-11 and 4:7-8.

This discourse on the futility of riches runs through 6:12. It is lengthy because it is common to all men and it is highly deceptive and dangerous. It also has many sides which need exposed so the reader will not fall prey to any of its insidious nuances. Similarly much is said in the New Testament concerning the principle of Christian stewardship. Jesus offered numerous discourses on the danger of loving the world. His disciples kept the theme alive in their Epistles and instruction to the church. One need not apologize for extended discussion on such an important theme. Jesus said to his disciples on one occasion, "How hard it will be for those who are wealthy

to enter the kingdom of God!" (Mark 10:24) It was a "certain rich man" in contrast with a beggar who found himself upon his death to be "in torment." (Read Luke 16:14-31.) Jesus told the story of the rich man and Lazarus after it is recorded that the Pharisees who had encountered Him "were lovers of money" (v. 14).

v. 10 It is the love for money and not money itself that Solomon is careful to note. He is talking about the man who "loves" money and the man who "loves" abundance. He shall discover that satisfaction escapes him in reference to both. Even when one continually receives a profit or income from the fortune he has amassed, it will not satisfy him. Many rich people touched the life of Jesus and were members of the church and were both successful and content. Such men as Joseph of Arimathea, Barnabas, and Zacchaeus are usually considered wealthy men. Yet, their love was not for their wealth but rather the good their wealth could accomplish. This is the difference.

Solomon identifies this *love* for money and possessions as "vanity." It is not the money itself. To this very point Jesus spoke when he illustrated this type of empty, transitory greed in Luke 12:20-21. He said concerning the certain rich man who had such an insatiable desire for riches, "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' So the man who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

v. 11-12 The reader is here confronted with two disadvantages of riches which are kept to the owners hurt. One is the fact that the more you gather, the more people you must have to look after your possessions, and thus you simply become a provider of the necessities of life for others who have not so labored to enjoy your wealth. The other is the fact that restful sleep, which is so vital to the renewal of strength and a proper spirit to both enjoy and care for what one possesses, is taken from you.

A single insight to one facet of Solomon's many endeavors is given for us in I Kings 5:13-16. Solomon became responsible

to care for 30,000 forced laborers, 70,000 transporters or burden bearers, 80,000 hewers of stone in the mountains, and 3,300 chief deputies to rule over the people who were doing the work. Although this cooperative work with Hiram and the Gebalites was in reference to the work on the temple, it nevertheless indicates the principle he is now setting forth. His own personal endeavors, which exceeded the work on the temple in both time and riches, necessitated similar involvement of those who must be cared for from his abundance.

What is meant by "to look on"? Perhaps it is the riches which are left over after the expenses of caring for all that it takes to support his wealth that he finally fixes his eyes upon and asks, "What profit is this?" Some believe "to look on" means that he gazes upon all the activity that is the direct result of his own wealth and speaks more to the workers and the fruit of their labor than the actual wealth itself.

It is a sad commentary on Solomon's activities and life-long endeavors to come to the conclusion that the humblest man in his employ enjoys a night's rest more than he. The king is envious of him. The "full stomach" means that the rich man has eaten all that he can possibly hold. Perhaps it was the most delicate and palatable of the finest or rarest prepared foods. Yet, he is unable to sleep. The point is that one man discovered that he is able to find satisfaction in the most meager circumstances while the other discovers that contentment is not the result of excessive riches. It is not so much the full stomach that causes the restless, sleepless nights, but the avaricious spirit of the rich man that causes him to toss and turn throughout the night as he thinks back over the activities of the day and schemes and plans for a more profitable tomorrow. His many activities and responsibilities invade his mind and rob him of sweet peace.

FACT QUESTIONS 5:10-12

243. What subject is again under consideration?
244. Give three reasons why the discussion on the "futility of riches" is particularly long.
245. What did Jesus say concerning the "wealthy" entering the kingdom?
246. Why were some rich men in the New Testament both successful and contented?
247. What is it that Solomon calls vanity?
248. Name the two disadvantages of riches. (Cf. vs. 11-12)
249. What was the total number of men under Solomon's control in quarrying stone for the temple?
250. Give two interpretations of what could be meant by "to look on."
251. What is the point of verse twelve?
252. What really robs the rich man of a restful night?

b. They may be harmful. 5:13-17

TEXT 5:13-17

- 13 There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun: riches being hoarded by their owner to their hurt.
- 14 When those riches were lost through a bad investment and he had fathered a son, then there was nothing to support him.
- 15 As he had come naked from his mother's womb, so will he return as he came. He will take nothing from the fruit of his labor that he can carry in his hand.
- 16 And this also is a grievous evil—exactly as a man is born, thus will he die. So, what is the advantage to him who toils for the wind?
- 17 Throughout his life he also eats in darkness with great vexation, sickness and anger.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 5:13-17

135. Identify the two activities of life Solomon considers as "a grievous evil."
136. How were the riches lost? (Cf. v. 14)
137. Why was it important that the man not lose his wealth?
138. What fruit of his labor will the rich man take with him when he dies?
139. List the four things which are descriptive of the rich man's life. (Cf. v. 17)

PARAPHRASE 5:13-17

I looked closely upon another situation under the sun, and I saw what was a painful misfortune for the rich man. He accumulated his riches and hoarded them, but this resulted in great damage to himself. In his attempt to increase his profits and accumulate more money, he made an unwise investment. Rather than compounding his money as he predicted, he lost his entire fortune! In the meantime he had fathered a son, and now nothing was left to be given the son for an inheritance.

This is life's lesson: one is born naked and empty handed, and when one dies he returns to the dust naked and empty handed. Men cannot carry any of the fruit of their labor in their hands when they return to the earth. And this also is a painful misfortune—since man goes exactly as he comes, what profit is there in gathering and collecting? Such a one actually labors for the wind!

I have clearly seen these things in my own mind. What does such a rich man gain? He eats his food in the midst of gloom, and lives out his life with frustration, sickness and anger.

COMMENT 5:13-17

In this section there are two additional descriptions of the futility of riches which lead the Preacher to the same conclusion. He states that both are "a grievous evil." The reader should keep in mind that it is not riches that are evil but the improper attitude toward riches. In this instance, the man "hoarded" them to his own hurt. This simply means that rather than using them for good, he accumulated riches for the sake of riches.

v. 13 He once more qualifies the activity by the phrase "under the sun." This time, however, he discovers that not only do the riches fail to satisfy and keep one from sweet sleep, they actually harm the owner. The owner once believed the added wealth was good and would be the answer to everything. He is to discover that they not only fail to produce peace of mind; they become the very source of sorrow and pain.

v. 14 It was suggested in 5:10 that money is generally invested for greater gain. But now some bad business investment has resulted in not only a failure to gain a profit, but the loss of the fortune as well. This of itself would be of grave consequence to one who had such a love for money. It is of a more serious nature, however, because the man who has lost the fortune has gained a son. He would naturally wish to instill in his son's mind the same desire and love for what is so important to him. He would demonstrate first-hand to the young man how to care for and increase the fortune and together they would share in promoting for even more gain. But it is not to be. Money is transitory just like other things that are attached to this world. The father has lost all he possessed and stands empty handed. He is unable to give his son a penny. The text offers that "he" had nothing in his hand. Is it the father or the son? It could be taken either way, and would be true in either instance.

v. 15 This verse speaks of death and contrasts it with birth. He is born with nothing and shall leave this life with nothing. The elusive riches one toils for in this life are actually called

“wind” by Solomon. From the beginning of his message, he has underscored the truth that one may labor through knowledge, wisdom, and skill only to leave what he has to another. The tragedy of this situation is that the one to whom he wanted to give his fortune did not receive it; neither does the man who accumulated it take it with him. It is a universal truth to which Paul speaks when he says, “For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either” (I Timothy 6:7).

Death terminates all wealth. This lesson is difficult for many to learn. Yet, it is close to the heart of Christianity. James admonishes when speaking of our new relationship in Christ: “But let the brother of humble circumstances glory in his high position; and let the rich man glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away” (James 1:10-11). The Preacher stands as it were, on the edge of the grave of the rich man looking at the freshly shaped mound of earth and asks, “So, what is the advantage of him who toils for the wind?”

v. 17 “Darkness” is a metaphor for gloominess and suggests that he lives his life in sorrow, dejection and heaviness of heart. Perhaps this is why James had written “let the rich man glory.” In other words, what riches cannot do, Christ can. But the man who eats in darkness, in this case at least, has had the privilege of riches. He is sorrowful the more because he has the memory of the temporary satisfaction they brought. He thinks back over his poor investment or the ones now who are enjoying what he had labored so hard to accumulate, and this adds to his darkness. His mind turns to view the son who should have inherited the fortune, but now has nothing in his hand. Such thoughts result in vexation, sickness and anger. These are mental maladies which could easily produce physical illness too. However, it is a troubled spirit that broods over what could have been. He placed his trust in material gain and when he lost it, he lost his joy and his life.

FACT QUESTIONS 5:13-17

253. In what way do "hoarded" riches harm the one who hoards them?
254. What adds to the rich man's sorrows since he lost his riches?
255. Who stands empty handed? Discuss.
256. Solomon equates "wind" with what?
257. "Darkness" is a metaphor which stands for what?
258. Name the past experiences of the rich man, which when remembered by him, adds to his sorrow.

c. Exhortation to enjoy the riches God permits 5:18-20

TEXT 5:18-20

- 18 Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one's labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward.
- 19 Furthermore, as for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, He has also empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God.
- 20 For he will not often consider the years of his life, because God keeps him occupied with the gladness of his heart.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 5:18-20

140. List the four things which God does for, or gives to, men.
141. What is it that Solomon here calls "good"?
142. What is man's reward?
143. Who gives every man riches and wealth?
144. Can every man rejoice in his labor and his riches? Discuss.

145. What does man forget when God keeps him occupied with the gladness of his heart?

PARAPHRASE 5:18-20

“What does any man gain?” I have asked myself this question before. Now, I arrive at a similar conclusion. That which is satisfying and appropriate is to eat, and to drink, and to enjoy oneself in all the events of life under the sun. Let the labor of your hands bring you pleasure. That is really all one gets out of life. In addition, if your excessive wealth is indeed a gift from God—that is, you can actually enjoy it and it makes you happy because God permits it, consider yourself fortunate. You have just received a bonus from God. Another blessing which will come to you is the fact that you will not be vexed over the past experiences of your life. You will have your mind occupied with happy thoughts and thus you will not sit and ponder the transitory nature of life.

COMMENT 5:18-20

Solomon is still pursuing the “profit” that is available to one who labors “under the sun” and “during the few years of his life.” He speaks of such profit in these three verses as a “reward” or “gift” from the hand of God. He also instructs his reader to “rejoice” and discover the “gladness” of the heart that comes from his labor. This theme is an oft-repeated one that culminates in 9:7 with the imperative form which states: “Go then, eat your bread in happiness, and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works.” Note also 2:24; 3:12, 13, 22; 8:15. There is a sense in which man can find pleasure and some advantage in his labor. The qualifying mark appears to be that God must approve.

v. 18 To find personal satisfaction in one’s labor and the

joys of living is the reward available to men. Yet, on the one hand there are very few who seem to find it. Much of what the Preacher has observed and experienced, has been the opposite of this. There has been the inescapable futility that has marked all his labors. Now, however, there is a shaft of light that reveals some cause for rejoicing and joy that can be shared. He calls it "good and fitting." Actually the rendering is "good and *beautiful*" which implies personal satisfaction. What does one have to do to receive such a reward? Evidently avoid the attitudes which have been illustrated with such detail by Solomon in the preceding materials. (1) Eliminate the *love* for money and abundance. Use your wealth as a means to an end, and not an end in itself. (2) Do not offer hasty words before God. "When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it." (3) Do not put your trust in the acclaims of men. Realize that men are fickle and drawn by success rather than integrity. (4) Avoid selfishness which results in loneliness. Choose friends over insatiable desires for wealth. (5) Admit to the anomalies of life. Sorrow over the oppression of the poor, but do not despair. (6) Do not fail to see the hand of God in control of His world. The prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous are not indicators of God's justice, but rather His patience. God "has made everything appropriate in its time." Thus, from Solomon's own observations we draw the conclusion that there is a way to find a reward in the short years one has upon the earth.

v. 19 As noted, "riches" and "wealth" are not evil of themselves. God gives them. When they are looked upon with a proper attitude and used in harmony with God's ordained will, they bring joy. This is what is meant by the fact that God has "empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward." Such behavior is also called a "gift of God." It is surely available to every man, but some men choose the unrestrained, selfish pathway of avarice and greed. They miss the gift, the reward and the joy. The Preacher's admonition is to the better way of life. Do not be carried away with excess. Rather, accept your life each day and live it to the fullest.

v. 20 There is a "bonus" for those who seek such a life before God. Not only do they discover that they have a reward in finding joy in their labor and living, but they soon forget the undesirable experiences of the past which causes greater joy for the present. Since it is God who now controls his daily attitudes, it is also God who causes him to forget the sorrows of his past years. This verse does not speak to "eternal" life or the anticipated joys of some future state. This would be out of character for Ecclesiastes. However, it does suggest that one's present life can be rewarding and filled with joy. One way to accomplish this is to be busy doing what God desires. The memory that haunts the rich, lonely miser and brings him to a prison house of gloom and vexation has no part with the one who discovers God's gift for living.

All men have past experiences that are better buried and forgotten. Some come as a result of external circumstances and pressures that are beyond the control of the individual but nevertheless erode his peace of mind when recalled. Other experiences are direct results of volitional folly or sin. These have a more damaging influence on the joy of the present. It is a much-desired blessing to be able to close the door to the past and find joy in the present. This is the promise the Preacher now offers to those who make an effort to be wise.

Since such a positive note is sounded regarding the possible rewards that one may find even under the sun, it might be expected that Solomon will turn to a new theme. This is not true, however. This rather refreshing observation that speaks of rewards and joy is to be looked upon as a temporary terminal in his reasoning. He dedicates the entire next section (Chapter Six) to the theme of the futility of riches. Let us close out this section with two observations. One comes from Jesus who speaks to this point with the words, "Therefore do not be anxious for tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matthew 6:34). Also, the following quote from the Bereleburger Bible is very much to the point: "To the pure all things are pure" (Titus 1:15), "and so a pure man may undoubtedly use riches with purity;

and it will, therefore, chiefly depend on each one's own heart, on how it stands before God. But if any person is unable to remain just as contented and calm, when house and home are burnt down, or when some other damage is done to his property, he proves himself to be not yet truly composed and satisfied: *that is the test thereof.*"

FACT QUESTIONS 5:18-20

259. When and where does Solomon seek for a profit?
260. What does he call this profit?
261. What is the qualifying mark that makes man's labor profitable?
262. To labor according to God's will is said to be "good and fitting." What is an alternative rendering for "fitting"?
263. List the six reasons given why men can discover a profit from their labors.
264. How can "riches" and "wealth" bring joy? (Cf. v. 19)
265. Why do some men miss the gift, reward and joy of life?
266. Explain the "bonus" mentioned in verse twenty.
267. Past, undesirable experiences come from what two sources?
268. What general theme is discussed in chapter six?
269. What did Jesus teach about anxiety over tomorrow?
270. What does the Bereleburger Bible say is the true test of riches?

2. It is possible to possess riches which cannot be enjoyed.
6:1-6

TEXT 6:1-6

- 1 There is an evil which I have seen under the sun and it is prevalent among men—

- 2 a man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor so that his soul lacks nothing of all that he desires, but God has not empowered him to eat from them, for a foreigner enjoys them. This is vanity and a sore affliction.
- 3 If a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years, however they may be, but his soul is not satisfied with good things, and he does not even have a proper burial, then I say, "Better the miscarriage than he,"
- 4 for it comes in futility and goes into obscurity; and its name is covered in obscurity.
- 5 "It never sees the sun and it never knows anything; it is better off than he.
- 6 "Even if the other man lives a thousand years twice and does not enjoy good things—do not all go to one place?"

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 6:1-6

146. What is "better" than the rich man of this passage?
147. Give the five reasons listed in the passage why the miscarriage is better than the rich man.
148. Who gives men riches even when they are not enjoyed?
149. What is the prevalent evil among men?
150. What does the rich man lack of that which he desires?
151. Who enjoys the fruit of the rich man's labor?
152. The rich man's labor is considered vain because he is not satisfied with what? (Cf. v. 3)
153. Would begetting of children be considered a great blessing?
154. The rich man would not enjoy his riches even if he lived how many years? (Cf. v. 6)
155. What is the "one place" where all men go?

PARAPHRASE 6:1-6

I observed one other misfortune that lies heavily upon men who live and labor under the sun, and I concluded that not

only is the burden heavy, but it is also prevalent among men. That burden is this: A man has everything his heart desires and yet he does not enjoy it. God grants him riches, possessions and honor in his community. As a matter of fact, he has every materialistic benefit needed to satisfy his soul. Although God permits him to possess all and experience social prominence, God does not allow him to enjoy it. One who is a stranger receives it and enjoys it instead. This is indeed a heavy burden to bear. More than this, it is a misfortune marked with hollowness!

What can you say concerning a man who has everything except happiness? Even if he lives a good long time, is honored in his community, and is the father of a hundred children, and, yet, doesn't enjoy what he has, or doesn't even receive a proper burial when he dies, he would be better off not to have been born. It is my conclusion that a stillborn child is better off than he! I know that sounds extreme, but here are my reasons for such a conclusion: The stillborn has no name; it is marked with total futility; it leaves in darkness just as it arrived in darkness; and although it never saw the sun and never knew anything, it rests in greater peace than he.

The important thing is to discover joy and find contentment. What good is there if one lives for two thousand years if he cannot share in either of these? Do we not all finally come to the grave anyway?

COMMENT 6:1-6

This entire chapter continues the theme of the futility of riches. The poor would discover some comfort in the fact that since he is poor he is not sharing in the evil which lies heavy on so many others. However, the message is directed toward the one who is able to gather and collect and yet fail to enjoy. The Preacher now turns to another side of the deceitfulness of riches and would have his reader note carefully that it is not possible to find satisfaction through possessions, where God

does not permit, even when those possessions include everything the heart could desire!

v. 1 Wealth is relative. To the poor, a rich man is one who possesses more than he does. Thus, it is possible that a lesson is held in these verses for every man. Solomon does say that the incident which he has in mind is common or prevalent among men. In other words, one can see it everywhere. He also identifies it as an evil and influenced by vanity as it takes place once again under the sun. It is not to be thought of, therefore, as an incidental ill or burden but one that is "heavy" upon many men. When one looks to possessions for comfort and security and thus places his confidence in that which he owns, he is a prime candidate for the message the Preacher now proclaims.

v. 2 God is involved in this example in two ways: first, He permits the man to acquire all that his heart desires; secondly, He does not permit the man to enjoy what he has acquired. The first part of this verse is more easily understood. One can readily see that it is because of God's providential activities working through His laws of nature that we have material success upon this earth. Jesus spoke to this point when he said that God "causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45). It is evident that although men do not acknowledge that their success in gathering and collecting materialistic things comes as a direct result of God's blessing, it nevertheless does. The mercy of God is demonstrated in the apparent success of the wicked. Such success should be a means of bringing the wicked to the acknowledgment that his wealth is a result of God's goodness and thus come to repentance and humility before Him. However, men often gather and collect and fail to acknowledge God in their endeavors. It is this kind of man who also fails to enjoy what he possesses. The Preacher states that "God does not empower him to eat from them." The phrase "to eat from them" is a metaphor for "to enjoy them." Just what does "enjoy" mean in this instance? Or more to the point, how can one fail to enjoy such possessions

when he has *everything* his heart desires? This part is not so easily explained.

What the one who accumulated the riches failed to do, the stranger who inherits them does. It is said of the stranger or foreigner, and this should be understood as one who is not of the same family or rightful live to inherit the wealth, that he does "enjoy" them. That is, he eats from them with great satisfaction. To say that God does not empower the rich man to enjoy what he has accumulated is stating that the rich man cannot divorce himself from the power of his wealth. He is still greedy of gain; he is hoarding his riches to his own hurt; he is not content and perhaps he fails in health as a result of his avaricious spirit and thus cannot use what he has gathered together. Whatever the cause of such failure to enjoy, it is spoken of that God does not permit it simply because God's laws will not permit such to find joy. God has ordained that personal fulfillment and joy are to be found only within the confines which he has established. One who chooses to live outside such an area may be able, because of God's mercy, to gather and collect great amounts of wealth, but he will not genuinely enjoy it!

When riches capture the heart and control the will of an individual, it is indeed an evil. Such evil is common among men. In addition, Solomon speaks of it as vanity and a sore affliction. That which one believed would fulfill his life and bring lasting satisfaction has created an emptiness instead and is making a hollow mockery of life itself. Not only is this true of possessions, it is also true of prominent positions (Cf. 4:13). "Honor" suggests that the man has a place of respect in his community. The idea that he "lacks nothing" speaks entirely to the elements of this world which are marked with futility. In contrast James speaks of one who is "perfect and complete, *lacking in nothing*" (James 1:4). There is a marked difference. The man in Ecclesiastes has every possible physical need met and all that his heart desires; yet he is not enjoying life. The man in James may not have any physical blessings and yet lacks nothing. The difference? The Christian man of whom James

speaks is content because he possesses wisdom from above and potentially all the blessings in Christ are his (Colossians 2:3). Contentment in Christ is not a result of riches, prestige, health or long life. Rather, it is a result of spiritual maturity. Therefore, the poor man is to glory in his high position (in Christ) and the rich man rejoice in that he has been brought to see that his riches will not bring him enjoyment and he has been humbled and divorced from the control his possessions held over his life. Study James 1:1-11.

v. 3 Our attention has been drawn to riches, possessions and prominence in the community. Perhaps, one may reason, a large family and long life will surely bring personal joy. But, no, the Preacher reasons that though one fathers a hundred children and lives for two thousand years (v. 6) this will not change the picture. It would certainly add to his list of blessings which God permits him to have, but the additional blessings are not of such a nature that they in themselves will produce the joy.

The failure to have a proper burial was a disgrace (Isa. 14:19-20). The tragedy of the rich man is compounded as he has everything his heart desires except the means of enjoyment, and now at the end of his useless and hollow life he has no burial. To leave a body upon the ground to be devoured by animals or fowls of the air was reserved for the enemies of Israel or the despicable members of their society. (Cf. I Samuel 17:46; Jeremiah 22:18-19) It is not noted as to the reason why the rich man does not have a burial, but circumstances of life led to this unfortunate conclusion. To face such a reality is indeed a heavy burden especially in light of the unlimited wealth the rich man possessed, to say nothing of the fact that he was honored in his community.

Once again the qualifying mark of such a man is the fact that "his soul was not satisfied with good things." He has placed his values on things of this earth rather than being content with each day's activities. The sorrow and bitterness of such a wasted life is intensified in the following analogy. He compares such a wasted life with a stillborn baby and

concludes that miscarriage is better!

vs. 4-5 The baby born prematurely or born dead is said to be better off than the rich man. This is a strange conclusion because the child has no name, is not honored in the community, knows nothing, and never experiences one day of life. It is nameless, unrecorded, unburied and unremembered! Yet, such an untimely birth is more to be desired than the long life of the rich man under consideration. The key appears in the marginal reading of verse five in the NASV. Here it reads, "more rest has this one than that." The idea of rest is the reason why the one is desired above the other. It has previously been noted that when a rich man places his ultimate values on riches that he is restless at night and is unduly concerned for his riches during his waking hours. In other words, he has been robbed of rest. The stillborn does not experience the perpetual restlessness of the rich. Certainly one must agree that the description of the stillborn is depressing and undesirable. Yet, whatever the plight of the untimely birth, it is *better* than the misery of a covetous man! "Rest" may suggest "freedom from suffering." The entire picture leads one to the conclusion that such rich men in any society are to be objects of pity rather than envy.

v. 6 There are three significant points in this verse: (1) Regardless of how long one may live, even if it is twice as long as the longest life recorded, it would not change the circumstances nor would one come to different conclusions, (2) the reason being that the man who is under consideration did not "enjoy good things." This is the equivalent of verses two and three which teach that God did not permit him to enjoy life. (3) Both the stillborn and the rich man will return to dust and, in the grave as it were, there will be no remembrance of previous things. It is on the basis of these arguments that the conclusion is drawn that an untimely birth is better than living in the midst of plenty and yet failing to divorce oneself from an avaricious spirit.

FACT QUESTIONS 6:1-6

271. What theme is continued here?
272. How could the poor find some comfort in this passage?
273. Why does one fail to enjoy riches even when he has all his heart desires? Discuss.
274. Explain what is meant by the statement, "wealth is relative."
275. Who is a "prime candidate" for the Preacher's message?
276. In what two ways is God involved in this example? (Cf. v. 2)
277. How does God permit evil men to acquire wealth?
278. What should such blessings from God lead even evil men to do?
279. What is meant by the metaphor "to eat from them"?
280. Who is a foreigner?
281. What does the foreigner do?
282. List the possible causes why the rich man fails to enjoy his riches.
283. What is suggested by "honor"?
284. In what sense can one "lack nothing" and still be miserable?
285. What does James mean when he speaks of one who "lacks nothing"?
286. What two additional blessings come from God? (Cf. v. 3)
287. Who usually failed to receive burial?
288. List the characteristics of the stillborn.
289. What is the "key" that makes the untimely birth better than the long life of the rich man?
290. List the three significant points in verse six which serve as his final arguments for his conclusion.

3. Reasons why riches cannot satisfy 6:7-9

TEXT 6:7-9

- 7 All a man's labor is for his mouth and yet his appetite is not satisfied.
- 8 For what advantage does the wise man have over the fool? What advantage does the poor man have, knowing how to walk before the living?
- 9 What the eyes see is better than what the soul desires. This too is futility and striving after wind.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 6:7-9

156. Man labors for what primary cause?
157. Is man's appetite for either food or pleasure ever completely satisfied?
158. Does the wise man have an advantage over the fool in respect to being satisfied with pleasure or food?
159. Does the poor man have an advantage over the rich man?
160. Explain verse nine in the light of 5:18-19.
161. What parallel is found between verses seven and nine?
162. After reading over these verses, what does the Preacher identify as futility and striving after wind?

PARAPHRASE 6:7-9

A man labors all the days of his life for food and pleasure, and regardless of how much he gathers and collects he will never say, "It is enough!" If one's appetite is never satisfied, how is the wise man better off than the fool? Or, what advantage does the poor man have who at least knows enough to enable him to get along in life—even as he walks over against the rich and the wise? It is better that one enjoy daily what he has than fret over what he might be able to acquire.

To always anticipate more possessions and additional pleasures and think for a moment that when they are realized you will be satisfied is an empty dream which never will be fulfilled.

COMMENT 6:7-9

In searching for one idea in these three verses which would give clear insight to the unlocking of the mystery of how one with such great wealth could go through life unfulfilled, one discovers the thought that "the appetite is not satisfied." This explains the first seven verses in this chapter as well as giving direction to the remaining verses. The man under consideration has an insatiable appetite. He will never have enough regardless of how much he accumulates. Such a man is given over to the "cares of this world" and has lost control of his own spirit. In these three verses, therefore, we are discussing the same individual who has been under consideration from the beginning of this chapter. It is not to be concluded that the Preacher has one particular person in mind, but rather this evil which is common to men is simply being illustrated through a hypothetical situation. This activity is so designated as "futile" and "striving after wind."

v. 7 Some render this verse as "All of man's toil is for his mouth and yet his *soul* is not appeased." In doing so, it is argued that mouth represents the lower areas of desire and soul represents the higher, spiritual areas. This, however, is not the intention of the verse. It is not a comparison; it is an additional argument to demonstrate that certain men labor endlessly for the products of food and pleasure, and yet their desire is never satisfied. Certainly it is the soul that desires such things and it is the soul that is in difficulty. What Solomon is saying is simply that some men are so attached to earthly things that like fire, the barren womb, and the grave itself they never cry, "Enough!" (Cf. Proverbs 30:15-16) Once again the lesson which teaches the power riches have over the minds of men is vividly demonstrated. Indeed the man's soul is in

trouble. He has perverted his true purpose of living to God's glory and has become slave to things futile and transitory.

v. 8 One would think that the wise man would have great advantage over the fool. The wise man in this situation is the one who is skillful and has the ability to increase his possessions and receive healthy profits from his investments. In addition he has merited the esteem of his peers and managed his physical affairs in such a way that his life has been extended. He is also surrounded with his children. Yet, he does not hold an edge on the fool. The fool, of course, is the one who lacks the wisdom to make such a mark in his community as that which distinguishes the wise man. When a wise man fails to enjoy what he possesses, he is no better off than a fool. There is a sense in which he is indeed a fool (Luke 12:20).

The second part of this verse is difficult to understand. The tenor of this section would lead one to see here the simple statement that the poor man does not have an advantage over the wise man simply because, like the stillborn, all finally go to the grave and there are no distinctions there. The Paraphrase attempted to speak to this truth. However, there is much disagreement as to how the verse should actually be translated. Leupold translates it: "or what advantage has the poor man that knows how to walk over against the living?" He would argue that the poor Israelite, under Persian rule, is the only one who knows how to walk (because of his inheritance of Wisdom) over against the living (his oppressors). Two items militate against this translation or interpretation. One, the historical setting would necessitate a date at least 500 years later than Solomon, and secondly, such an interpretation does not speak to the line of reasoning pursued in this entire section. The Septuagint suggests that "the living" is to be translated "life," and implies that he knows how to walk in this world to prepare for the life to come. Thus the Septuagint reads, "For what advantage has the wise man over the fool? since the poor man knows how to walk before life?" This idea appears to be foreign to not only the immediate context, but the thought of the entire book. *The Anchor Bible* eliminates

the problem by actually changing the direction of thought and making the idea of "knowing how to conduct himself during his life" refer to the wise man and thus pointing out that this is the only advantage the wise man has over the fool. This translation seems to be more from convenience than meeting the issue. Perhaps what Solomon is saying is that the poor has his troubles, too. He never has his desires fulfilled, and thus his appetite does not receive the numerous benefits of the wise man, rich in the things of this world, but like the rich man his desires are insatiable. No man has an advantage over another if each is controlled by greed and earthly goods. If this is indeed the correct interpretation then what Solomon is saying is that such an evil is truly common to all men. Both the rich and the poor have demonstrated a failure to enjoy life, and both have the same misery as the result of a lack of fulfillment. Their inability to "eat from" what they possess places them on equal status in that respect at least.

v. 9 "What the eyes see is better than what the soul desires," is not that which is spoken of in the same verse as "futility and striving after wind." Rather, it is good advice and is in harmony once again with previous conclusions found in 2:24; 3:12, 13, 22; 5:18 and later in 6:12. The adage, "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," speaks of this truth. It is better to take what one has and enjoy it rather than entertain a craving for what is possibly in the future and uncertain. To control one's appetites and make the most of what one has is the mark of a truly wise man. God will evidently permit such a one to find joy in living and "eat from" what he possesses.

The contrary attitude which manifests the dissatisfaction with life regardless of what one possesses is that which Solomon speaks of as futile. The oft-occurring "striving after wind" marks this type of activity as totally useless.

FACT QUESTIONS 6:7-9

291. What key statement found in these verses helps to clarify the conclusions in this entire section?

292. What is demonstrated by the argument found in verse seven?
293. What characterizes the wise man of verse eight?
294. What characterizes the fool?
295. What advantage does the wise man have over the fool?
Discuss.
296. Give two reasons why Leupold's translation of verse eight should not be considered.
297. Explain what the Septuagint does with the term "the living."
298. What does the poor man have in common with the rich, wise man?
299. What good advice does Solomon offer? (Cf. v. 9)
300. How can one "eat from" what he possesses?
301. What does "futility" refer to?

4. Reasons why it is useless to strive for riches 6:10-12

TEXT 6:10-12

- 10 Whatever exists has already been named, and it is known what man is; for he cannot dispute with him who is stronger than he is.
- 11 For there are many words which increase futility. What then is the advantage to a man?
- 12 For who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime, during the few years of his futile life? He will spend them like a shadow. For who can tell a man what will be after him under the sun?

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 6:10-12

163. Man was made from what substance? (Cf. Genesis 2:7)
164. In what way is man described in Isaiah 45:9?

165. Who is stronger than man?
166. Can man dispute with God?
167. What increases when man's words increase?
168. Does man's ability to speak many words prove to be profitable to him?
169. Does man have the ability to know what tomorrow holds?
170. Man's short life is likened unto what?

PARAPHRASE 6:10-12

Man cannot contend with God. God is stronger than man. It is well known that God created man from the earth, and man should never forget that. Man knows that whatever he is, he is created and came from the earth. The more man talks, the more evident this truth becomes! Man's much speech betrays his origin and his nature. How does man profit from that? His life is but for a few days, and is compared to a shadow—it lengthens and then quickly disappears. Who can tell a man what will be after him in this life marked with such a heavy stamp of meaninglessness and death?

COMMENT 6:10-12

Solomon now returns to speak to a theme introduced in 1:9-11. This idea has been carried through his book. (Cf. 2:12; 3:15) The nature of man does not change. Man should know who he is and recognize that his ability to speak long and loud will not change his nature but only compound his futility. He concludes once more that one should simply make the most of the present and not fret over that which is beyond one's control.

v. 10 What is man? Whatever he is, he is certainly less than God. Perhaps it is a passing observation, but the Preacher admonishes his readers not to dispute with Him that is stronger than man. The idea that God is Creator is consonant with all

the teachings of the book. Direct reference to the fact is made when the Preacher begins to drive home his point like well-driven nails (Cf. 12:1, 11). The relationship that exists between "Adam" and the fact that Adam was taken from "the earth" is very close. God's new creation is called Adam because he is taken from the earth. One has aptly translated the idea into the English with the sentence: "His name is earthling because he was taken from the earth." Since this is true, man cannot dispute with God, for he is but the created, not the creator. It would also follow that man depends upon his Creator to empower him to eat of that which he possesses. The discussion here would be an additional argument for the Preacher's main thesis: i.e. The gift of God is for a man to enjoy his labor and stay occupied each day with the gladness of his heart. The superiority of God is demonstrated that man can see the futility of trying to find enjoyment without Him. God is definitely the One who is stronger than man and the One with whom man cannot contend.

v. 11 Although the NASV translates this idea as "many words" which increase futility, other translators have offered varying suggestions. One popular translation supplies "things" for "words," and thus suggests that wealth, pleasure, knowledge, all human pursuits along with every endeavor gives credence to the fact that man is subjected to futility. However, these are aspects that have previously been considered. The idea of "words" offers a different view of man. Now, one can see that the Preacher is saying that even though man is very glib and capable of varying and lengthy speeches, such exercises will only manifest his vanity. Perhaps this tendency on the part of man to demonstrate his futility through his speech was the thought in the Preacher's mind when he admonished, "Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your words be few" (5:2).

We are now confronted with the question: What profit has a man? This may refer to the general approach of the entire book, or it may speak specifically to the immediate context.

However, it is obvious that the Preacher is concerned about man's role on this earth and if there is any way in which he can come to the end of the day and honestly say, "See, this is my profit for today!" It is evident from his previous reasoning that the rich have nothing more than the poor. We are to accept his inquiry then as a sad but true commentary of life's endeavors. Regardless of what is accumulated, there is no profit to man who lives simply for pleasure itself.

v. 12 The first question of this verse has been taken by some to mean that he is not only questioning the meaning of life on the earth, but also the value of life to come. This is out of character with the book, and it is forcing the immediate context into an unwarranted position. He is speaking only to life as it is lived on this earth. Such ideas or terms as "futile," "under the sun," "few years," "shadow" and "his life time," verify this contention.

In answer to his question, the implication of verse ten is that God knows what is good for man. This is the basis for his reasoning in 5:18-20. Man is not in a position to determine what is good because he, like that which he desires, is subjected to vanity. His own conclusions, apart from God's help, will inevitably lead to the frustrating burden of feasting on the wind.

To spend his life like a shadow suggests that it is fleeting. This figure reinforces the idea of a "few years." Too much should not be made of the idea that when the sun goes down, the shadow vanishes. However, the concept of living one's life under the sun is interesting in view of the analogy with the shadow. There is a sense in which when the sun sets life is over for all. (Cf. 8:13; I Chronicles 29:15) Sufficient comment has already been made concerning the shortness of life and the concurrent emptiness that accompanies it.

The final question of this section is: "For who can tell a man what will be after him under the sun?" It does not refer to eternity but rather to the activities which shall occur upon the earth tomorrow, the day after that or in the following years. No man knows. Since God is in control of His world and is

the One who permits man to enjoy living, then it would follow that man should cease fretting about what might happen and live each day with simple trust and enjoyment. The wise, rich, but yet unhappy man has concerned himself with many problems that pertain to tomorrow: Who will come after him? To whom will he *really* leave all that he has collected and gathered? What if he has no son to carry on? Will he receive proper burial? What will people think of him when he has died? These and many other questions continually trouble his mind. He is rather required to submit to the power of God and enjoy with moderation the goods of life which God has permitted to accumulate and now potentially at least offer him the ability to enjoy.

FACT QUESTIONS 6:10-12

302. Solomon now returns to what theme?
303. What is the meaning of the name Adam?
304. In what way does man depend on God?
305. Why do "many words" prove man's futility?
306. Why is man admonished to guard and select wisely the words he speaks? (Cf. 5:2)
307. What kind of life robs even a rich man of profit?
308. Give two reasons why Solomon is not writing of "eternal life" in verse twelve.
309. Why is man not in a position to determine what is good for himself?
310. What is meant by man spending his life like a shadow?
311. What period of time is referred to in the final verse by the phrase "after him under the sun"?

II. A MAN OF WISDOM WHO WORKS IN HARMONY
WITH GOD REAPS EARTHLY BENEFITS
REGARDLESS OF ENVIRONMENTAL
CIRCUMSTANCES. 7:1—12:8

A. ADVERSE CIRCUMSTANCES TEACH WORTHWHILE
LESSONS BUT IF IMPROPERLY INTERPRETED
COULD LEAD TO DESPAIR. 7:1-22

1. This lesson taught by comparisons 7:1—7:14

a. A good name is better than precious ointment. 7:1

TEXT 7:1

1 A good name is better than a good ointment, and the day
of one's death is better than the day of one's birth.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:1

171. What must one possess to assure that his death is better
than his birth?
172. Read Proverbs 22:1 and list the three valuable things
which are not as desirable as a good name and the favor
of others.

PARAPHRASE 7:1

To have a good name or reputation is of greater value than
possessing fine perfumed oil. So, too, is the day of death
better than the day of one's birth.

COMMENT 7:1

This is the beginning of a rather long section of lessons taught through contrasts or comparisons. The technique is not new to Solomon. On the same subject he had previously written: "A good name is to be more desired than great riches, favor is better than silver and gold" (Proverbs 22:1). Undoubtedly the primary emphasis here is on one's character and integrity. To be honest and to have the respect of one's peers is the objective. Moral purity should receive the highest priority. The second part of the verse has been discarded by many as incidental to the lessons to be learned and has no particular contribution to make to the meaning here. It is argued that it is employed to simply show that one "thing" is better than another. However, there is purpose in the contrast between life and death that speaks to the lesson in point. The same "theme" of birth and death is carried through verse eight. The correlation is that one's reputation is often determined by serious consideration of the inevitable time of death which comes to every person. There is a real sense in which the honest facing up to the reality of death, whether your own or the death of another, has a sobering effect on decisions which may determine character and ultimately one's destiny.

To the Christian death is not the worst thing that can happen. On occasion it is welcomed as a sweet release from suffering or escape from a disease-ridden body which no longer should be joined with the spirit. To the Christian death is often viewed as a victory, a triumph. Especially is this true when it can be said, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord" (Revelation 14:13).

It appears that a good man with a good name dies and leaves behind a good reputation. Such an experience would elicit the observation that, in this case at least, the day of one's death is better than the day of his birth for he has lived his life successfully. He now has the assurance that he shall be remembered. (Cf. 2:16; 8:10; 9:15) It has been noted that to be forgotten was cause for despair.

FACT QUESTIONS 7:1

312. What method is employed in this section to teach numerous lessons?
313. What primary lesson is taught in this verse?
314. In what way can the observation concerning death relate to the lesson of the good name?
315. List the reasons that death could be considered blessed to the Christian.
316. Why is the deathday better than the birthday for a good man?
317. Give evidence from Ecclesiastes that to be forgotten was cause for despair.

- b. Attendance at a funeral is better than attendance at a birthday party. 7:2

TEXT 7:2

- 2 It is better to go to a house of mourning than to a house of feasting, because that is the end of every man, and the living takes it to heart.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:2

173. Why is it better to go to the house of mourning?
174. What is the end of every man?
175. If the house of mourning represents death, and the house of feasting is the opposite, what would the house of feasting refer to?
176. From your own observations, list reasons why you think it would be of greater value to attend a funeral than a birthday party.

PARAPHRASE 7:2

Since all men must share in the experience of death, and since those who are living consider the serious nature of life when they visit the house of mourning, it is better to attend a funeral service than to go to the places of festive enjoyment.

COMMENT 7:2

In the former verse the emphasis was on the importance of one's reputation and good name. Such an attainment would assure a good memory in the minds of those who outlive you on the earth. In this verse, the emphasis is placed on the living who recall the life lived by the one who is being mourned.

Once again the lesson is taught by comparison. Human nature is such that man naturally gravitates toward festive occasions where the senses are delighted and the heart is made to laugh. However, there are few lasting values in such experiences. It is better to seek out the house of mourning. It is in this house that one is confronted with the issues of life and death. These are the issues which are grave enough to influence destinies and bring about sober reflection on one's present activities. Because man moves naturally to festive occasions, he needs to be reminded and even admonished to seek out opportunities which will lead him to consider seriously his own short sojourn on the earth.

One should not argue too strenuously that the "house of feasting" is a birthday party. However, since birth is the opposite of death and most births are occasions for festivity, it could be reasoned that the contrast is made between the beginning of life and the house where life has been terminated. If such is the case, the lessons are more plentiful in number and more lasting in value. At any rate, honest men admit that death is inevitable and they are sobered by looking upon the face of a friend who in this life will neither smile nor sing again.

The sobering effect is of a permanent nature because the text literally states that the individual takes the idea of death and "gives" it to his heart (mind). He ponders the ramifications of the death event, and allows the fact that he too will one day come to the same end, help him redesign his thinking and subsequently his life. Note the similarity in the prayer recorded in Psalms 90:12: "So teach us to number our days, that we may present to Thee a heart of wisdom."

FACT QUESTIONS 7:2

318. Who is to benefit from going to the house of mourning?
319. What must one do to receive benefit from such an experience?
320. Man, by nature, gravitates toward what kind of activity?
321. List and discuss the reasons that the "house of feasting" could refer to a birthday party.
322. According to Psalms 90:12, what is the result of seriously considering the few days one has to live on this earth?

c. Sorrow is better than laughter. 7:3

TEXT 7:3

3 Sorrow is better than laughter, for when a face is sad a heart may be happy.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:3

177. In the contrast of the two houses in verse two, which house would hold sorrow? Which would hold laughter?
178. Explain this verse in the light of II Corinthians 7:10.
179. List some things that would cause a sad face but result in a happy heart.

PARAPHRASE 7:3

To understand the circumstances of life which result in sorrowful experiences is better than seeking after laughter. The face may cloud with tears and sorrow, but the mind will benefit and be made happy.

COMMENT 7:3

The principle taught in this verse is universally true. When one faces the reality of death and the suddenness of judgment before his Creator, he is drawn in his mind to consider his own ways. His countenance is made sad because he is seeing himself with the veneer and sham produced by self-deceit removed. His sinful ways are apparent. Repentance is implied because his sadness results in his heart being made happy. Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, "For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces repentance without regret, leading to salvation; but the sorrow of the world produces death" (II Corinthians 7:10).

Laughter is good for the soul. There are times when it is the manifestation of direct blessing received from the Lord. (Cf. Psalms 126:2) However, it is used here in contrast to sorrow with the latter being more profitable because it leads to repentance while joy is the result.

The term "sorrow" is also rendered "anger, indignation, shagrin," and suggests a more severe attitude one should express toward his own iniquity. (Cf. Psalms 6:8) Sorrow is probably the better word as the visitor is in the house of mourning and this causes him to reflect on his part in the light of the deep emotion of the moment.

FACT QUESTIONS 7:3

323. Identify the principle taught in this verse.

324. Why is it evident that repentance is understood to have taken place?
325. Why is sorrow more profitable than laughter?
326. Why is sorrow more appropriate than anger in this context?

d. Wisdom is better than folly. 7:4

TEXT 7:4

4 The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning, while the mind of the fool is in the house of pleasure.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:4

180. What decision does the wise man make?
181. List the reasons from the first three verses as to why attendance in the house of mourning is a wiser choice than participating in the house of pleasure.

PARAPHRASE 7:4

So the mind of the wise man dwells in the house of mourning while the house of mirth naturally attracts the heart of fools.

COMMENT 7:4

The thesis of this section which reads, "It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting," has been thoroughly explained and defended. In this summary verse, a final argument is stated. It is noted that the "wise" man is the one who dwells upon the meaning of life as he faces the reality of death. If one fails to give death its rightful place

in the forming of life's decisions, and only pursues the activities of mirth and folly, he is considered a fool.

Death is never far removed from the mind of a Christian. There is an element of wisdom which is characteristic of the followers of Christ that is indeed foolishness to the world. (Cf. I Corinthians 1:18-23) We rejoice in the death of Christ for us and also our own death to sin which leads us to daily repentance. (Cf. Romans 6:1-7; Matthew 16:24-25) As one contemplates the cross and the death event of Jesus, the face is sorrowful but the heart is made to rejoice.

FACT QUESTIONS 7:4

327. What is the final argument as stated in this verse?
328. When is a man considered a fool?
329. What two death events should the Christian keep in mind?

e. A rebuke from the wise is better than the song of fools.

7:5-7

TEXT 7:5-7

- 5 It is better to listen to the rebuke of a wise man than for one to listen to the song of fools.
- 6 For as the crackling of thorn bushes under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool, and this too is futility.
- 7 For oppression makes a wise man mad, and a bribe corrupts the heart.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:5-7

182. What is of greater profit than listening to the singing of fools?
183. Discuss the lesson taught by the analogy of the "crackling of thorn bushes," and the "laughter of fools."

184. State the two reasons given in verse seven for listening to a wise man.

PARAPHRASE 7:5-7

Grave admonitions which are directed toward us from a wise man are better than listening to the singing of fools. The laughter of fools accomplishes about as much as burning nettles under a kettle—it is but a meaningless illusion. For oppression will make a wise man foolish and a bribe will destroy his understanding.

COMMENT 7:5-7

Solomon is still contending that one should maintain a good name and protect it. His argument has been that if we give sober consideration to the lessons gained from reflecting on death, rather than pursuing foolish pleasures, we will discover those truths which will enable us to protect our reputation. He continues to argue for the same cause. However, he now suggests that our attention should be directed toward the rebuke from wise men. If we listen and accept the admonition, this will cause us to develop into wise men, too.

v. 5 It is not encouragement that comes from the lips of the wise man, but stern rebuke. The idea is one of offering grave admonition that heals and strengthens while it wounds. Much of life is this way. Physical muscles must be broken down through hard work or exercise before they can be rebuilt with firmness and strength. Sometimes suffering is the direct result of sin. In such instances the sinner has found a friend when he discovers one who will rebuke him with the truth mingled with love and long-suffering. The rebuke of the wise is a blessing in disguise. Rebuke, with a view to repentance and renewal of spirit, has always been characteristic of God's prophetic word. Prophets, apostles and gospel preachers have

all lived under the same mandate to "speak, exhort and reprove" (Titus 2:15).

The listening to the singing of fools is the equivalent of luxurating with the world in pleasure and mirth. In such circumstances one is seldom confronted with a rebuke which leads to godly sorrow and healing of the soul. The reason is simple: *wise men* are not found singing songs that fools sing or frequenting places where fools seek pleasure and mirth.

v. 6 The lesson taught in the former verse is now illustrated by a simple but vivid analogy. The laughter of fools is short-lived, meaningless, loud, and without lasting value. In like manner, quick-burning, dried thorn bushes will crack and pop while appearing to give lasting heat beneath the kettle. However, their contribution to the cooking process is meaningless. In the original Hebrew, there appears to be a play on words which may be translated in our language as "nettles under the kettle." The point of the lesson is that the laughter of fools is a temporary contribution without redeeming value.

The oft-defined "vanity" is once more employed to underscore the uselessness of mirth and pleasure. That which once gave occasion for joy and laughter now lies in ashes. James summarized the lesson in the following words, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom" (James 4:8-9).

v. 7 One needs to safeguard his good name and maintain personal integrity. Especially is vigilance required when oppression is rampant and the universal practice of bribe-taking is corrupting the hearts of influential leaders. Rulers, who are tempted (Cf. Proverbs 16:8), need the rebuke of wise men just as those who are poor and suffer under oppression. The Jewish tradition surrounding Proverbs 31:1-9 is that in this section Solomon's mother is reprimanding him because he failed to act wisely. Her words conclude, "Open your mouth, judge righteously, and defend the rights of the afflicted and needy." When one is given to strong drink he cannot judge

wisely. In like manner, when one is influenced by a bribe he renders distorted judgments.

A corresponding observation concerning the destructive nature of taking a bribe is found in Proverbs 15:27. The heart is corrupted to the point where a man will abandon wisdom and sound judgment. The bribe-taker has fallen prey to compromise. He is now vulnerable to numerous areas of corruption. A reflection of verse five enables the reader to weigh the warning in the light of a positive declaration.

Numerous writers have expressed attitudes that verse seven is misplaced and unrelated to the preceding materials. However, the theme of this section, the protection of a good name through wise behavior, is threatened by oppression and bribe taking. The idea is that a wise man will safeguard himself against both hazards.

FACT QUESTIONS 7:5-7

330. Identify the objective that is still being sought by Solomon.
331. Define the term "rebuke" as it is used in verse five.
332. Explain what is meant by the "singing of fools."
333. What similarities exist between the singing of fools and the crackling of thorn bushes?
334. In what sense is such singing vanity?
335. Name the two dangers facing a wise man which are found in verse seven.
336. Which of these two dangers would one consider the greater threat to a ruler?
337. Explain why verse seven is not out of place in this section.

f. Patience is better than anxiety. 7:8-9

TEXT 7:8-9

8 The end of a matter is better than its beginning; patience

of spirit is better than haughtiness of spirit.

9 Do not be eager in your heart to be angry, for anger resides in the bosom of fools.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:8-9

185. To what previous statement in this chapter could the first part of verse eight have reference?
186. What one word is synonymous with "haughtiness of spirit"?
187. Explain what you think is meant by "*eager . . . to be angry.*"
188. One who harbors anger in his heart is considered to be what?

PARAPHRASE 7:8-9

Better is the end of something than its beginning, and better is a patient spirit than a proud spirit. Do not become impatient and angered in spirit for he who allows anger to reside in his heart is a fool.

COMMENT 7:8-9

Why is the end of a thing better than its beginning? There are numerous answers which could be given as many experiences of life underscore the truth that "hind sight is better than foresight." One who enters rashly into a business deal or enterprise, bragging concerning his personal ambitions and goals, may discover that the wiser action would be to wait and see how events finally materialize. Jesus said concerning the individual who boasted of his intention to build, only to discover that he ran out of funds, that "all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying 'This man began to build and was not

able to finish' ” (Luke 14:29-30). A similar statement comes to us from the Old Testament in the classic statement of Ahab: “Let not him who girds on his armor boast like him who takes it off” (I Kings 20:11). Thus, the wise man knows that it is better to resign all of one’s future plans into the providential control of the Creator. This does not relieve one of the responsibility of planning for tomorrow, but it does safeguard against the proud spirit.

The purpose of a thing is best understood by looking back upon it. Wisdom is gained by patiently waiting even when one is tempted to press and force the situation to fit desired or predicted ends.

A quick temper in company with frustration is the earmark of a fool. Another mark of the fool is to welcome, harbor and entertain anger. The wise man will be careful not to become easily agitated or react physically without just provocation. Such irresponsible behavior will not produce a “good name.”

FACT QUESTIONS 7:8-9

338. Simple observations of life lead to what conclusion?
 339. If one wishes to be thought of as a wise man, what is a better course of action than proud bragging over proposed projects?
 340. Give two earmarks of a fool.

g. The now is better than the former days. 7:10

TEXT 7:10

- 10 Do not say, “Why is it that the former days are better than these?” For it is not from wisdom that you ask about this.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:10

189. What would be considered the "former days"?

190. Why is it unwise for us to long for "the good old days"?

PARAPHRASE 7:10

If you wish to be wise, do not be longing for the past and say, "The good old days were much better than these days!"

COMMENT 7:10

There is undoubtedly more implied in this verse than merely a rebuke of being dissatisfied with the present and the fruitless longing for days gone by. If the conditions of the present time which produce suffering are a result of disobedience and sin, then the present is a time of just retribution. In such a case, it is not wise to question the circumstances of the present or long for the past. There is evidence that Solomon detected three signs of lack of wisdom: impatience, willingness to harbor anger, and a failure to inquire wisely concerning the circumstances of the present.

It is easy to imagine that former days were better than the present time regardless of the age in which one lives. With the passing of time there is the tendency to forget the evil experience of the day-to-day living that constitutes life in every age. Thus, the present *appears* to be more difficult than what one overhears concerning the joy of past experiences. However, the wise man interprets the present in the light of wisdom. This will enable him to interpret the past and make necessary adjustments to live wisely in the present.

FACT QUESTIONS 7:10

341. The adverse conditions of the present time may be the result of what?
342. List the three signs of lack of wisdom noted by Solomon.
343. Discuss the attitude a wise man has toward his own present age.

h. Wisdom is better than haughty judgment. 7:11

TEXT 7:11

- 11 Wisdom along with an inheritance is good and an advantage to those who see the sun.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:11

191. Who are the ones meant by "those who see the sun"?
192. Wisdom plus what is an advantage?

PARAPHRASE 7:11

Wisdom like an inheritance is good and is profitable to those who are now living upon the earth.

COMMENT 7:11

There are two ways to view this verse. One suggests that wisdom "plus" an inheritance is good. The other is that wisdom "like" an inheritance is good. The original language will permit either. The English translations are varied.

Wisdom is likened unto an inheritance. This suggests that it is a permanent possession. An inheritance was kept in the

family to be passed on from parents to children. It is wisdom, however, that is under discussion and not an inheritance. Wisdom is good like an inheritance, it is permanent like an inheritance, and it is superior to an inheritance. Other related passages in Ecclesiastes verify these conclusions. It is also true that wisdom enhances the value of an inheritance. However, when one is reduced to wisdom alone, he still has the greater treasure. Note Proverbs 3:13-14: "How blessed is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding. For its profit is better than the profit of silver and its gain than fine gold."

There is also a reciprocal nature that exists between wisdom and money: Wisdom lends value to wealth and wealth lends prestige to wisdom.

Wisdom is an advantage to those who see the sun. This conveys the idea that one can make more of life upon this earth than normally thought. The word "advantage" probably does not mean financial increase but rather that wisdom will add more to the enjoyment and purpose of living than would an inheritance. This conclusion is also supported by verse twelve.

FACT QUESTIONS 7:11

344. Give the two ways the first part of this verse can be interpreted.
345. Why doesn't the original language settle the issue?
346. Give reasons why wisdom is superior to an inheritance.
347. Discuss what is meant by wisdom being an advantage to those who possess it.

i. Wisdom is better than money. 7:12

TEXT 7:12

12 For wisdom is protection just as money is protection. But

the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the lives of its possessors.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:12

193. What advantage does wisdom have over money?

194. Wisdom leads us to whom? (Cf. Proverbs 8:35)

PARAPHRASE 7:12

To live beneath the shadow or shelter of wisdom is like living beneath the shadow or shelter of wealth, but there is the added blessing with wisdom and that is the blessing of knowing that wisdom gives life to its possessors.

COMMENT 7:12

This verse adds another comparison to the growing list that exists between wisdom and other possessions which are discovered upon the earth. It is intended to help the reader understand that a wise man will value knowledge, which is synonymous with wisdom in this instance, above other things. To maintain a good name, one must place wisdom at the top of his priorities.

The additional comparison here is to illustrate the protective nature of wisdom. Yet, wisdom has greater value than offering protection to the one who possesses it. Solomon states that wisdom also preserves or keeps the one who possesses it. The analogy of the "shadow" is appropriate in that the heat of adversity ("oppression" v. 7) is evidently threatening. The shadow offers a shelter of protection from such heat. One can escape from certain threats in life by employing wisdom just as he can escape certain threats through the use of money. (Cf. v. 11) Examples of how both wisdom and money serve in

this capacity are found in Ecclesiastes 9:15 and Proverbs 13:8.

Some translations suggest more the idea that wisdom *gives* life rather than *preserves* life. The idea of giving life is consonant with other passages in the Bible which speak to the subject. One example is found in I Samuel 2:6, 8: "The Lord kills and makes alive; He brings down to Sheol and raises up. . . He raises the poor from the dust, He lifts the needy from the ash heap." It is also true that wisdom preserves life. (Cf. Proverbs 3:18) Either way, wisdom is the prize possession.

FACT QUESTIONS 7:12

348. Is knowledge synonymous with wisdom as it is used in this verse?
349. Name the distinctive advantage that wisdom now offers.
350. Why is the analogy of the shadow appropriate?
351. What variations of translations appear in the last half of this verse? Discuss.

j. Trusting God for tomorrow is better than knowing about tomorrow. 7:13-14

TEXT 7:13-14

- 13 Consider the work of God, for who is able to straighten what He has bent?
- 14 In the day of prosperity be happy, but in the day of adversity consider—God has made the one as well as the other so that man may not discover anything that will be after him.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:13-14

195. Note the similarities between 7:13 and 8:17. List them.
196. Can man discover the work of God? (Cf. 3:11)

197. What reason is offered that man should accept both the good days and the bad?
198. Give evidence from this passage that man cannot predict the future events as God works them out.

PARAPHRASE 7:13-14

Look into and thoughtfully weigh the things which God has done, and yet you will never be able to straighten out what he has bent—that which has grown crooked because of sin. Rejoice when days are good and life goes well, but watch for the bad days for they will come too—God has made them both, placed them side by side so man will never know what lies ahead of him.

COMMENT 7:13-14

v. 13 A wise man will consider the work of God. There are unlimited advantages in searching out God's involvement in His world. Some of these advantages have been clearly stated in the previous verses. Now others are called to the reader's attention. Certain traits of a fool, such as a haughty impatient spirit, can be averted if one seriously fixes his mind on God and his works.

The inability to alter the plans of God and the awareness that He is in complete control of His world results in humility on the part of men who consider this. Such action also causes one to discover serenity and calmness as anxieties are eliminated and trust is exercised. These are positive benefits from acknowledging that man cannot straighten what God has bent. The declaration here is positive confirmation that God has ultimate control of every-day events which are often so besetting to men. Man is not capable of arranging the events and circumstances of life in such a way as to satisfy his own ends. Otherwise, he would not remain under the burden of oppression.

A wise man will, therefore, acknowledge that what he cannot change or control he will accept. It is comparable to the declaration of Paul who wrote, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). Additional evidence of Paul's wisdom is found in Philippians 4:11-12 when he writes, "Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need."

How can God make anything crooked? The term "crooked" is used in reference to the wicked, as it is stated that God ". . . makes crooked the way of the wicked" (Psalms 146:9). Study once again the COMMENTS on 1:15. It is said that God makes things crooked only because His righteous judgments demand penalties be attached to the violations of His commands.

v. 14 "In the day of prosperity be happy." This is in harmony with the wise man's conclusions (Cf. 2:24, 3:12 and 3:22). Both the good days and evil days will serve the higher purposes of God. Therefore, one should learn to cope with the troublesome days as well as enjoy the good ones. He should realize that God remains the same regardless of the emotional "ups" and "downs" experienced by men. One indication of a person being mature is that he is not unduly influenced by his environment. Such a person maintains a spiritual constancy under all circumstances. Inner peace is a mark of wisdom. Discontent, longing for the former days, and giving anger a place in the heart are the marks of a fool. God does not allow us to see the future. Withholding such information from men should cause him to learn to look to God. Peter suggested that we cast our all upon Him and trust Him. (Cf. I Peter 5:7)

The remaining part of this verse corresponds with the former verse. There is the additional thought, however, that man cannot know if tomorrow will be a good day or an evil one. The conclusion is that man should learn to rejoice in the day

of prosperity and thoughtfully consider the true nature of God when evil days are experienced. No man can know what will be after him. "After him" does not refer to eternity; neither does it refer to some period of time upon the earth after one dies. The context demands the interpretation we have given: No man knows what *tomorrow* will hold for *him*.

FACT QUESTIONS 7:13-14

352. Read the COMMENTS on these two verses and then write your own summary as to what you think Solomon is saying.
353. After reading the COMMENTS on 1:15, explain what is meant by the statement that God makes things crooked.
354. What will be the end result in one's life when he finally acknowledges that God has ultimate control of all things?
355. What should one do in the days of prosperity?
356. What should one do in the days of adversity?
357. Identify one indicator that a person is mature.
358. What is meant by "after him" in the last part of verse 14?

2. This lesson is taught even when the opposite appears to be true. 7:15-18

- a. The wicked are rewarded and the righteous suffer. 7:15

TEXT 7:15

15 I have seen everything during my lifetime of futility; there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his wickedness.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:15

198. What two "crooked" ways are apparent?
199. What word qualifies "lifetime"?

PARAPHRASE 7:15

I have seen everything during my short stay on this earth! I have seen death come swiftly to cut off the righteous man in the midst of his righteous activities. I have seen the wicked man live for a long time in spite of his wickedness.

COMMENT 7:15

Can a man interpret the riddle of life which states that the innocent perish while the wicked prosper? He can if he is a wise man. Wisdom offers the advantage of looking beyond the apparent anomalies to the higher purposes of God.

Not only is life transitory and unfulfilling, it is also inconsistent. A wise man will acknowledge the inequities but he will not despair. He will remember that God controls the ultimate outcome.

There is a sense in which man receives an equitable return for his investment in life whether that investment is made in righteousness or in wickedness. (Cf. Proverbs 10:28, 11:21) However, there are exceptions to the rule that "Whatever a man sows he shall also reap." At the same time, the exceptions are but temporary—that is it only appears for a short time that the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper (Cf. 8:12-13). Solomon does not propose to his readers that they pursue wickedness because it pays or shun righteousness because suffering is often associated with it. He is still speaking to the theme of a good name. He points to the apparent reversal of the rules because this is a facet of life that wise men will eventually face. The next two verses in this chapter amplify his contention.

FACT QUESTIONS 7:15

359. What riddle of life is stated?

360. Why will a wise man not despair over the success of the

wicked?

361. Is Solomon suggesting that one pursue wickedness because it pays? Explain.
362. What goal is Solomon still trying to achieve?

b. Warnings against the wrong interpretations of life 7:16-17

TEXT 7:16-17

- 16 Do not be excessively righteous, and do not be overly wise. Why should you ruin yourself?
- 17 Do not be excessively wicked, and do not be a fool. Why should you die before your time?

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:16-17

200. What kind of righteousness is undesirable? (Cf. Matthew 5:20; Philippians 3:9; Luke 18:10-14)
201. What kind of wisdom is undesirable? (Cf. I Corinthians 3:19)
202. What will cause one to die before his time?

PARAPHRASE 7:16-17

Avoid self-righteousness and putting your trust in a false wisdom which is of this world. Both of these things will ruin you; so why destroy yourself? Why play the role of a fool through excessive wickedness? Such behavior will lead you to an early grave!

COMMENT 7:16-17

v. 16 There is a righteousness that is unhealthy and a wisdom which should be avoided. One would normally pursue both.

However, upon closer study of the Word of God, it is apparent that there is a kind of righteousness that causes spiritual and mental harm. There is also a wisdom which fosters pride and produces a false foundation upon which to build a life.

We call this kind of righteousness "self-righteousness." It questions God's dealings and judgments. (Cf. Romans 9:19ff.) It elevates man and leads him into arrogance. It is this strained, dangerous righteousness that Jesus publicly derided and condemned. (Cf. Matthew 23; Luke 18:10-14) Solomon is warning his readers against such temptations as this will lead them to grow bitter and resentful. Especially would this be a threat when the truly righteous person is persecuted and suffers while the wicked person prospers. Losing sight of God's higher purposes in history will lead to a crooked or perverted sense of ethical behavior. This is vividly illustrated in the words of Malachi 3:13-15: " 'Your words have been arrogant against Me,' says the Lord. 'Yet you say, "What have we spoken against Thee?" 'You have said, "It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His charge, and that we have walked in the mourning before the Lord of hosts? So now we call the arrogant blessed; not only are the doers of wickedness built up, but they also test God and escape." ' ' ' Such attitudes and behavior are indeed dangerous. If you persist in this direction, Solomon states, you will "ruin yourself."

He also warns against false wisdom. Here again the Bible is clear concerning the type of wisdom which destroys. This wisdom grows out of self-righteousness. Paul wrote concerning it: "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, 'he is the One who catches the wise in their craftiness'; and again, 'The Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, that they are useless ' ' " (I Corinthians 3:19-20). The wise man will not ruin himself. He will cope with the pressures of the day as he properly interprets the events of life in the light of God's overall purpose. Once again, Paul summarized the proper attitude one should have when he said, "For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to

think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith" (Romans 12:3).

v. 17 God can neither condone nor encourage the slightest degree of wickedness. This statement in verse 17, like the preceding ones, must be explained in the context of the passage. Solomon is pointing out that righteousness is not immediately rewarded. Neither does God's judgment fall suddenly upon all who engage in wickedness. However, this does not give one God's approval to sin. Neither does the wise man interpret it as discouraging righteousness. One is indeed a fool if he thinks that he can entangle himself in sin and not pay the penalty for such involvement. As it is written, "The fear of the Lord prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be shortened" (Proverbs 10:27). Exceptions to this rule are just that—exceptions! No sin will go unpunished forever. This principle is foundational and is expressed throughout the Bible.

There can be no such thing as excessiveness in *true* righteousness. There are no limitations which God places upon us in respect to *true* wisdom. On the other hand, God cannot approve of any sin, nor does He want man to play the part of a fool. The explanation given here to the problems of these two verses is in harmony with the general purposes of Scripture. Furthermore, it fits the immediate context of this chapter. Solomon's contention is to find a wise man. He will be a man who protects himself from the deceitfulness of self-righteousness, the power of self-indulgence, the destruction of self-esteem and the pitfalls of foolishness. He will not knowingly ruin himself or die before his time.

FACT QUESTIONS 7:16-17

363. What kind of righteousness should be avoided?
364. Why would one be tempted to grow bitter and resentful?
365. What will happen to a person who persists in the wrong kind of righteousness?

366. False wisdom grows out of what?
367. Should long life for the wicked and short life for the righteous be considered exceptions to the general rules of life? Explain.
368. A wise man will protect himself from what four general areas which, if pursued, could kill him before his time?

c. Choose the best in life. 7:18

TEXT 7:18

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

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:18

203. Identify the two things one should hold on to. (vs. 16, 17)
204. What condition must one meet in order to come forth with both of them?

PARAPHRASE 7:18

It is good that you take hold of the true righteousness, and also that you grasp the idea that you should not lead a life of sin. Hold on to both of these for the one who departs from evil and seeks the good will escape the power of wickedness.

COMMENT 7:18

Solomon is now *admonishing* his readers to follow the wisdom of acting upon the previously stated observations. He adds the incentive that if they will do this, they will always

be free from the evils which destroy us and kill us before our time. The condition that must be met which enables one to maintain his good name and attain unto wisdom is to practice the fear of God. This fear is a healthy reverence for God which results in departing from evil and following that which is good. Such pious activity will safeguard one against the dangers delineated in the two preceding verses.

The latter part of this verse presents a problem in translation and subsequently in interpretation. *The Anchor Bible* reads: "He who fears God will consider both sides." In a footnote on this verse, the translators openly state that it does not refer to "wisdom" and "folly" but to both sides of a question. However, there is more involved here than just the investigation of both sides of a question. Solomon is specific in pointing to the evils of self-righteousness, false wisdom, indulging in wickedness, and acting foolishly. The pursuit of any of these evils would destroy one's good name. The high good of attaining unto wisdom would thus be missed.

The *New American Standard Version* states that the wise man will "come forth with both of them." In this case the *them* would refer to purity of life and wisdom. The preposition "with" suggests that he desires to have them and figuratively holds them in his hands.

An opposite view is that the *them* refers to self-righteousness and folly, and that the wise man will escape from them. The following translations are based on this interpretation: "For he who fears God will come forth from every case" (Leupold); ". . . he that feareth God shall escape from all" (Hengstenberg).

Although the difficulty in translation exists, the main message is not diminished. Solomon is teaching that the wise man, who labors to maintain his good name, will do all within his power to "turn away from evil and do good" (I Peter 3:10). In his honest pursuit he will be delivered from the snare of the Devil and he will come forth with righteousness and wisdom in his hand.

FACT QUESTIONS 7:18

369. What incentive to do good does Solomon now suggest?
370. Define "fear" as it is used in this verse.
371. Identify and explain the two main interpretations of the latter part of the verse.
372. Explain what the main message of the verse is, and why neither interpretation violates the primary lesson of this section.
3. Wisdom leads to proper attitudes and conduct. 7:19-22

- a. Wisdom strengthens the wise. 7:19

TEXT 7:19

19 Wisdom strengthens a wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:19

205. What theme is still under discussion?
206. What is of greater value than ten rulers who rule a city?

PARAPHRASE 7:19

Wisdom is strength to a wise man; more strength than ten rulers, although they are surrounded by their advisors, masters in their own right, and dwelling in a city.

COMMENT 7:19

Wisdom gives strength. This is the first observation in a list that runs through verse twenty-two. When wisdom is accepted

as a companion, strength of such proportion is added to one that ten competent leaders cannot equal. Some argue that the verb will not allow "strengthen" but rather conveys the idea of a separate entity that can be called upon to fight for and defend the one who calls for such assistance. It has previously been noted that wisdom is better than money (v. 12), and here it is declared to be better than the accumulative power of ten rulers in a city. They may be wise in the ways of the world, but if they do not "fear" the Lord, they do not possess the true strength. As Psalms 127:1-2 states: "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who built it; unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman keeps awake in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to retire late, to eat the bread of painful labors; for He gives to His beloved even in his sleep."

The fact that "ten" rulers are mentioned is used by some to argue for a late date for the writing of Ecclesiastes on the basis that ten rulers often ruled Hellenistic towns and this is a reference to such instances. However, ten has a significant meaning in all Biblical periods. It represents completeness and may be suggesting nothing more than the fact that true wisdom is better than the accumulated wisdom of ten men which suggests in this context the complete, united effort of the strength of all non-wisdom sources. For the use of the number ten in Bible times, study the following:

- (1) The ten antediluvian patriarchs: Adam, Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech and Noah (Genesis 5);
- (2) The ten righteous men who would have saved Sodom (Genesis 18);
- (3) The ten plagues of Egypt (Exodus 8-12);
- (4) The ten commandments (Exodus 20);
- (5) The ten servants of Gideon (Judges 6);
- (6) The ten elders who accompanied Boaz (Ruth 4);
- (7) The ten virgins of the parable (Matthew 25);
- (8) The ten pieces of silver (Luke 15);
- (9) The ten servants entrusted with ten pounds (Luke 19);

- (10) The ten days tribulation predicted for the church of Smyrna (Revelation 2)¹

The recognition that the ten rulers are *in a city* is also significant. Power, resources and authority would be assets of a city. In addition, there would be many from whom the rulers would be selected which suggests the choice of talented and competent men. The import is that of a superlative: *Wisdom* is a better companion and offers greater benefits than ten of the finest rulers chosen from the major population centers of the land. In light of the various ways the number ten is employed in the Bible, it would be a mistake to attribute significance to it beyond that which has been discussed here.

FACT QUESTIONS 7:19

373. What is the first benefit of wisdom as noted here?
374. Why is the number ten used in this verse?
375. What is meant by the term *superlative*?
376. Why say the ten rulers are in a city?

b. Wisdom leads one to see his own sin. 7:20

TEXT 7:20

20 Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins.

¹ William Taylor Smith, "Significant Numbers," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1947), IV, p. 2162. This summary is taken in part from the article "The Number Ten."

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:20

207. What truth is stated here that is also taught in Romans 3:10?
208. In the light of this verse, why does man need wisdom as a corrective?
209. Write a definition of *righteous*.

PARAPHRASE 7:20

There isn't a man on earth who doesn't need wisdom. Where is the righteous man who always does good and never sins? He cannot be found!

COMMENT 7:20

This second benefit of wisdom—to teach us to be humble and to depend upon strength gained apart from human resources—is based on the conclusion of the former verse. Israel had the treasure of revelation and this alone should have kept her free from the wickedness which typified the heathen communities around her. Such wisdom should also eliminate the evils of self-righteousness which would be the major temptation of those who possessed the true revelation.

Since there is no man so righteous that he always does what is best, it logically follows that he needs all the assistance he can get. Wisdom is the very best source of such assistance.

Solomon had previously asked, "Who can say, 'I have cleansed my heart, I am pure from my sin' " (Proverbs 20:9)? A section of Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple spoke to this point when he said, "When they sin against Thee (for there is no man who does not sin) and Thou art angry with them and dost deliver them to an enemy, so that they take them away captive to the land of the enemy, far off or near, if they take thought in the land where they have been

taken captive, and repent and make supplication to Thee in the land of those who have taken them captive, saying, 'We have sinned and have committed iniquity, we have acted wickedly' " (I Kings 8:46-47). Repentance and confession are fruit of wisdom. In Solomon's prayer he foresees the people of God following this path of healing back to God. It is a wise man who recognizes that he has need of strength to withstand temptation, and also see the pathways to repentance, supplication, and forgiveness should his own strength fail him. No man, on his own, is able to hold on to the best pathways of life. He needs the strength which wisdom affords.

FACT QUESTIONS 7:20

377. What is the second benefit of wisdom?
378. What characteristic identified those of the heathen community?
379. What special temptation is presented to those who have revelation from God?
380. What fruit of wisdom did Solomon speak of in his dedicatory prayer at the Temple?

c. Wisdom protects against false accusations and self-righteousness. 7:21-22

TEXT 7:21-22

- 21 Also, do not take seriously all words which are spoken, lest you hear your servant cursing you.
- 22 For you also have realized that you likewise have many times cursed others.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:21-22

210. Wisdom will keep one from falling into what danger?
211. Identify the reason given why one should not busy himself with taking seriously all that he hears.
212. Why would a servant know about his master's faults and deficiencies?

PARAPHRASE 7:21-22

Do not give your heart to ascribe too much value to what men say concerning you. If you do, you will soon hear your own servant cursing you. If you stop and consider your own past behavior, you will have to admit that you have many times reviled others.

COMMENT 7:21-22

There is yet another benefit wisdom will bring to the one who turns to it for strength. In this instance, it is a two-fold blessing. First of all, it will keep one from prying into every bit of gossip or information circulating in the area; secondly, it will safeguard against a self-righteous attitude.

It is indeed the mark of a foolish man to pursue every tidbit of information that may be spoken concerning himself or others. So much of what is said is best unheard, and if heard soon forgotten. Wisdom will lead one to correct behavior and thus eliminate many sorrowful experiences because information gained was weighed and dismissed on the basis of lack of merit. How many heartaches in life would have been avoided if the whole matter would simply have been dropped. Solomon does not have reference here to information which will benefit the hearer. If in the sharing of truth, there will be benefit, then the one who possesses such knowledge has a moral obligation to speak. However, the idea here is that it is gossip or unprotected

words which wend their way into the communicative fabric of every culture and society.

The servant is mentioned for two reasons. Since he is a servant, he will most likely know the weaknesses of his master, or at least be near when his master loses control of his tongue. On the other hand, the master would be nearby and would overhear the conversation of the servant.

The idea of "cursing" in this context suggests more of a reviling than what one normally considers either "to curse" or "to swear." *Base* men curse and swear, but *all* men, whether of high or low estate, have difficulty controlling their tongues. The master is reminded that he has *often* "reviled others." He must admit that he, too, has spoken words in a moment of weakness or heated discussion which he would like to recall. He confesses that he would like such words to be forgotten.

FACT QUESTIONS 7:21-22

381. What two-fold blessing does wisdom offer?
382. When should information be withheld?
383. When is one obligated to share information?
384. Give two reasons why the *servant* is mentioned here.
385. What prompts the "cursing" (reviling) which comes forth from the master of the house?

B. IMPORTANT LESSONS DRAWN FROM THESE OBSERVATIONS 7:23-29

1. Practical lessons can be learned but the deeper things are unattainable. 7:23-24

TEXT 7:23-24

23 I tested all this with wisdom, and I said, "I will be wise," but it was far from me.

24 What has been is remote and exceedingly mysterious. Who can discover it?

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:23-24

213. List the things that "all this" refers to if it has reference to the teaching found in verses 1-22.
214. Make a list of the things "all this" refers to if it has reference to the teaching found in verses 25-29.
215. What was the means by which Solomon tested everything?
216. Identify the conclusion at which Solomon now arrives.

PARAPHRASE 7:23-24

I have proved many things, and in each case I proved it by wisdom. However, I have not discovered all there is to know about anything. I became wise, but complete wisdom was far from me. What I have failed to discover is still remote and exceedingly deep. Is there anyone who can find it?

COMMENT 7:23-24

v. 23 What is the "all this" to which Solomon here refers? Whatever it is, he declares that he *tested* it with *wisdom*. One idea is that "all this" refers to everything written thus far in Ecclesiastes. This suggests that all of his previous experiments, observations and conclusions have been tested with wisdom. Others argue that "all this" is limited to the observations which pertain to a *good name*, and speak only to the material in the first twenty-two verses in chapter seven. On the other hand, there are those who believe that "all this" refers only to the final five verses of chapter seven, and not to any of the previous material. There is little doubt that Solomon claims that *all* of his activities were guided by wisdom. Examine the

following random expressions: "explore by wisdom" (1:13) "I set my mind to know wisdom" (1:17); "my mind was guiding me wisely" (2:3); "My wisdom also stood by me" (2:9); "I turned to consider wisdom" (2:12); "Wisdom is protection . . . wisdom preserves" (7:12); "wisdom strengthens" (7:19). Similar references to the place of wisdom are found in eleven direct instances in chapters eight through twelve. Note: 8:1, 16; 9:10, 13, 15, 16, 18; 10:1, 3, 10; 12:11.

What does this prove? First, it proves that one should not make too much of what "all this" refers to since *everything* in the book is tested by wisdom. Secondly, the emphasis is on the fact that *wisdom* is the tool used to test everything. Solomon's stated purpose was to possess wisdom fully. He wanted to understand all the facets of life—the perplexing contradictions as well as the transparent joyous experiences, the deep riddles along with the self-evident truths. There is now the obvious desire to probe deeper into the hitherto unexplored areas of life. His desire to know more concerning the deeper things of life is openly stated. He wishes to explore each nuance of every side of life, and yet his conclusion is almost a declaration of frustration: " 'I will be wise,' but it was far from me." The secret things of God are *always* a little distance from man's reach; at least until that time when God chooses to disclose the deep, deep mysteries. (Cf. Deuteronomy 29:29; Colossians 1:26-27). A parallel thought is found in Solomon's own words: "Man cannot find out the work that God does" (3:11). The Bible receives a new dimension of appreciation from such a *searcher* for it holds numerous answers to what would otherwise be perplexing riddles of life. More than that, the Bible gives us the most important answer to the most important question of life: "What will God do with my sins?" What "the Preacher" of Ecclesiastes searched diligently to discover, the Christian knows about and gives thanks, for God teaches us that ". . . the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin" (I John 1:7).

A beautiful parallel passage to the two verses under discussion here is found in Job 28:12-28. The reader would do

well to look it up and read through it thoughtfully. One is immediately impressed with three conclusions: (1) Man is limited in his knowledge and understanding; (2) Wisdom is of the greatest premium; and (3) God is the only source of true wisdom and man must turn to Him for understanding.

v. 24 Solomon set out to write about wisdom and in the midst of his adventure, he confesses his lack of it. He is wise but not fully wise. He can see the value of wisdom and extols it honestly and sincerely while at the same time humbly confessing that he is helpless before the infinite wisdom of God. He wants to know what is the actual *essence* of all things. Yet, he cannot discover it. He turns to a superlative which is variously translated but the impact is still felt. He states that it is "remote and exceedingly mysterious"; or that it is "far from me and deep, deep." He wishes to impress upon the reader that such knowledge as he is seeking is beyond the grasp or understanding of man. He cannot discover it!

There is a wisdom which is discoverable by man but it lies "under the sun." It is this wisdom that Solomon employs. However, there is a wisdom which God alone possesses and man cannot discover it. It is to Solomon's credit that he perceives his limitations and is wise enough to admit to them.

What is the nature of the information he seeks? From the context, it is obviously the every-day entanglements of life with its recurring inequities which build a web of unexplained riddles to bind and limit the understanding. He is practical rather than philosophical. He wants answers to *why* things happen as they do rather than *how* did they come to be. He knows God is the Creator (Cf. 8:15, 17; 11:5; 12:1, 7). He now wants to know the *why* behind the behavior of men. He is unable to explain it but he does draw a conclusion that temporarily satisfied him. He says, "Behold, I have found only this, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many devices" (7:29). Man's eyes are blinded by sin and the darkness is compounded because he lives in a sinful (dark) environment. Solomon's conclusion is another way of saying that man is

the author of his own blindness, while "God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all" (I John 1:5).

FACT QUESTIONS 7:23-24

386. Identify three sections of Ecclesiastes that the "all this" of verse 23 could possibly refer.
387. Since there are numerous views as to what "all this" refers to, what two lessons should be drawn?
388. Was Solomon determined to be wise? Explain.
389. What kept Solomon from becoming completely wise?
390. Write out the three obvious lessons found in Job 28:12-28 which parallel the Ecclesiastes 7:23-24 passage.
391. What is the nature of the wisdom Solomon seeks? Explain.
392. What is it that blinds the eyes of men and keeps them from seeing clearly?
393. What compounds this darkness.

2. Through intensive study, one comes to see the potential within men and women to do evil. 7:25-28

TEXT 7:25-28

- 25 I directed my mind to know, to investigate, and to seek wisdom and an explanation, and to know the evil of folly and the foolishness of madness.
- 26 And I discovered more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are chains. One who is pleasing to God will escape from her, but the sinner will be captured by her.
- 27 "Behold, I have discovered this," says the Preacher, "adding one thing to another to find an explanation,
- 28 Which I am still seeking but have not found. I have found one man among a thousand, but I have not found a woman among all these.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:25-28

217. Who will escape from the evil woman?
218. Identify the three figurative tools used by the evil woman.
219. Solomon "directed" his mind to "seek" what?
220. How many men out of a thousand did he find that had such wisdom as he desired?
221. How many women did he discover who possessed wisdom to this degree?

PARAPHRASE 7:25-28

I said in my heart that I will seek out two things: on the one hand, I will study, investigate and find an explanation and wisdom; on the other hand, I will come to know and identify wickedness, stupidity, folly and madness. What did I discover? I discovered something more bitter than death itself! I found through my experience with woman that her thoughts are snares and traps, and her hands are chains. One who seeks God and pleases Him may escape her. However, one who is a sinner will be caught in her snares and traps. "Look!" says the Preacher, "This is what I have discovered by adding one thought to another to find an explanation, which still calls forth my soul's energy and asks my strength. Yes, I am still searching but have not found a satisfactory answer. I have found that among a thousand men there is but one who can be numbered among the wise. However, I cannot say the same for women. I have not found one such women among all these."

COMMENT 7:25-28

These verses are among the most difficult verses in Ecclesiastes to interpret. The primary cause of difficulty stems from whether one should exegete the passage literally or figuratively. If the woman is figurative (false wisdom), it is one thing, but

if she is a real woman then a different interpretation must be given. It is true, however, that regardless of the direction one takes, whether literal or figurative, there are similar passages in the Bible to support the principles involved.

An overview of the passage. Solomon is determined to discover wisdom in the fullest sense. This is not a new quest. (Cf. 1:13, 16-17; 7:23-24) However, he admits that he has not found the satisfactory answers. The one thing he has discovered is that not only is complete wisdom illusive, it is equally difficult to discover a wise person. His observation is that only one man in a thousand could be considered wise, but he failed to discover even one woman among this number. He further observes that there are some women who will catch and destroy you if it is in their power to do so. The one who pleases God and receives His favor will escape from the snare of such a woman. However, the one who acts foolishly will be caught by her.

The literal view. Solomon does not categorically label *all* women as evil. He identifies the evil woman as "the woman whose heart is snares and nets." The implication suggests that there are women whose hearts are not snares and nets. It is from the writing of Solomon that we have the beautiful description of the virtuous woman so delineated in terms of praise and honor. (Cf. Proverbs 31:10-31)

There can be little question concerning the power women are capable of exerting over men. In the context of Solomon's discussion, that power is evil. There are numerous non-Biblical proverbs which speak to a consensus on this subject. Some of these are: "It is better to follow a lion than a woman"; "Woe to the age whose leader is a woman"; "Who follows the counsel of his wife arrives at hell"; and "Women are snares of Satan." There is also the warning from Solomon: "Now therefore, my sons, listen to me, and pay attention to the words of my mouth. Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways, do not stray into her paths. For many are the victims she has cast down, and numerous are all her slain. Her house is on the way to Sheol, descending to the chambers of death" (Proverbs 7:24-27).

In Solomon's investigation to discover the "evil of folly" and the "foolishness of madness," he discovered how far both men and women are removed from their original design. There is little comfort for men, and less for women. He was unable to discover the degree of wisdom which he desired, but he discovered all too soon the depths of evil to which both men and women are capable of descending. As a male writer, he naturally turns to his counterpart in crime to impress the minds of his readers with the extent of his discovery of evil. He speaks of inescapable snares, nets and chains. However, he hastens to speak objectively and suggests that although God made men upright, they have bent low in the pursuit of devising new ways of committing sin.

His statement that he was unable to find one wise woman among a thousand should not be looked upon as saying there are no wise women. It is rather a relative comparison with men. He is saying that from his own observations, he has discovered that there are fewer wise women than men.

These verses should not be used to build a case for the superiority of men over women in the possession and use of wisdom. Many commentaries miss the point of Solomon's argument when they draw attention to the fact that only men were employed in writing the Bible, and in holding prominent positions of leadership in both the Jewish economy and the Christian church. The inference is that women were neither wise enough nor suited for such undertakings. It is true that woman was first in the fall (Cf. I Timothy 3:13-14), and that she is to be in subjection (Cf. Ephesians 5:22-24). But neither of these conclusions speak to the point at hand. It is simply that in Solomon's pursuit of wisdom and evil, he discovered *mankind* to be perverse and crooked. His conclusion is: wise, righteous people are scarce!

The literal interpretation of this passage satisfies the hermeneutical demands placed upon it.

The figurative view. The personification of false wisdom as "the woman" establishes a natural correspondence between sound doctrine which is "pleasing to God," and its opposite,

“folly and madness” which trap, ensnare, and destroy the sinner. It could be argued that “the woman” answers to philosophy and vain deceit. (Cf. Colossians 2:8; I Timothy 6:20) While it is true that both Israel and the church are personified as a woman (Cf. Ephesians 5:24-32; Revelation 21:2, 9; 22:17; Judges 8:27), it does not necessarily follow that such figurative language is used here. Solomon’s *literal wives* (300 of them and 700 concubines) were responsible for turning his heart away after other gods. They were real, physical women who ensnared and captured Solomon’s heart. So enslaved was he by their evil powers that he actually accepted the false wisdom of Ashtoreth and Milcom. He was led to false doctrine by his entanglement with real women. It is written of him, “And Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not follow the Lord fully, as David his father had done” (I Kings 11:6). There is little justification in the light of Solomon’s experiences and the context of Ecclesiastes for a figurative interpretation.

Christological thoughts. It is true that men and women are equally wise. It is also true that they are equally sinful. When one realizes that Solomon is marking *all* with the curse of sin and only a few with the blessing of wisdom, he has arrived at the intent of the passage. Some have not shared this interpretation of the passage and since they are reluctant to make a distinction between men and women in the area of wisdom, they ascribe the “one man among a thousand” to Jesus Christ. The *one man* they insist is a reference to Jesus who to Solomon was also the “rose of Sharon, the lily of the valleys” (Song of Songs 2:1). There are a number of arguments that militate against such a conclusion. Jesus does stand in a class by Himself. He *is* wisdom. However, to find one among a thousand implies that he would find another if he continued his search. There is only one Jesus (God). To ascribe this passage to Jesus would be breaking from the “under the sun” context of Solomon’s search. It is better to simply take him at his word: he did find one among a thousand. Finally, the context is not clarified or helped by such an interpretation.

Solomon *is* still reasoning "under the sun." He has clearly expressed his desire to be wise, and he has confessed to his inability to achieve such wisdom. He states his purpose to discover folly and madness and it is in this area that he excels. His final conclusions are consistent with the total context. He says (1) there are few wise people, (2) there are many who are caught in the trap of wickedness, and (3) those who devise new ways of sinning!

FACT QUESTIONS 7:25-28

394. What makes the interpretation of these verses difficult?
395. Identify the two general areas Solomon is attempting to discover?
396. Is Solomon declaring that all women are evil? Discuss.
397. Was Solomon able to discover an "explanation" (vs. 27-28) of the wisdom he sought?
398. What did he find?
399. Explain what Solomon means by his statement: "I have not found a woman among all these."
400. If this passage is interpreted figuratively, the evil woman is a personification of what?
401. Were the women who turned Solomon's heart away from God real or figurative? Give proof of your answer.
402. In what was Solomon entangled when he turned away from God?
403. Give two reasons why a Christological interpretation of this passage is unwarranted.
404. After a careful study of these verses, write your own summary statement of the passage.

3. A final observation: Men seek evil devices. 7:29

TEXT 7:29

29 "Behold, I have found only this, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices."

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:29

222. How many things did Solomon discover?
 223. What do you think is meant by the term upright?
 224. If "many devices" are the occasion for keeping man from being upright, what would be the nature of the "many devices"?

PARAPHRASE 7:29

Be sure to look at this! Only this one thing have I discovered: When God created man, He created him perfect. However, since the creation, man has invented many ways to fall short of what God intended him to be.

COMMENT 7:29

The use of the interjection "behold" suggests that Solomon wants the attention of his readers on this subject. Why is there the gravity at this particular point? Two things become apparent: First, God is not to blame for man's inability to discover wisdom. God made man upright, and in that state man was in a position to know and understand the things which are now hidden from him. Man cannot achieve complete wisdom, but it is his own fault. Second, man busies himself with innovative, vain speculation and self-wise reasonings which compete in his own mind with the true wisdom of God. Solomon is underscoring his previous contention that both men and women are evil.

The "inventions" of this verse are speculations or thoughts which result in a spiritual and sometimes physical stance which is contrary to God's word. The one evil invention that Solomon cites in this entire passage is found in verse twenty-six. Here he speaks of the weakness of his own life. He speaks of the violation of the monogamous marriage situation in his own personal experience. The large number of both wives and concubines which he possessed defies the imagination. However, Solomon implies by the "*many devices*" that there are numerous ways to sin, many of which are unrelated to immoral sexual activity.

Man should both desire and be ready to receive the will of God for his life. He should not invent his own speculative philosophies. God approves of the wise man who allows God to speak to him. The promise has been given: "Behold, I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you" (Proverbs 1:23). The word translated "devices" is used only twice in the Old Testament. The other reference is II Chronicles 26:15 where the devices or "inventions" were "engines of war." These devices were clearly designed to shoot arrows and great stones at the enemy. They were also strategically located on the towers and on the corners to give maximum defense to the city. Such detail and cunning illustrates the ingenuity of the mind of man and demonstrates the variety of his inventiveness. The context under consideration, however, implies evil devices because they are set against the fact that God made man "upright." Man was made to walk with God, but he fell from his high place of honor because of sin. Without grace and truth (John 1:17) man continues to invent pathways of departure from the presence of God.

Solomon's conclusion is the inevitable point to which all thinking men are drawn: all have sinned. The Apostle Paul concurs. He writes, "we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written, there is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God, all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one" (Romans 3:10-12).

FACT QUESTIONS 7:29

405. Give two reasons why Solomon expresses "gravity" at this particular point.
406. What is Solomon "underscoring" in this verse?
407. Explain what is meant by "devices" or "inventions."
408. What *one* invention does Solomon cite?
409. The word translated "device" is used elsewhere only in II Chronicles 26:15. From this passage, what does the use of the word illustrate?
410. State Solomon's conclusion.

C. ADMONITIONS TO USE WISDOM IN THE WORK OF SOLVING THE PROBLEMS OF LIFE 8:1—9:18

1. Work in submission to the king. 8:1-8

TEXT 8:1-8

- 1 Who is like the wise man and who knows the interpretation of a matter? A man's wisdom illumines him and causes his stern face to beam.
- 2 I say, "Keep the command of the king because of the oath before God.
- 3 Do not be in a hurry to leave him. Do not join in an evil matter, for he will do whatever he pleases.
- 4 Since the word of the king is authoritative, who will say to him, "What are you doing?"
- 5 He who keeps a royal command experiences no trouble, for a wise heart knows the proper time and procedure.
- 6 For there is a proper time and procedure for every delight, when a man's trouble is heavy upon him.
- 7 If no one knows what will happen, who can tell him when it will happen?
- 8 No man has the authority to restrain the wind with the wind, or authority over the day of death; and there is no discharge

in the time of war, and evil will not deliver those who practice it.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 8:1-8

225. Who is the man who knows the interpretation of a matter?
226. What two things will wisdom do (verse one)?
227. Are the "king" and "God" to be taken synonymously in verse three?
228. After reading through verse eight, can you find evidence that *requires* that the "king" be interpreted to mean God? Discuss.
229. Does God approve of entering into an agreement with Him through an oath? (Cf. Exodus 22:11; II Samuel 21:7; Ezekiel 17:18)
230. Does the "him" in verse three refer to God or to the king who rules the land? (Cf. 10:4)
231. What word in verse four indicates why the king can do whatever pleases him?
232. What will keep a wise man from getting into trouble with the local authority? (verse five)
233. What principle taught in verse six has previously been detailed in chapter three, verses one and seventeen?
234. According to verse seven, man does not know "what" will happen to him or "when" it will happen. Read 3:22; 6:12; 7:14 and 9:12. In each case, determine if it is the "when" or the "what" that Solomon refers to.
235. Identify the four things in verse eight that man cannot do.

PARAPHRASE 8:1-8

Who can compare with the wise man? Who but a wise man understands what things mean, or knows the interpretation of a matter? It is because of wisdom that a man's face shines like a light, and the hardness of his countenance changes until

his face actually glows. It is wise counsel to keep the king's command. Have you not made an oath before God that you will keep his command? We know the king will do whatever pleases him. Therefore, you will be wise if you do not hurry from his presence simply because you are agitated with his command. Above all, do not stand for an evil cause. It is the king who has the authority in the land and his word is law. None dare say to him, "What are you doing?" A wise man knows when and how to act—he knows the proper time and procedure. He who keeps the law of the king will discover that he is free from every evil thing, and will therefore remain out of trouble. You have already been instructed in the truth that there is a proper time and place for every desire of man—yet, you must be aware of the heavy judgment and chastisement which often presses heavy upon man. A wise man considers all of these things because he does not know what will happen, and there is none to tell him when it will happen. Consider this: no man has the authority to hold back the wind with the wind; no man has the authority to hold back the spirit of man in the time of death; neither can man claim immunity in time of war, nor be discharged from the battle; no man who practices evil or becomes involved in wickedness can expect to be delivered by such evil in his time of distress.

COMMENT 8:1-8

As noted in the outline, there are five distinct divisions in this section which relate to solving some of the problems of life. In each instance, *wisdom* is the guide which leads the reader to the correct solution. The first area of discussion calls attention to the authority in the land, suggesting that submission to the law will result in pleasant relationships between the king and his subjects. The heart of the discussion is summarized in the words, "He who keeps a royal command experiences no trouble."

v. 1 There is no man on earth who can compare with a wise

man. Such a man excels them all. It is evident that Solomon continues to extol wisdom. His emphasis is noted by his declaration that *only* a wise man can explain the difficult, and drive to the very foundation of things. There is more to the wise man's ability than that which equips him to be an interpreter of proverbs or an adequate manipulator of words. He can unfold the mysterious. He has the ability to draw back the veil and present a clear word picture of *why* things are.

This gift of understanding has a direct result on the wise man's heart which manifests itself immediately in his face. His knowledge has brought an inner awareness that he knows and understands both God's word and God's providential activities. His face literally shows it. He has a cheerful soul and his face shines. His face is but a reflection of his heart.

His face was formally "stern." This word is variously translated into "hardness," "harshness," "boldness," and "fierce countenance" (Deuteronomy 28:50). His wisdom transforms his face and causes it to beam. The marginal reading in the NASB reads: "causes his stern face to *change*." Examples of such changes of facial expressions are found in Exodus 34:29-30, Acts 6:15 and 7:14. Knowledge of the true God, and the awareness that one is keeping His commandments, results in both joy and happiness. Solomon's father had expressed it simply: "The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes" (Psalm 19:8). Sin causes the "hardness of face," while righteousness drives out sin and welcomes peace and contentment. Jesus aptly struck at the heart of the matter when He said, "Therefore every one who hears these words of Mine and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man" (Matthew 7:24).

v. 2 Two problems arise from this verse: (1) Who is the king? Is this a reference to God or to an earthly king? (2) What oath was stated before God by the people in Solomon's day? Authorities are divided on the first question but have generally agreed on the second. Let us consider the latter question first.

It is not so important that one determines the exact wording

of the oath as this is not the point of Solomon's argument. The point is that the oath was made "before God," and it stands as a reminder that (1) it was made before the highest authority, and (2) it pertains to submission to the rule of the king. One such oath is recorded in II Kings 11:17 where "Jehoida made a covenant between the Lord and the king and the people, that they should be the Lord's people, also between the king and the people." To be "the Lord's people" is tantamount to the submission to the rule or the authority of the Lord. It is further noted in this illustration that a distinction is made between the *Lord* and the *king*. Israel saw the king as God's representative who was appointed to carry out His will on earth. Thus, the oath was made to the highest authority and also bound the Israelites to the authority of their king. Instructions concerning such oaths are given in Exodus 22:11; I Kings 2:43; II Samuel 21:7 and Ezekiel 17:18.

To whom does the term "king" refer? Many commentaries view the king as God and suggest that the entire context must be interpreted as to our submission to "the heavenly King." However, the II Kings 11:17 passage makes a clear distinction between "the people," the earthly "king," and "the Lord." It appears that such a distinction would also capture the spirit of this passage. Everything spoken of in reference to the king could apply without difficulty to an earthly king. In forcing the meaning of the term king to refer to God, seems to be demanding more than either Solomon or the context intended to convey. New Testament parallels are found in Matthew 12:21; Romans 13:1-7 and I Peter 2:13-17.

v. 3 To break the oath is equal to entering into an association with evil. Therefore, the subjects of the kingdom are admonished not only to keep the command of the king, but to refrain from joining in an evil matter. The "fear of the Lord" has previously been defined (Cf. 5:7, p. 117) as departing from evil and doing that which is good. Solomon isn't introducing new material. He continues to pursue the characteristics of a wise man. In this instance, a wise man is one who recognizes the authority of the king and lives within the

restrictions of the law.

“Do not be in a hurry to leave him.” The king is on the side of right; to depart from him would be to align oneself with evil. Cain is an example of one who because of his evil deed was forced to leave the companionship and security of the side of right. It is written of him, immediately after he had murdered his brother, that “Cain went out from the presence of the Lord” (Genesis 4:16). The relationship the kings of Israel enjoyed with God was unique in history. There was a much closer correlation between their laws and the law of God than has existed in any other period of time. However, the principle that authority is ordained of God is still true. On the whole, the admonition of this verse remains a valid one. Paul wrote: “Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves” (Romans 13:1-2).

“To do whatever he pleases” should be understood to mean that the king will inflict whatever punishment he wishes. It is the evil doer who draws the *wrath* of the king.

v. 4 The authority of the king has been established. On the basis of this conclusion, it must be admitted that none has the right to question the king’s decision or to question the punishment which he places upon the wicked. The verse is not to be taken as blanket approval for *all* the activities of the king. It is to be understood in the light of two things: (1) Disobedient citizens who depart from the presence of the king and stand in an evil matter deserve punishment; (2) the punishment appointed is the prerogative of the king—none has the right to question him on such a matter.

v. 5 For authority to be meaningful, there must be laws and subsequent punishment exacted upon those who break the laws. Who is the wise man? A partial answer is arrived at in this verse. A wise man is one “who keeps a royal command.” It is generally true that obedience to the law results

in peace. This principle is valid whether the law is God's law or man's law.

Another characteristic of the wise man is that he recognizes that judgment and punishment will fall upon those who break the law. He knows there is a "proper time and procedure." He practices patience and thus lives in peace. Sometimes such assurance is the *only* compensation for one who does right. Especially is this true when the authority is on the side of the oppressors (4:1), or when the law-abiding poor have their wages withheld and on occasion are put to death (James 5:4-6). Even in the face of such extreme punishment they are encouraged to retain their wisdom: "you too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand" (James 5:8). The lesson from Ecclesiastes, chapter three, had been that there is a time for everything under the sun. Now the Preacher is underlining his previous contention: "God will judge both the righteous man and the wicked man, for a time for every matter and every deed is there" (3:17). Even God patiently waits until the sin has ripened fully on the vine. Man would like for punishment to fall swiftly as well as justly but life is not always this way. The wise heart recognizes that such judgment will come with certainty and thus tunes all of his thoughts and activities to this channel. It is at the fountain of patience and deep conviction in the justice of God that he drinks.

v. 6 The preposition "for" indicates that this is an extension of the line of reasoning established in verse five. The phrase restates the closing thought of the preceding verse. "A proper time and procedure for every delight" has been sufficiently demonstrated in chapter three. However, the statement, "when a man's trouble is heavy upon him," needs explanation. Who is the man who is under the burden of trouble? Is he the good, wise man or the sinner who has departed from the side of the king? If it is the good man, then evil men have afflicted him and he must learn to patiently wait until the time and seasons of God's providence bring about God's justice. It is considered a *heavy* trouble because he is required to bear it until the

appropriate *time*. On the other hand, if it is indeed the sinner who is under consideration, then the heavy trouble is just and he acquiesces beneath it because he knows it is of his own doing. He knows that the judgment of God will eventually fall upon him. He has broken all the rules and departed from the king's cause; he finds himself standing in an evil matter. Now he must subscribe to punishment decreed by the king. This latter interpretation is most tenable as it fits best into the total context of the passage. Such an argument presses upon the mind of the one who would choose the road of wisdom that there are rewards indeed! Additional proof for this contention is found in the major premise of the passage: "He who keep the royal command experiences no trouble."

v. 7 The evil man's suffering is compounded because he knows neither when he will be punished nor what will be his punishment. He knows only that it is due him and will be forthcoming. Behind the law in the land stands the authority of God. Kings exact God's punishment and are thus a terror to those who do evil. However, kings may be bribed or influenced to compromise or act unjustly. In such instances the justice of God overrides the injustices of men. If not immediately, in due season (Cf. 8:11). This awareness weighs heavily upon the mind of the evil doer. He lives in constant fear as he does not know when or how his punishment will come. Solomon is careful not to insert the conditional "if" in his declaration. He is pressing for the inescapable: judgment *is* coming!

v. 8 The preceding interpretation appears to be logical in view of the closing fourfold argument Solomon now presents. He has contended that a wise man will live in harmony with the law of the land; in doing so he will neither bring the wrath of the king nor the wrath of God upon him. He now offers the closing arguments to sustain his contention:

(1) "No man has the authority to restrain the wind with the wind."

The term translated "wind" in this first statement is also commonly translated "spirit." It is improbable that one can

arrive at sufficient proof to ascertain one or the other. It is obvious that the NASB translated *ruach* as *wind*. There is a rather equal distribution of views in both translations and interpretations. The primary purpose of the verse is best served when the *lesson* of the verse is determined, not necessarily whether the term is translated wind or spirit. On this same subject Jesus said, "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going" (John 3:8). At least the truth taught in the two statements is the same: one cannot see or control the wind. But what is the intent of the observation? One conclusion is found in the fact that only God has control of the wind, man cannot hold back or control the wind even with the wind. The wind moves about according to an appointed order. Solomon described it as "Blowing toward the south, then turning toward the north, the wind continues swirling along; and on its circular courses the wind returns" (1:6). Again he stated that "we do not know the path of the wind" (11:5). The lesson seems to be that the evil man has no more control over his inevitable punishment which shall come upon him than he does over the wind. Both are in the hands of God. One is carried out through the laws of nature while the other is arranged on the basis of compensating for evil and is determined by the authority of the king. God is the author of both! This lesson—God is in control of the laws of ultimate justice just as He controls the wind and other laws of nature—is in harmony with the immediate and greater context of Ecclesiastes. It also justifies this emphasis that Solomon places on the uncontrolable nature of the wind.

If one feels compelled to interpret the term "spirit" as "breath of life," rather than "wind," as many authorities do (Cf. A. R. Fausset, E. W. Hengstenberg, J. P. Lange, H. C. Leupold, Et. Al.) then this phrase is a parallelism with the following part and simply restates the same thought. If this is the preferred interpretation, then the following discussion will explain the parallelism.

(2) "No man has the authority . . . over the day of death."

What has been referred to in this discussion as the "ultimate justice of God" is the judgment facing every man when his spirit is finally released from his body. The Preacher knows that when this happens, the spirit will return to God (12:7). At that time, the unequal judgments of this earth, the suffering of the innocent, the apparent escape of evil doers, will be brought to light. The crooked shall be made straight. The New Testament is also explicit on this matter: "inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once, and after this comes judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).

Many would restrain the spirit in the face of death if it were possible. Fortunes would be exchanged for a little more time. The epilogue of men's lives under such circumstances would see a rash of repentance and restitution. However, no man can decide to add a few days or years to his own life when death calls. It was true in Solomon's time and it is still true today. Once again the Preacher is bringing into focus the distinction between the wise man and the fool. The wise man has no more control over his time of death than the fool does, but the wise man is prepared. He keeps "the command of the king . . . and experiences no trouble."

It should be observed here for the Christian reader that Jesus teaches us to keep the command of *the King* and in so doing we shall find rest for our souls. (Cf. Jeremiah 6:16; Matthew 11:29).

(3) "There is no discharge in time of war."

Just as one is bound by the rigors of death and must submit to its call, there is no escape from the demands of service placed upon one during the time of war. The analogy is made to illustrate once more that "a wise heart knows the proper time and procedure" (8:5b). The following excerpt from *The Pulpit Commentary* illustrates the principle Solomon refers to:

Thus we read that when Oeabazus, the father of three sons, petitioned Darius to leave one at home, the tyrant replied that he would leave him all three, and had them put to death. Again, Pythius, a Lydian, asking Xerxes to

exempt his eldest son from accompanying the army of Greece, was reviled by the monarch in unmeasured terms, and was punished for his presumption by seeing his son slain before his eyes, the body divided into two pieces, and placed on either side of the road by which the army passed, that all might be warned of the fate awaiting any attempt to evade military service (Herod., IV, 84; vii, 38).¹

Although there were exemptions prior to the battle (Cf. Deteronomy 20:5-8), none were made *during* the time of war. It is inappropriate to use this argument as evidence that Ecclesiastes had to be written late, during the Persian period, because Israel made some exceptions and there were none granted during the Persian rule. The point is not that every man had to be engaged in warfare, but once the battle is underway there is no escape or discharge. One is "locked in" as surely as he faces death and judgment. The lesson once again teaches that man should be on the side of "right" and refrain from joining in "an evil matter."

(4) "Evil will not deliver those who practice it."

The fourth and final reason stated in this verse has a parallel truth given in 8:13 where Solomon reminds his readers, "But it will not be well for the evil man and he will not lengthen his days like a shadow, because he does not fear God."

What wickedness or evil cannot do, wisdom can. Wisdom *does* deliver those who practice it.

The tragedy of practicing evil is not only its failure to deliver one from the judgment of the King or the Lord, but their own wickedness will stand against them in the face of that judgment. The rich oppressors mentioned by James are examples of the severity of casting one's lot with the wicked. He writes, "Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. Your gold and your silver have rusted;

¹ J. S. Excell, H. D. M. Spence (Editors), "Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon," *The Pulpit Commentary* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Company, 1893), p. 201.

and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the Last Days that you have stored up your treasure" (James 5:2-3)!

The wicked could raise the question: "Deliver from what?" The inference is strong regarding the necessity of escape. Once again the reader is reminded of the law of retribution that has been presented in this section as a major theme: One *will* reap what he sows. The severity of their evil demands severity of judgment. They shall not escape!

FACT QUESTIONS 8:1-8

411. Identify the guide that leads the reader to solving the problems of life.
412. What will result in a pleasant relationship between the king and his subjects?
413. What specific ability on the part of the wise man causes his face to shine (verse one)?
414. What causes the "hardness" of face?
415. Identify the two problems of verse two.
416. Solomon is suggesting that the oath is a reminder of what two things?
417. Give evidence that the king could be an earthly king.
418. "Breaking the oath" is equal to what?
419. Explain what is meant by leaving the king.
420. What is the specific meaning given to the statement that the king will do whatever he pleases?
421. List the characteristics of the wise man found in verse five.
422. According to verse six, "trouble is heavy" upon a man. Is this man the wise man or the sinner? Discuss.
423. Who is it that does not experience trouble?
424. What compounds the evil man's trouble (verse seven)?
425. Give evidence that both Solomon and Jesus taught that the wind is not controlled by the power of men.
426. What lesson concerning the *wind* should the evil man learn? How will the same lesson comfort the wise man?

427. Explain what is meant by the "ultimate" justice of God.
 428. Were exceptions from battle granted certain Israelites in time of war? Explain.
 429. Could one be dismissed from battle after the war began?
 430. What double jeopardy does the wicked man experience (verse eight)?

2. Work even when one discovers the oppression of the righteous. 8:9-13

TEXT 8:9-13

- 9 All this I have seen and applied my mind to every deed that has been done under the sun wherein a man has exercised authority over another man to his hurt.
 10 So then, I have seen the wicked buried, those who used to go in and out from the holy place, and they are soon forgotten in the city where they did thus. This too is futility.
 11 Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil.
 12 Although a sinner does evil a hundred times and may lengthen his life, still I know it will be well for those who fear God, who fear Him openly.
 13 But it will not be well for the evil man and he will not lengthen his days like a shadow, because he does not fear God.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 8:9-13

236. Is the wise man or the wicked man the *primary* subject of this verse?
 237. What evil action of the wicked man is recorded in verse nine?
 238. Is there sometimes corruption of authoritative offices?

(Cf. 4:1; 5:8; 7:7)

239. What puts an end to the temporary oppression exercised by the wicked (verse ten)?
240. Give evidence from verse ten that the wicked made a pretense of worship.
241. Why do men indulge freely in sin (verse 11)?
242. What is meant by fearing God openly (verse 12)?
243. Why will it not be well for the evil man (verse 13)?

PARAPHRASE 8:9-13

All this I have seen. I thought about everything man does under the sun and I realized that there is a time when one man has the opportunity to exercise authority, and in doing so injures himself or another. I watched the wicked come and go from the temple. However such practice did not save them from the doom due them—they too were eventually borne to their tombs. They were both praised and then forgotten in the city where they did such things. I number these activities among the unfulfilling, fleeting experiences under the sun. These evil activities, which fill the minds of men continually, happen because men are aware that the judgment upon wrongdoing is not quickly executed. As a result, men are fully set to do evil. Since a sinner may do evil a hundred times, and find his life to be prolonged, I am still aware that it is the one who reverently fears God—the one who abides in His presence—who will survive in the end. This is because the wise man practices reverence for God. But for him who will not reverently fear and honor God, it will not be well for him. Such wicked men will not prolong their days but their days will be fleeting as a shadow.

COMMENT 8:9-13

This is the second division of this immediate section which offers guidance through wisdom for difficult or trying times.

More specifically, the admonition is to work and function as a wise person even when the wise or righteous are oppressed.

v. 9 Both translators and commentators manifest bias when translating or discussing this verse. Is the verse a summary, transitional or preparatory? Some maintain that it is a summary verse and include it as a terminating verse for the section including verses one through nine. Others say that " 'All this' points forward to the problem that is about to be stated and about to be solved."² A. L. Williams states that the expression "all this" is used to "introduce" not to "gather up." The NASB views it as a summary with a new paragraph starting with verse ten. "One man ruling over another" seems to reflect more on the content of the preceding verses than it does to the following arguments. However, it may be taken as simply identifying a point in history—a *time* when one man has power over another to his hurt. The primary theme of this section deals with the characteristics of a wise man and this theme is still under consideration here. The most satisfactory view may be that the verse is *transitional* as is 7:14; 9:1; 9:11 and 9:13.

It should be noted again that Solomon is *still* restricted by "under the sun" observations.

The latter part of the verse also offers some difficulty. It could mean that the injured man is the one being oppressed or it could mean that the one who is doing the ruling is the one who suffers hurt. *The Amplified Bible* incorporates both views with the translation, ". . . one man has power over another to his own hurt or the other man's." Usually it is understood to mean that it is the poor, righteous person who suffers the persecution.

v. 10 Once more this verse presents additional difficulties in determining the original meaning. But whatever it means, it is labeled as "vanity" and "futility." To make each of the activities in this verse refer to the wicked person makes for

² Leupold, *Exposition of Ecclesiastes*, p. 192.

better sense. It is the *wicked* individual who journeys to the "holy place" (the Temple). They are observed by those who live in the city as worshiping God, but their worship is meaningless. (Cf. COMMENT 5:1-7) Such hypocritical worship was meaningless because it would neither hold back their time of death nor would it fortify them against the inevitable certainty of God's judgment. They were able, however, to influence their peers and received respectable burial. They received the burial due the righteous. This Solomon says is vanity and futility. The despicable in Israel were to be ". . . buried with a donkey's burial, dragged off and thrown out beyond the gates of Jerusalem" (Jeremiah 22:19). However, the wicked receive decent burial from their neighbors and friends.

Some of the living played along with their hypocritical game. They closed their eyes to the wicked deeds performed by those whom they had helped to bury. They praised their names in the streets. Some translations have "praised" instead of "forgotten." However, in a short period of time the dead were forgotten even by those of their own city. It is the wicked *rulers* who have died and receive burial. This makes the action more absurd and motivates the observation, "This too is futility." From the standpoint of the righteous, one of the most perplexing problems encountered is to observe the wicked go to their graves praised by the society whom they have maligned without any apparent retributive action to make the record straight. It is specifically to this problem of life that the Preacher addresses himself.

v. 1 The first observation in this verse suggests that sinners do *appear* to carry out their wickedness without just retribution. This is *not* the way wise men would prefer. *Punish the wicked and reward the righteous*. This would eliminate part of life's futility and bring immediate justification to the one who trusts God. However, the ultimate justice of God is one of the major themes of the Bible, and a wise man will accept the promise of the vindication of the righteous on faith. It was precisely this same problem which stimulated the words: "Surely in

vain I have kept my heart pure, and washed my hands in innocence; for I have been stricken all day long, and chastened every morning" (Psalm 73:13-14). The Psalmist felt the burden of the inconsistent justice of his world. He would have despaired in the face of it except for an experience which assured him that it *will not* be well for the wicked. His next observation manifests an assurance of God's justice and also how he came to that conclusion. He writes: ". . . when I pondered to understand this, it was troublesome in my sight, until I came into the sanctuary of God; *then* I perceived their end" (Psalm 73:16-17). The Psalmist drew near to God and was able to place the apparent injustices of life in proper perspective. The following two verses in Ecclesiastes demonstrates that the Preacher has come to the same conclusion!

The second thought in this verse is a result of the first. It is because the justice of God does not demand immediate retribution for evil activities that the hearts of men are literally filled to overflowing with evil. One has said that "the same sun that hardens the clay melts the wax." The long-suffering of God has a positive effect on some hearts while it is the occasion of evil activity for others. It is not the wise man who is under consideration here. The wicked are the ones considered in verse ten and the conclusion drawn in this verse has the wicked as the subject. The Preacher has a keen eye to interpret human nature. He observes that since men do not pay immediately for breaking God's moral laws, that they are deceived into believing that such evil behaviour need never be recompensed. The "heart" is mentioned because it is the seat of both emotional and rational processes. The "given *fully* to do evil" suggests that the wicked feel secure in their present state and give themselves with fearless, shameless, boldness to the practice of evil. The fact that God is slow to anger and filled with grace and mercy is clearly set forth in Exodus 34:6; Psalm 86:15; Romans 2:4 and II Peter 3:9. Many misinterpret God's mercy and conclude that pay day for them will never come. The Preacher only states that God's judgment is not "executed speedily," he does not imply that it will not be.

Christians are not such fools. They can rejoice because Christ has made them "wise unto salvation" (II Timothy 3:15). He has taught that although the wise man is a sinner, "Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried . . . He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed" (Isaiah 53:4-5). The wise Christian is thankful that "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, and not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9).

vs. 12-13 These two verses demonstrate the final vindication of God's ways. It is an open message to both the righteous and the wicked. The righteous are assured that a temporary extension of the life of the wicked is not tantamount to God's approval of their evil deeds. He is also given assurance that his own allegiance to purity of life and obedience to right will be rewarded. On the other hand, however, the sinner should take heed. There are forceful, declarative warnings. "It will not," "he will not," and "he does not" are statements which ring with certainty. They leave nothing to the imagination of the wicked. They close off all possible exits which could have served as a refuge from the wrath of God. There is no comfort in the Preacher's message for the one who has been deceived to believe that God will not execute justice.

The sinner "does evil a hundred times." He goes unchecked in his evil rampage. The idea that "his days are lengthened" is best understood to mean that his evil activities are prolonged. He has neither found the meaning of life nor are the *number* of his days prolonged because of his wickedness.

It is well for the one who *fears* God. He is the exact opposite of the sinner. The term fear has been sufficiently defined. As it appears here, it represents the abhorance of all that appeals to the sinner and it encompasses all that is worthy of the wise. The fact that sinners often live to old age should not be taken to mean that they have received God's approval. The fact that the righteous sometimes die young should not be

interpreted to mean that God is uninvolved in His world and lacks empathy with His own. The Preacher declares: "I know it will be well for those who fear God." The details of *how* God will vindicate His own are hidden from the eyes of the Preacher. He has observed enough, however, to know that someday, sometime, God will have the final word and justice will triumph. One must keep in mind the purpose of the book and also the restricting limitation of "under the sun."

The NASB translates the first part of verse thirteen to read, "But it will not be well for the evil man and he will not lengthen his days like a shadow." The idea here is understood to mean that a shadow lengthens and the evil man will not experience length of days. Although this appears to contradict the statement concerning the fact that the evil man "may lengthen his life" (verse 12), it need not. First of all, it has been pointed out that verse twelve could mean his activity in sin is lengthened although his actual days of life need not be. Also, some sinners do live a long time but such longevity should not be understood as a product of their wicked activities. The message to the wise man is that he should not despair if he observes a wicked man living a long time in spite of his wickedness. Leupold translates the first part of this verse differently. He writes: "But it shall not be well with the wicked, and being like a shadow, he shall not prolong his days." This conveys just the opposite meaning of lengthening and implies a fleeting, transitory existence as a shadow. In 6:12 the comparison between life and a shadow is made to illustrate how fleeting man is and this truth corresponds to Leupold's translation. The use of the shadow to represent the shortness of life is also supported by Luther, Vaihinger and Hengstenberg.

It will not be well for the wicked and the reason is clearly stated: "He does not reverently fear and worship God" (*The Amplified Bible*). Once again the practice of the fear of the Lord is the distinction made between the wise man and the wicked. One should not be surprised to see this theme occur (Cf. 3:14; 5:7; 7:18; 8:12, 13) or to discover that when the conclusion of the "whole matter" is drawn, it is once again

“the fear of the Lord” which remains as the one distinction which sets a man apart as the one who shall stand in the final day (Cf. 12:13).

FACT QUESTIONS 8:9-13

431. Identify the general admonition offered in this section.
432. What three possible functions could verse nine serve?
433. Give evidence from verse nine that Solomon is still laboring from the standpoint of restricted information.
434. Who is to be understood as the injured man (verse nine)?
435. Is it the wicked, the wise, or a mixture of both under discussion in verse ten? Defend your answer.
436. More specifically, who are those who are buried?
437. What experience did the Psalmist have that gave him courage in the face of the prosperity of the wicked and oppression of the righteous (verse 11)?
438. What is the occasion that gives rise to the statement, “men . . . are given fully to do evil”?
439. What two possible effects on the hearts of men can the long-suffering of God have?
440. What is meant by “given fully to do evil”?
441. Identify the messages for both the wise man and the wicked man found in verses 12-13.
442. What is meant by saying that the sinner’s days are lengthened?
443. What characteristic must the wise man possess if it is to be well with him?
444. What two meanings are given to the term “shadow” as it is used in verse thirteen?
445. What theme, which occurs in a number of verses, is also the distinguishing mark of the one who will stand in the final judgment?

3. Work even when one cannot understand
the working of God. 8:14-17

TEXT 8:14-17

- 14 There is futility which is done on the earth, that is, there are righteous men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked. On the other hand, there are evil men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I say that this too is futility.
- 15 So I commended pleasure, for there is nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat and to drink and to be merry, and this will stand by him in his toils throughout the days of his life which God has given him under the sun.
- 16 When I gave my heart to know wisdom and to see the task which has been done on the earth (even though one should never sleep day or night),
- 17 and I saw every work of God, I concluded that man cannot discover the work which has been done under the sun. Even though man should seek laboriously, he will not discover; and though the wise man should say, "I know," he cannot discover.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 8:14-17

344. What two events which take place upon the earth does Solomon identify as futile (verse 14)?
345. If a man is without revelation from God, what is the best thing he can do (verse 15)?
346. Who gives both the wise man and the wicked man his days to live?
347. How extensive or intense was Solomon's pursuit to see the "task which has been done on earth"?
348. Can man discover all the work done under the sun?
349. When a wise man has observed all that he can, he should be able to say what?

PARAPHRASE 8:14-17

There are some threads of life which are difficult to unravel. The world is filled with many anomalies. Note these two: a wicked man continues in his wickedness and prospers as if he were a wise, righteous man; a righteous man, who does the right thing and acts wisely suffers as if he were a sinner. I say that this is certainly empty and unfulfilling. In my search under the sun, apart from God's revelation, I have decided what is good for man. There is no better thing for him to do than to eat, to drink, and to be joyful. These are the things which will stick with a man and warm his heart in the short time God gives him to live upon the earth.

Man is busily engaged in the sorry and difficult task of business under the sun—to the degree that some men never close their eyes day or night—and I joined the endless round of activity, and gave myself to know wisdom and see all that it was possible for me to see. I saw that such activity is the work of God and man cannot discover all that is done on the earth. A man can toil to discover but he will not find it out. A wise man should, after living his life seeking after wisdom, be able to say that he has found it out, but even he will not be able.

COMMENT 8:14-17

In this third division, one is instructed to work although he has limited resources under the sun, and although he discovers that God's ways are past finding out. In addition, he is deeply troubled because on numerous occasions the events of life are opposite from what they should be: wicked men prosper as though they were the righteous, and the righteous suffer as though they had committed grievous sins.

The two most common factors which color the writing of the Preacher are evident in this section. Both the "vanity" and "under the sun" concepts limit his observations. From

the purely earthly point of view he has drawn his conclusions. His conclusion found in verse fifteen is a reasonable one to him. Especially is this true in the light of his restricted knowledge as he observes the activities of the wicked and the righteous.

v. 14 Is there an issue on the face of the earth that is more perplexing to the one who does good than that presented in this verse? It is the basis for much of what has been identified as a "grievous, sorry task" that has "afflicted" the sons of men. This issue, the inequitable correspondence between the righteous and the wicked and their deeds, serves as a potential stumbling block even to the Christian who has the *full* revelation from God. How difficult it would be for one to understand when all he has to work with are the tools of observation. This explains the Preacher's rather matter-of-fact and limited conclusion.

He equates the activities with "futility." Since the mark of vanity rests upon all creatures "under the sun" then, to a degree at least, one could almost expect some imbalance in rewards and punishments. In other words, the shock need not be so severe when one realizes that the world too travails beneath the curse of sin and decay. However, even such an admission does not dissuade the searching mind. The Preacher's conclusion is still valid—there should be a closer, observable correlation between the righteous and his rewards and the wicked and his punishment. But it is not the case, so he marks the whole experience as false and empty.

v. 15 In the face of his observation, Solomon returns to his previously stated conclusion (Cf. 2:24; 3:12, 22; 5:18). He commends the enjoyment of the primary resources of living: eating, drinking and merriment. He also qualifies his commendation twice in this one verse by the phrase "under the sun." He is not encouraging one to a life of greedy abandonment or wanton hedonism. He offers more the idea of quietly sharing in the blessings of life which are obviously placed here by God for one's enjoyment. Man is going to have to "toil" through life and his memory will serve him best if it contains these fundamental joys upon which he can reflect. He admits

to the truth that it is God who gives man his days to live. It is true that God gives the "wicked" his days too. Solomon is arguing that a wise man will recognize them as a gift from God and although he is often bewildered by what he sees to be unfair balances of life, he will nevertheless resign himself to living each day to its fullest.

v. 16 This verse is a summary of the two previous proposals: (1) From 1:16-17, he declared that he would "know" wisdom. He recognized that such wisdom would enable him to succeed in his second proposal. (2) He also proposed to see the business activity that is done upon the earth. (Cf. 1:13)

The closing thought in the verse has been interpreted two different ways. It may suggest that Solomon is the one whose eyes cannot close in sleep. This would be due to the intense study of that which he desired to know. Or it could have reference to the ones he observes who are so engaged in the activities of life, especially in business enterprises, that *they* do not even take time to sleep. "To see sleep" is not found elsewhere in the Old Testament and means to *enjoy* sleep. Once again it could apply either to the one who tries to discover the solutions to the problems of life, or to the ones who are engaged in endless labor to increase their wealth. Neither will discover satisfaction and thus will never "enjoy sleep." Almost all authorities admit to the hyperbolic use of the expression "one should never sleep night or day."

v. 17 If Solomon could have reached beyond his time and selected any verse from the New Testament to state succinctly his closing thought, it undoubtedly would have been: "Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways" (Romans 11:33)! Solomon wanted to discover the work of God—that which is done upon earth through the providential ordering of things—but it was far from him. Even though man "should seek laboriously" he will not discover it. A wise man should say "I know," but he cannot. This double emphasis on man's desire to know and his willingness to expand his energies without restraint, speaks

to the gravity of the subject and the intensity of Solomon's quest.

FACT QUESTIONS 8:14-17

- 446. Identify the inequity revealed in this section.
- 447. Name the two oft-appearing concepts which qualify the Preacher's remarks.
- 448. What has been the primary cause of the imbalance in rewards and punishments (verse 14)?
- 449. What conclusion does Solomon state that he has previously observed (verse 15)?
- 450. Explain what Solomon means and also what he doesn't mean by "eat," "drink," and "be merry."
- 451. Verse sixteen is a summary of what two proposals Solomon has made from the beginning of the book.
- 452. "To see sleep" refers to whom? Discuss.
- 453. What was Solomon's objective which he found impossible to fulfill "under the sun"?

- 4. Work regardless of the similar fate of the godly and the ungodly. 9:1-10

TEXT 9:1-10

- 1 For I have taken all this to my heart and explain it that righteous men, wise men, and their deeds are in the hand of God. Man does not know whether it will be love or hatred, anything awaits him.
- 2 It is the same for all. There is one fate for the righteous and for the wicked; for the good, for the clean, and for the unclean; for the man who offers a sacrifice and for the one who does not sacrifice. As the good man is, so is the sinner; as the swearer is, so is the one who is afraid to swear.

- 3 This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men. Furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil, and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives. Afterwards they go to the dead.
- 4 For whoever is joined with the living, there is hope; surely a live dog is better than a dead lion.
- 5 For the living know they will die; but the dead do not know anything, nor have they any longer a reward, for their memory is forgotten.
- 6 Indeed their love, their hate, and their zeal have already perished, and they will no longer have a share in all that is done under the sun.
- 7 Go then, eat your bread in happiness, and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works.
- 8 Let your clothes be white all the time, and let not oil be lacking on your head.
- 9 Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life, and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun.
- 10 Whatever your hand finds to do, verily, do it with all your might; for there is no activity or planning or wisdom in Sheol where you are going.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 9:1-10

350. What is it that Solomon takes to his heart, and then explains (verse one)?
351. Who holds the destiny of "righteous men" (verse one)?
352. Identify the "one fate" which comes to the good man as well as to the wicked man (verses two-three).
353. List the characteristics of the sinner set forth in verses two and three.
354. What advantage does the living have over the dead (verse four)?
355. According to verse five, what knowledge possessed by

- the living could cause them to turn from evil to good?
356. List the seven characteristics of the dead (verses five-six).
357. Why should the living be happy and cheerful (verse seven)?
358. "White clothes" and "oil" could be symbolic of what (verse eight)?
359. Man's reward is identified as what (verse nine)?
360. With what spirit should man work (verse ten)?

PARAPHRASE 9:1-10

So I thoughtfully considered and reflected upon everything I had observed—I took it to heart, examining and exploring it all. I discovered that righteous men, the ones who are wise and whose activities are in harmony with God's will, are the ones whose deeds and works are in the hands of God. However, that which is ahead for the wise man, whether love or hatred, he will have to wait to find out as no man can foresee the future. The same thing happens to the innocent as well as to the guilty. There is one event to the righteous and to the wicked. Anything may happen to anyone whether they are submissive to authority or defiant of the law; whether they swear by an oath or are afraid of an oath. Yes, one event comes to all regardless of their moral behavior. I concluded that this is a terrible thing that happens under the sun. It causes some men to be filled with evil and behave wickedly. Their lives are actually governed by insane impulses while they live. Afterwards they die too. As long as there is life, there is hope! Surely to be a live dog is better than being a dead lion. Why? Because the living at least know they will die while the dead know nothing. There is nothing left for the dead in this life; even the memory of them is forgotten. Their love, their hatred and their warm emotion have vanished into the dark past; they can no longer participate in the work or joy of the activities of those who still labor upon the earth.

Since you are one who is righteous, wise, and in the hand of God, go on your way. Eat your bread with joy and drink

your wine with an untroubled mind, for you are one of whom it can be said, "God has already accepted and approved of your works." Because this is true, you should demonstrate God's acceptance and approval of your works by wearing white garments which indicate your pure life. You should also anoint your head regularly with oil which is a sign of your genuine joy and gladness. In addition, you should make the most of your marriage. You do not have many years upon the earth, so live joyfully with the wife of your youth. Remember, God has given you the few years you will have on the earth. This joy and happiness you experience will be your reward in life. Such joy will also be the reward of all your toil and hard work which your hands find to do under the sun. Everything your hands find to do, do it with all your might. Such industry will bring you satisfaction during your few years here upon this earth. Remember, there is no industry, work, knowledge, or wisdom in the place of the dead where you are going.

COMMENT 9:1-10

The first ten verses capture the despair, resolve and encouragement of the Preacher. They begin with the age-old problem of the similar fate of both the godly and the ungodly. This, however, is not to become a basis for pessimism or inactivity on the part of the godly. As long as one is still alive, he has hope. The Preacher's conclusion is simple: Do not waste your opportunity. His advice is to gain as much as possible from each day. His formula for daily activity states that one should give himself whole-heartedly to his work. In addition, his life should be filled with happiness and cheer as he lives it with the wife whom he has chosen and whom he loves.

The explanation found in these verses sustains his previous contention (8:14-17) that men cannot find out the work of God. The future is veiled from men, but known to God. His conclusion is the same here as in the previous discussion. He

suggests industry and joy in one's daily task.

v. 1 The "all this" refers to the preceding discussion concerning the inability of men to know what the future holds for them. He admits to God's control of the future activities of men and the fact that *everything* is in His hand. The fact that man does not know what the future holds is of grave importance to Solomon, and he gives himself completely to explain it.

The "love" and "hatred" which will come to even wise men represents the broad scope of experiences of life. While the context suggests these are deeds "in the hand of God," one need not conclude that God is the author of evil. He permits or allows evil to come upon the godly but only so far as He chooses not to intervene in the activities of ungodly men. Neither should one think that determinism, as a doctrine, is supported by this verse. God does affect the activities of men when His plans or purposes are involved. The important lesson in this verse is that outward signs of prosperity and success are not necessarily indications of God's approval; neither should suffering or poverty be interpreted as a sign of His disapproval. The "love or hatred" which befalls the wise man come to him because he is an intricate part of the total experiences of life, they are not contingent upon his moral character or lack of it.

The argument which states that "love and hatred" comes from others, rather than God, is supported by verse six. Here Solomon specifically refers to "*Their* love, *their* hate, and *their* zeal." The distinction between what God wills, or desires, and what He permits must constantly be made. It is precisely this point that Solomon makes. God is in control of His world, but He, at times, permits or allows the flow of history to ebb and tide unobstructed, and thus the events which fall to the godly should come to the wicked and those which fall to the wicked should come to the godly. One thing is certain even as Solomon says, "anything awaits him," or "is before him."

v. 2 What is the *one* fate? The verse begins with, "It is the

same for all." This undoubtedly refers to the observations in verse one which speak to the many facets of life. This fact has been clearly demonstrated. *Death* is often understood to be the fate or event which comes to all men. (Cf. 2:14; 3:19) While this is true, the term in Hebrew translated "fate" suggests more of a "meeting with" or "happening," and most likely includes all of the events of life spoken of in the preceding verse. This would not *exclude* the death event. The message clearly states that whether one is godly or a sinner, he will be caught up in the activities of hatred and love. None escapes. The following list of contrasts illustrates that all men experience the same fate. It is true even as Solomon says. Whether one is righteous or wicked, clean or unclean, a sacrificer or non-sacrificer, good or sinner, honors an oath or is a profane swearer. All receive the same fate.

It is not important to decide if these are individuals or classes of people the Preacher has observed. The fact that he has extended the list to include variations of good and bad people enforces his argument that *no man* knows what the future holds and all men are caught up in the innerplay of life's struggle.

The characteristics of those who have been approved of God indicate a general attitude of submission to God's will. The "righteous" are those who behave correctly toward their fellow man, while the "wicked" would violate proper relationships. The "clean" would refer to those who are ceremonially clean as Solomon speaks next in sacrificial language of the one who follows the levitical rules, or fails to do so. However, the use of "good" which qualifies "clean" suggests acceptable *moral* activity as well as clean in the levitical or externally legal sense. There were those who were careful to sacrifice according to the laws. Such are called "good" in contrast with the "sinner." The final comparison is made between those who see the value of the use of an oath before God, and those who fail to reverence an oath. Zechariah 5:3-4 refers to the evil of swearing (oath taking) with an irreverent attitude. Isaiah 65:16 speaks of the solemn act as acceptable to God.

The point of the many contrasts is stated at the beginning of the verse where it reads: "It is the same for all."

v. 3 The first half of this verse is a summary statement. The one fate for all men is looked upon as an "evil under the sun." The fact that Solomon states that all "go to the dead" does not have to be understood that *death* is the one event or "fate" he has in mind. Death simply terminates the fate of men. It is the final exercise of all the futile and transitory activities of men upon this earth.

He observes that because the godly suffer as if they were the wicked, and wicked people prosper as if they were the godly, that two things result. First, the righteous should recognize that their deeds are in the hands of God and unfortunate calamities should not move them from their pursuit of good and righteousness. Second, the wicked sinners because they prosper and their wicked deeds often go unpunished, are self-deceived and believe there will never be a day of judgment before God. As a result of this deceitfulness, the hearts of wicked men are set to do evil continually. Solomon says, "Insanity is in their hearts." This strong affirmation of the intensity of their sin is in contrast to wisdom and reason which are characteristic of the godly. If men respected the moral laws of God as they do the physical laws, there would be less sinning in the world. Wise men refuse to violate laws when they recognize the reciprocating, sudden recompense for their folly. Because God is long-suffering and desires that no man perish, He postpones or defers punishment of sins. This act of grace is often misinterpreted by wicked men to mean that no judgment will be forthcoming.

Thus the inability of righteousness to protect or deliver one from evil is occasion for doubt and despair. At the same time the apparent lack of judgment against an evil deed encourages participation in wickedness. Of such activities, Delitzsch has written: "It is an evil in itself, as being a contradiction to the moral order of the world; and it is such also on account of its demoralizing influences. The author here repeats what he had already, viii. 11, said in a more special reference, that

because evil is not in this world visibly punished, men become confident and bold in sinning.”¹

“The dead” is mentioned here as the end of those who hold disregard for God’s government and laws. It is the end or final resting place where all activities are thought to cease. The godly also partake in this event. (Cf. 4:1-2)

vs. 4-6 For the true sense of the passage, these three verses must be considered together. Each verse is an extension, an observation, based upon the declaration of verse three. Solomon observes that so long as there is life there is hope; death closes the door permanently to all activity; even the memory of the dead is soon obliterated. Finally, the contribution of love, hatred and energy can no longer be made as the dead no longer share in the transitory futility of life on the earth.

The comparison of a dog with a lion was much greater in Solomon’s day than it is with one who lives in American culture. The lion was the most noble of beasts. (Cf. Proverbs 30:30; Isaiah 31:4) Dogs were not treated kindly and held as pets, but were considered scavengers of the streets. (Cf. I Samuel 17:43; 24:14; II Samuel 3:8; 16:4; Matthew 15:26; Luke 16:22) The meaning is obvious; the most despicable or undesirable *person* who still possesses life is better off than the finest individual who has already gone to the grave. The reason? Because as long as there is life there is hope. “The living know they will die; but the dead do not know anything.” Since one knows he will die, he should so order his life as to come into a proper relationship with God. This is the hope of the living. One is reminded of the Preacher’s admonitions in 7:1-4 where the living are directed to seriously consider the fact that death is the end for every man. Obviously the result will be a re-ordered and improved life.

The “reward” lost by the dead refers to their consciousness. They no longer share in the knowledge, love, hatred, or events upon the earth. Their memory is even forgotten.

¹ F. Delitzsch. *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, Vol. VI (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), p. 357.

This is not a denial of God's retributive action after death. It is just that such activities are not under consideration here. His conclusions are based upon his observations made "under the sun." The Preacher does not approve of the activities of despicable men, and neither does he suggest that sinners who are alive are of greater value than godly people who have already died. His emphasis is simply on the fact that life affords opportunities which the dead cannot experience. Death terminates all activity under the sun. Therefore, one's reward is gained on the earth: to be cut off from the earth is to be cut off from one's reward. Solomon had written: "I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my *reward* for all my labor" (2:10). He adds that man should find happiness in his activities (3:22); that he should enjoy his life as well as his riches (5:18-19); and to live joyfully with the wife of one's youth is reward indeed (9:9)! It is to be noted that these rewards are experiences which take place among the living. None of these will take place in the grave. Therefore, his emphasis upon the living is clear. One must not conclude that Solomon did not have some insight as to activity beyond the grave. (Cf. 12:7) He is writing with a self-limiting focus which qualifies his observations by the closing thought of verse six which states, "they will no longer have a share in all that is done under the sun."

v. 7 The Preacher has already established both principles that are expressed in this verse: (1) Enjoy life (Cf. COMMENT on 2:24; 3:12-13, 22; 5:18; 6:12; 8:15); (2) God's approval of your labors (Cf. COMMENT on 3:13; 5:19). The admonition to enjoy life is not in contradiction to 4:2 where Solomon said, "So I congratulated the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still living." On the one hand life could be filled with joy and merriment while on the other there was sorrow, oppression and bitter experiences. When God approves one's works, life is enjoyable even "under the sun."

"Works" are to be understood in the context of this chapter, and would refer to all the godly, righteous acts of the good

man. God has no delight in the sinful acts enumerated in the preceding verses but approves or accepts the works of righteous men. The fact that God approves of their works implies that their labors are in God's hands (verse one) and negates the idea that the "love" and "hatred" come from God. It is obvious that such activities come from the hands of men with whom one lives and works upon the earth.

v. 8 "White" in the Bible signifies glory, purity and joy. The Preacher is arguing for a full, happy life to be lived by the ones who labor through life with God's blessing. The white attire of angels (Mark 16:5) and of men (Acts 1:10) represents messengers of God who have His approval. In addition the glorified saints are dressed in white apparel manifesting both joy and righteousness. Jesus said to the church in Sardis: "But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels" (Revelation 3:4-5). The people in Solomon's day were admonished to wear white as a sign of God's approval. They were also to keep oil on their heads as a sign of joy. (Cf. Psalms 45:7; Isaiah 61:3) The oil was to be perpetually worn upon the head representing the constant joy of the one whose works are approved of God.

v. 9 Solomon compounds his admonition to be happy with still another injunction: "Enjoy life!" The literal meaning is "*look upon life.*" This suggests turning away from the scenes of sadness and experiences which would rob one of joy. Fix your eyes on the hope of joy—on those things which will result in God's approval and subsequently your own happiness. You should share your joy with your life. Although the monogamous ideal is out of harmony with Solomon's polygamous practice, he is keenly aware that genuine joy in marriage is experienced between husband and wife—not multiple wives or concubines. Jesus gave the order which receives God's approval when He said, "He who created them from the beginning made them

male and female, and said, 'For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh.' Consequently they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate" (Matthew 19:4-6). (Cf. Proverbs 5:15, 18, 19; 18:22; 19:14)

Your wife is intended to make this toilsome life more bearable. Do not long for the past or wait expecting to find joy tomorrow. Live for today. Realize that God has approved your works and it is He who has also given you the few years you have to work upon the earth.

v. 10 This section is summarized by two observations: (1) Work with great industry; (2) Remember that today, in this life, one is afforded his only opportunity to work. You cannot redeem lost opportunities in the grave. Solomon has clearly demonstrated that it is the righteous, godly person who is under consideration. He is to find renewed determination in the truth that God approves of his work and gives him time to labor. Similar instruction is found in John 9:4; II Corinthians 6:2; Galatians 6:10 and II Thessalonians 3:10.

"Sheol," or grave is used only this one time in Ecclesiastes. It means a shadowy region or place of the dead. Such a dark, shadowy region where there are no activities is contrasted to life "under the sun." It is today upon the earth that one is instructed to seek joy and work diligently.

FACT QUESTIONS 9:1-10

454. Identify what causes some godly people to grow pessimistic and inactive.
455. What advice does Solomon offer in view of the fact the future is known only to God?
456. The "all this" refers to what? (Cf. verse one)
457. "Love" and "hatred" will come to whom? They will come from whom? (Cf. verse six)
458. Are outward signs of success indicators of God's approval?

Discuss.

459. What is the *one fate*? Explain. (Cf. verse two)
460. The godly are identified by what five terms?
461. What general truth is demonstrated by such a long list of characteristics of both the godly and the ungodly?
462. Explain the "evil" under the sun. (Cf. verse three)
463. Write in your own words the inequity that exists between the godly and the ungodly.
464. What is meant by "insanity is in their hearts"?
465. Explain why God withholds *immediate* punishment against some sinners.
466. Why should verses four through six be considered together?
467. Explain why the contrast between a dog and lion would be greater in Solomon's day than today.
468. Identify the lesson taught in verse four.
469. What is meant by "hope" in this verse?
470. Explain what the "reward" is which the dead loses. (Cf. 2:10)
471. State the two lessons found in verse seven.
472. God approves what kind of works?
473. The people of Solomon's day were to wear "white" as a symbol of what? (Cf. verse eight)
474. Where does Solomon admit that genuine joy is experienced? (Cf. verse eight)
475. What is a wife intended to do about her husband's toilsome life?
476. The godly person finds renewal of his work in what two truths?

5. Work with the awareness that God will control the final outcome. 9:11-12

TEXT 9:11-12

11 I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread

to the wise, nor wealth to the discerning, nor favor to men of ability; for time and chance overtake them all.

- 12 Moreover, man does not know his time: like fish caught in a treacherous net, and birds trapped in a snare, so the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls on them.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 9:11-12

361. What reason is given in verse eleven for the many inequitable situations found in life?
362. Where do these unfair situations take place?
363. What is it that man does not know? What is meant by this statement?
364. Identify the lesson taught by the fish and the birds.

PARAPHRASE 9:11-12

Once again I took a hard look at things done under the sun and I found that many things are not as they appear. The fastest runner does not always win the race; the battle is not always won by the best trained warriors; the wise are not always the ones who have bread; the intelligent ones do not always hold the wealth; the skillful are not always the ones to win favor. Time and chance will catch up to them all. Neither does a man know when his time of misfortune will come. His moment of disaster will fall upon him like fish caught in an inescapable net, or birds trapped in a snare. Even so men are ensnared in such an evil time.

COMMENT 9:11-12

The truth of the advice offered in these two verses could be easily observed and is not dependent on divine revelation.

We are confronted with five illustrations which demonstrate the lack of consistency in life. The effort exerted by the swift, the warriors, the wise, the discerning, and the men of ability should produce expected and predictable results. However, in each situation the opposite of that which one anticipates actually happens. This is the way life is "under the sun." In addition, two illustrations of netted fish and trapped birds demonstrate that not only is the outcome of man's efforts unpredictable, his time of death falls upon him suddenly and without warning. The transitory nature of life is once more impressed on the minds of the readers. The Preacher has previously explored the injustices of life which on occasion discourages the godly and leads them to despair. He now assures his audience that it is *wisdom* that protects against despair and fortifies the godly against the contradictions of life.

v. 11 "The race is not to the swift." The idea here is not that the swift loses the race to the slower runner because he is diverted from his goal by some lesser attraction or activity. Neither does it mean that the fast runner is over confident in his ability. The incident that causes him to lose the race is not of his doing. The closing thought in the verse qualifies all five of the illustrations—"time and chance overtake them all." The term "chance" does not mean something gambled or that one has "fallen down on his luck." It is best understood as an "incident," and means a calamity or an unfortunate experience that one encounters in the pursuit of goals or objectives. Unavoidably tragedies occur among men as well as in nature which necessitates the changing or readjusting one's plans. The reason for this is that both man and his world labor under the mark of vanity. Paul argues for this same premise when he states, "So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy" (Romans 9:16).

A similar explanation is given to the remaining four illustrations. One would expect a different result than the one stated in each example, but the events of life often curtail the detailed and carefully laid plans. In the Christian age the lesson is

the same, but there is the added act of trust which leads to the spirit of submission, goes beyond "time" and "chance" and leads one to pray, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that" (James 4:15).

v. 12 We have just learned that great talent and planned activities do not guarantee success. "His time" may well mean one's hour of death, but it should also allow for calamitous events which hinder planned activities. Thus man's life and daily activities are out of his own hand. The events are not controlled by some sinister force, competitive with God, known as "time" and "chance." Rather, in the exchange of love and hate as one lives his life out on the earth among the sinners and the righteous, he will come to realize that no guarantee of the fruition of any earthly activity is given. The two following similarities are offered to illustrate this truth. Just as "fish" and "birds" follow the course of daily routine and innocently go about searching out that which is essential to their livelihood, so man is engaged in similar activities. Without warning the fish and birds are trapped and their future is sharply altered. Just like the "fish" and "birds" the Preacher declares, "so the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls upon them." "Evil" means a time of misfortune and could refer to numerous events which befall men. Jesus used a similar figure of speech when he warned his generation of great calamity with the words, "Be on guard, that your hearts may not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day come on you suddenly like a trap, for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth" (Luke 21:34-35). Even when God is directly involved in the *sudden* judgments upon evil men, the image of a *net* is often used. (Cf. Hosea 7:12; Ezekiel 12:13; 32:3)

FACT QUESTIONS 9:11-12

477. What do the illustrations in this section demonstrate?
478. What protects and fortifies the godly?

479. Why does the swift lose the race? (Cf. verse 11)
 480. In what way does Romans 9:16 explain verse eleven?
 481. Identify the two meanings which could be attributed to "his time" in verse twelve.
 482. What is the specific lesson taught by the "fish" and "birds"?

6. Wisdom is declared to be the greatest guide in our work. 9:13-18

TEXT 9:13-18

- 13 Also this I came to see as wisdom under the sun, and it impressed me.
 14 There was a small city with few men in it and a great king came to it, surrounded it, and constructed large siege works against it.
 15 But there was found in it a poor wise man and he delivered the city by his wisdom. Yet no one remembered that poor man.
 16 So I said, "Wisdom is better than strength." But the wisdom of the poor man is despised and his words are not heeded.
 17 The words of the wise heard in quietness are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools.
 18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 9:13-18

365. Solomon said he was impressed with what (verse 13)?
 366. What kind of wisdom was it?
 367. Give three reasons why the small city should not have been delivered.
 368. What was the poor, wise man's reward for delivering the city?

369. Does Solomon prove by this parable that "wisdom is better than strength"? Discuss.
370. How should wisdom be communicated?
371. What should be heeded in time of trouble?
372. Identify the two lessons taught in verse eighteen.

PARAPHRASE 9:13-18

The following parable on wisdom, which I have observed under the sun, made a genuine impression on my mind. There was a small city with only a few men in it and a powerful king surrounded it with his army. The king also built overpowering bulwarks which towered above the city. The king cut off the small city from all exchange of goods and communication. However, there was a potential deliverer within the city. He was poor and insignificant but he was very wise. He was wise enough to deliver the city by his wisdom even in the face of such overwhelming obstacles. Yet no one thought of that poor man. So I said, "Wisdom is far better than the strength of an army." The wisdom of the poor insignificant man is despised and his words, which delivered the city, were soon forgotten. The quiet words of wise men, even when the wise men are poor, should be heeded rather than listening to the shouting of a great king who labors in the midst of fools. Wisdom is better than weapons but one sinner who acts foolishly can destroy much good.

COMMENT 9:13-18

The central subject of this section is *wisdom*. A parable is clearly evident in verses 13-15 while the interpretation of it is found in verse sixteen. Two final observations on the value of wisdom are given in verses 17-18.

How can one safeguard himself from the treachery of snares and traps? Is there any way one can find encouragement in

the midst of calamity? The answer is found in securing wisdom and practicing it. One should not despise such a valuable possession as wisdom though it be in possession of a servant—this would not diminish its worth. One should not only enjoy life, and work with great industry, he should also employ wisdom.

v. 13 One should not attempt to equate this wisdom with the wisdom revealed in the New Testament which is *complete* in Christ and wonderfully *redemptive* in nature. The wisdom the Preacher discusses is qualified at the outset as earthy “under the sun” wisdom. Such an example of wisdom as set forth here “impressed” Solomon and was “great” to him. This is true because of what it did.

Varied interpretations of the parable are offered. Among the notable views are: (1) Israel is represented as the possessor of true wisdom, and although she was small and despised, she was accepted by God and delivered by his hand. (2) The true church is besieged from generation to generation. However, she has Jesus Christ, once Himself poor, to deliver her. (3) The event in Bible history which most nearly parallels the story is recorded in II Samuel 20:15-22 and Judges 9:53. (4) Imaginative interpretations include cities such as Dora, besieged by Antiochas the Great and Athens which was delivered by Themistocles from the hand of Xerxes. (5) Luther and Mercerus both held that no actual historical occurrence is intended.

The most natural interpretation would be that which elevates wisdom. The emphasis on the “great” king and the “poor” wise man heightens the contrast and increases the odds. Thus, the fact that the city is delivered from such overwhelming strength elevates wisdom and makes it the true hero.

v. 14 “A small city” indicates a lack of military resources. “A few men” in the city implies a minimum number of men to defend the city rather than the number of non-fighting personnel. The plight of the city is magnified by the fact that a “great” king surrounded it with his soldiers. In addition, he built “large siegeworks against it.” One need not search for such an actual event in history as the emphasis here is to

demonstrate that *wisdom* can deliver from insurmountable odds.

The "siegeworks" are also called "palisades" (Septuagint), embarkments or mounds. Sometimes wooden towers were used whereby the enemy could catapult heavy rocks against the wall or into the city. From such strongholds towering over the city, the enemy could spy out the weak areas of the beleaguered city so as to assail it. (Cf. Deuteronomy 20:20; II Samuel 20:15; II Kings 19:32; Jeremiah 3:4; Micah 4:14)

The comparison is reminiscent of the powers of darkness which are set against the church. However, just as wisdom had the capabilities of delivering the city, even against such overpowering odds, so Christ has given the victory to the church. (Cf. I Corinthians 15:55-57; I John 5:4)

vs. 15-16 "Wisdom is better." Wisdom is better than strength (verse 16). Wisdom is better than weapons of war (verse 18).

On the one hand wisdom stands in bold relief against the great king and military might of the enemy. Within the city it emerges as the hero against the fact that it was insignificantly contained in a small city and a poor man. Wisdom had everything going against it and nothing in its favor. Wisdom was sufficient to deliver the city, however, when everything was going against it. The tragedy came after the victory. The one who through his wisdom delivered the city was forgotten. It is sometimes argued that since the verb is pluperfect it should be rendered "no man *had remembered* that poor man" and thus would change the emphasis of the text. The meaning then would be that none remembered him until the *need* for deliverance was keenly felt and then they turned to him. This interpretation would clarify the verse but would complicate the meaning of verse sixteen where the Preacher declares, "But the wisdom of the poor man is despised and his words are not heeded."

The *Anchor Bible*² takes an altogether different approach:

² R. B. Y. Scott. *The Anchor Bible: Proverbs and Ecclesiastes* (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1965), p. 247.

"Now there was in it a man who was poor but wise, and he might have saved the city by his wisdom. But no man thought of that poor man. So I said, 'Wisdom is better than might!,' yet the wisdom of the poor man was despised, and his words went unheeded." On the idea of "might have saved," the editors comment: "Literally 'he saved.' The former sense is implied by the comment in verse sixteen. The point is that no one remembered the wise man because he was little regarded, rather than that men were not grateful for his advice which saved the city."³

Still a different view is explained by Hitzig: "In this particular case they had, it is true, not despised his wisdom, and they had listened to his words. But it was an exceptional case, necessity drove them thereto, and afterwards they forgot him."⁴

The latter view most clearly states the intent of the passage. The rulers of the small city were forced to listen to the wisdom of the poor man and they heeded it. Because he was poor and the crises facing their city was over, they soon forgot the poor man. In a similar way, Joseph was treated by the Chief Butler (Genesis 40:23); and Jesus was temporarily forgotten after His death upon the cross where the wisdom of God was revealed (I Corinthians 1:24).

The lesson is obvious. Solomon observed the incident—whether real or imaginary—and then reflected on the observation with the statement that "wisdom is better than strength." If the man had not *actually* delivered the city, Solomon would not have been impressed with the parable.

v. 17 The contrast between wisdom and strength continues. Jesus demonstrates perfectly the principle set forth in this verse. It was said of Him that He did "not cry out or raise His voice, nor make His voice heard in the street" (Isaiah 42:2). On the other hand, the pompously dressed Herod assumed the role of the shouting ruler among fools at Caesarea when Luke wrote of him: "And on an appointed day Herod, having

³ R. B. Y. Scott. *ibid.*

⁴ Hengstenberg. *op. cit.*, p. 220.

put on the royal apparel, took his seat on the rostrum and began delivering the address to them. And the people kept crying out, 'The voice of a god and not of a man!' And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten with worms and died" (Acts 12:21-23).

The quiet tranquility could belong to the wise man himself. If so, such an attitude toward life would be an indication of his wisdom. Or it could refer to those who are so disposed as to quietly listen as they recognize the strength and power of his words.

v. 18 The first half of this verse has been sufficiently explained. The above example has shown that wisdom accomplishes more than weapons of war (7:19). The new thought introduced here is in antithesis to the former truth. Just as wisdom is better than weapons of war so one foolish act can undo the fruit of wisdom. The "much good" could refer to the present or potential good a nation accomplishes. The fact remains that it may all be lost if the ruler is a fool and engages in foolish or evil deeds. The "good" would not refer specifically to moral good but possessions, properties, prosperity, etc. This theme is taken up more fully in 10:1.

As an aside, it is interesting to observe how the preceding story has a counterpart in the Christian age. It is to be noted, however, that such a comparison is *not* to be interpreted as the original meaning of the author of Ecclesiastes. It does demonstrate, however, both the universal and spiritual application of the principles involved. The analogies are: (1) *Wisdom* would be the New Testament entrusted today to the church; (2) the *small city* would be the church (Luke 12:32; Hebrews 12:22-23); (3) the *great king* refers to Satan who sets himself against the chosen of God (John 12:31); (4) the *poor wise man* would represent Jesus Christ whose wisdom was, by some, forgotten (Isaiah 53:2-3; Mark 6:3; II Corinthians 8:9; Ephesians 1:7-8; Colossians 2:3).

FACT QUESTIONS 9:13-18

483. How can one fortify himself against snares and calamities?
484. Why is the wisdom of verse thirteen different from redemptive wisdom?
485. Give the best interpretation of the parable. Explain your answer.
486. Why is it not important that an actual event be identified in the siege of the small city? (Cf. verse 14)
487. The "siegeworks" are symbolic of what threat to the church today?
488. Make a list of the things wisdom had to oppose. (Cf. verses 15-16)
489. What became of the little man who saved the city?
490. Explain the statement: "Wisdom is better than strength."
491. In what way does Herod illustrate "a ruler among fools"?
492. What does "much good" refer to in verse eighteen?
493. List the possible analogies the parable could have in the church age.

D. ILLUSTRATIONS OF THOSE WHO LACK WISDOM

10:1-11

1. The foolish worker is in trouble. 10:1-4

TEXT 10:1-4

- 1 Dead flies make a perfumer's oil stink, so a little foolishness is weightier than wisdom and honor.
- 2 A wise man's heart directs him toward the right, but the foolish man's heart directs him toward the left.
- 3 Even when the fool walks along the road his sense is lacking, and he demonstrates to everyone that he is a fool.
- 4 If the ruler's temper rises against you, do not abandon your position, because composure allays great offenses.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 10:1-4

373. What lesson in 9:18 is illustrated again in 10:1?
 374. Where does a foolish man's heart lead him?
 375. What is meant by "toward the left" (verse two)?
 376. A fool demonstrates to all that he is a fool because he is lacking in what?
 377. A wise man should maintain his composure although the ruler does what?

PARAPHRASE 10:1-4

A large amount of perfumer's oil is ruined by a few dead flies. They send forth a vile odor, putrify and negate the value of the oil. So even a little foolishness may outweigh wisdom and honor. A wise man's mind will lead him to the right while a fool's mind will lead him to the left—as one thinks so he will act. Even the walk of a foolish man manifests his foolishness. His heart and understanding fail him and he demonstrates to all who look upon him that he is a fool. Suppose the ruler himself loses control of his temper, acts the part of a fool, and turns against you, do not flee from your position (the right side)—stand firm. Many great offenses have been diverted through patient resistance and a gentle spirit.

COMMENT 10:1-4

The unfortunate division of the chapter at this point suggests that the author is turning to a new subject. However, the following eleven verses are a series of sayings and illustrations which further demonstrate the principles set forth in the close of chapter nine.

v. 1 "Dead flies" are literally "flies of death." The statement at the close of the preceding chapter, "one sinner destroys much good," is metaphorically illustrated by the flies which

fall into the perfumer's oil. It is close to the statement of Paul that "a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough" (I Corinthians 5:6). A precious, expensive jar of mixed perfume can be ruined by the foreign influence of dead flies. So the most noble monarch or righteous person could be destroyed by one sinful act. The concept of "flies of death" is purposely intended to be much stronger than the fact that a fly falls into the oil. The flies are poisonous, destructive creatures which can potentially corrupt and destroy. One who is great in "wisdom" and "honor" may fall prey to evil and thus meet with destruction.

Even in life, how often does the one secret, unconfessed sin poison the mind until it renders the whole of man useless? Surely, "a little foolishness is weightier than wisdom and honor."

The costly perfume is putrified and made to "stink." Thus the value of the perfume as well as its practical use is nullified. The lesson of the "flies of death" serve to remind one that there is no such thing as insignificant sins.

v. 2 The association of good with the right hand and evil with the left hand is nothing new. Pagans have long believed that the right is synonymous with *good luck*, while the left is identified with *bad luck*. Although the Christian disdains attributing the events of life to luck, he recognizes that a distinction is made in the Bible concerning right and wrong in association with the right and left hands. (Cf. Matthew 25:31-33, 41; Luke 1:11; Acts 7:56)

It is commonly said today that "his heart is in the right place." By this one means that his heart directs him toward the right. For years many considered left-handed persons sinister, shifty and generally distrustful. This was true because the majority of people were right-handed. Thus the association of foolishness with the left, and wisdom with the right, was a natural distribution. The right hand has always been a place of honor while the left is one of less importance. It is this and nothing more that should be made from the comparison.

“Heart” is equal to the judgment of the mind as used in verse three and also in Proverbs 2:2; 14:33 and 15:28.

v. 3 Verses two and three should be considered together. The grammatical construction of the sentences is such that it is more the idea of following a direction of duty of obligation than placing the emphasis upon the hands. The fool of this verse shows no sense of direction. It is said of him that even when he walks along the road, “he demonstrates to everyone that he is a fool.” “Along the road” suggests that in his simplist acts he gives evidence of being a fool. If the mind is filled with folly, it isn’t long until such evil finds expression. If he had learned wisdom at home (Deuteronomy 6:4-9) he undoubtedly would have manifested it in the way.

v. 4 The figure of a “ruler” rising against the wise is revived. When this happens, one should not move from his place or “position,” for truth does not change. (Cf. COMMENT 8:3) If one moves from his position of wisdom, his only alternative is to follow the behavior of the fool. Thus, the verse admonishes one to remain consistent in following the greatest of all qualities—wisdom! Such “composure” practiced by the wise will “smother in the birth” great offenses. Study Proverbs 10:12; 15:1; 25:15; James 5:6-10. Examples from Old Testament history are found in Jacob overcoming Esau (Genesis 32-33) and David who triumphed over Saul (I Samuel 26).

FACT QUESTIONS 10:1-4

494. The first eleven verses of chapter ten illustrate what principle?
495. Explain the lesson taught by the “flies of death.”
496. Explain why people have ascribed evil to the left hand and good to the right hand.
497. What is implied by “along the road”?
498. What single alternative does one face when he chooses to forsake his wise position?
499. What happens when power is intrusted to unwise men?

(Cf. verse five)

500. State the truth amplified by verses six and seven.

2. Foolishness leads to humiliation. 10:5-7

TEXT 10:5-7

5 There is an evil I have seen under the sun, like an error which goes forth from the ruler—

6 folly is set in many exalted places while rich men sit in humble places.

7 I have seen slaves riding on horses and princes walking like slaves on the land.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 10:5-7

378. What is the reason given why “folly is set in many exalted places”?

379. Where did the “error” originate?

380. Identify the two illustrations of folly.

PARAPHRASE 10:5-7

When the ruler in the land makes a grave mistake, it results in evil doing under the sun. Folly itself is exalted in seats of dignity while the rich men sit in humble seats. Also, as a result of the error I have seen slaves riding on horses, and princes walking on the ground as if they were the slaves.

COMMENT 10:5-7

v. 5 The reader is now given a concrete example of the foolishness of the ruler. When power or authority falls into the

hands of unwise men, errors are committed and injustice reigns. In verse four the ruler is a man whose spirit or temper is raised against his subjects. Jerome has erroneously suggested that the Ruler is God. He did not hold that God is capable of error or sin, but that men *think* his judgments at times are unequal. The context, however, rules out this possibility. Those who argue that God is meant as the Ruler base their reasoning, partly at least, on the fact that the term for ruler in verse four is *moshel* but in this verse it is *shallet*. However, one literary technique of Solomon in Ecclesiastes is the interaction of synonyms: e.g., the use of *adam lo* (man) (Cf. 7:20; 9:14), and *ish lo* (man) (Cf. 6:2; 7:5; 9:15). Delitzsch says that the author wished simply to avoid repetition.

vs. 6-7 Words which capture the sense of both verses are found in Proverbs 19:10: "Luxury is not fitting for a fool; much less for a slave to rule over princes." Verses six and seven are intended as an amplification of the truth stated in verse five.

It has been suggested that "folly" is to be understood as an abstract term for the more concrete "fools." Thus the *fools* are in juxtaposition to the *rich*. The social order is out of joint. The incongruity is a result of an incompetent ruler (verses 4-5). It is not that the Preacher's own standard is violated or that His criticism betrays his prejudice. It is undoubtedly a violation of general principle. Folly should not be exalted, and the rich, most likely representing the godly of Israel (Cf. Deuteronomy 15:4) should not be humiliated. In addition, slaves should not rule over princes. The lesson before the reader teaches that when men fail to follow the direction of wisdom, folly reigns and injustice permeates the entire society.

FACT QUESTIONS 10:5-7

501. What two things happen when authority falls into the hands of unwise men?
502. Explain why "ruler" is not a reference to God.

503. What has happened to the social order? Is this good? Explain.
504. Identify the lesson taught in this section.

3. Failures in life result from lack of wisdom. 10:8-11

TEXT 10:8-11

- 8 He who digs a pit may fall into it, and a serpent may bite him who breaks through a wall.
- 9 He who quarries stones may be hurt by them, and he who splits logs may be endangered by them.
- 10 If the axe is dull and he does not sharpen its edge, then he must exert more strength. Wisdom has the advantage of giving success.
- 11 If the serpent bites before being charmed, there is no profit for the charmer.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 10:8-11

381. The activities described in verse eight and nine are normal. The danger lies in the fact that what quality is missing in the activity?
382. A dull axe is symbolic of one who attempts to work without what?
383. When is it too late for a charmer: What lesson is taught by this illustration?

PARAPHRASE 10:8-11

The one who attempts to dig a pit for others will fall into it himself, and he who breaks down a stone wall will be bitten by a snake. The one who removes stones or hews out new stones will be hurt by them, and he who splits logs or fells trees will

suffer hurt. When one fails to sharpen the cutting edge of the axe, he will have to work doubly hard to accomplish his work. However, if he demonstrates wisdom in his action he will have great success. Why call in a snake charmer and pay him to charm the snake after it has already bitten. What wisdom is there in this?

COMMENT 10:8-11

The following four illustrations demonstrate further the foolishness of working without the aid of wisdom. In the midst of the illustrations the Preacher pauses for a moment to make clear the emphasis he wishes to make: He says, "Wisdom has the advantage of giving success."

v. 8 In a similar passage in Proverbs 26:26-27, the context suggests evil activity. If such is the case in this verse, the digging of a pit would be an effort to try and snare another person or do him harm. In like manner, breaking through a wall would imply that one would be making an effort to steal from his neighbor. In both instances wisdom would be lacking as it directs one in the path of righteousness. Consistent with this interpretation is Psalms 7:15-16; 57:6 and Amos 5:18-20. The principle of retribution, taught clearly in the verse, also fortifies the argument that the activity is of an evil nature. The one who digs a pit will fall into it, and the one who breaks through a wall will be bitten by a serpent. *The Amplified Bible* translates the verse: "He who digs a pit (for others) will fall into it, and whoever breaks through a fence or a stonewall, a serpent will bite him." Although most snakes in Palestine are harmless, there are some which are deadly.

v. 9 This verse does not suggest retribution as did the former verse. Rather, it speaks to the accidents which may result from common everyday work when wisdom is not employed. One does not have to work long in a stone quarry or logging camp until the potential dangers are evident. To quarry stones and split logs suggests building something new. Wisdom is an

essential element in such an enterprise.

v. 10 The "axe" may be symbolic of all implements used by men in the activities of their work. When wisdom is not employed the maximum benefit of all implements is lessened. One must exert much more energy when the edge of the ax has not been properly honed. The latter part of the verse may be translated, "Wisdom is profitable to *direct*." Perhaps more time would be consumed in planning the work and sharpening the tools, but such purposeful *direction* pays dividends in both the energy exerted and the amount of work accomplished. Once again the value of wisdom is demonstrated.

v. 11 This final illustration demonstrates the foolishness of neglecting opportunities. In this instance wisdom would have directed the one responsible for charming the snake to employ a charmer (one who tames or controls the snake) before he had displayed the snake. Eastern cultures have practiced snake charming for centuries. References to the practice are found elsewhere in the Old Testament. (Cf. Exodus 7:11; Psalms 58:5-6; Jeremiah 8:17) If one has the secret to charm the snake, but does not use it and is bitten by it, what benefit does he gain from such wisdom? To be bitten by a poisonous viper which spreads its destructive venom throughout the body, is likened unto a slanderer who by his words destroys the character of another. Note *the Amplified Bible* where the verse is rendered: "If the serpent bites before it is charmed, then it is no use to call a charmer, (and the slanderer is no better than the uncharmed snake)." Wisdom teaches that both the serpent and the slanderer be controlled before they have an opportunity to destroy. A similar analogy is made by Jesus in Matthew 23:33. It is one thing to possess wisdom, it is something else to use it to advantage.

FACT QUESTIONS 10:8-11

505. What emphasis do the four closing illustrations have in common?

506. The fact that one will be bitten by a serpent or fall into a pit suggests the activity described in verse eight is good or evil? Explain.
507. Why do the accidents recorded in verse nine happen?
508. If the axe represents all implements, what lesson is taught by the fact that it is not properly sharpened?
509. If one were wise, he would have done what with the serpent?

E. THOSE WHO WORK CONTRARY TO WISDOM
ARE REPREHENSIBLE. 10:12-20

1. Talkers and workers 10:12-15

TEXT 10:12-15

- 12 Words from the mouth of a wise man are gracious, while the lips of a fool consume him;
- 13 the beginning of his talking is folly, and the end of it is wicked madness.
- 14 Yet the fool multiplies words. No man knows what will happen, and who can tell him what will come after him?
- 15 The toil of a fool so wearies him that he does not even know how to go to the city.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 10:12-15

384. How dangerous are the lips of a fool?
385. The fool's words start out as folly and end up as what?
386. What effect does this have on the fool?
387. What effect does a fool's work have on his direction?

PARAPHRASE 10:12-15

The words of a wise man bring him honor and respect while a fool is actually consumed by his own words. The fool begins

his conversation with light-hearted and foolish nonsense, but before he is finished he is caught up in wicked and perverse madness. The fool may brag about his future plans but no man knows for sure what the future holds or what will happen after he is gone. The activities of a fool are so exhausting to him that he loses his orientation and can't even find his way to town.

COMMENT 10:12-15

v. 12 The same word used for *charming* the snake is used for *prayer* (lachash) in Isaiah 26:16. So in contrast to wrong speech, the verse begins with the idea that words from a wise man are gracious. Such gracious words of praise or encouragement of one's fellowman are considered "sacrifices" (Hebrews 13:15-16) as they proceed from the mouths of those who possess the true wisdom. On the other hand, the poison in the mouth of fools is reprehensible. This is true not only because it destroys others, but because it consumes the fool himself. A close parallel is found in "the tongue of the wise makes knowledge acceptable, but the mouth of fools spouts folly" (Proverbs 15:2). On the matter of gracious words, read Proverbs 22:11; Psalms 45:2; Luke 2:52; 4:22. On the matter of the self-destruction of the fool, read Psalms 5:10 and Proverbs 18:7.

v. 13 "As the proverb of the ancients says: 'Out of the wicked comes forth wickedness' " (I Samuel 24:13). The very beginning of the fool's conversation is foolishness. (Cf. James 3:8-13) While it is true that the beginning of the conversation of fools is found in jest and folly, before it is ended the element of evil characterizes their words. Here it is called "wicked madness." (Cf. COMMENT 7:25)

v. 14 The multiplying of the fool's words implies his boasting about tomorrow, his promised accomplishments, his own greatness, and his importance to his society. Yet, when he boasts of tomorrow, he is speaking of that which he knows the least. (Cf. James 4:13; Luke 12:18-20) The word used for

“fool” in this verse (sakal) means one who is a “dense, confused thinker.” In verse twelve the word for “fool” (kesil) means one who is possessed of an unwarranted self-confidence. There is undoubtedly a mixture of both as there would be in most fools. The words “what will happen,” and “what will be after him,” speak to the immediate future as well as the distant future—even after death. No man can predict the events of *tomorrow* with any certainty, how foolish to go about boasting of what one will do in the distant future.

v. 15 Two additional indicators of the fool are noted: (1) The toil or labor in which he engages is apart from God’s approval. It is of such a nature that he toils for nothing and is wearied by it. Habakkuk described nations who toil and grow weary for nothing—showing no profit (Habakkuk 2:13). (2) The second mark of the fool is the total absence of common sense. He is so void of understanding that he doesn’t know his way home. Current American proverbs which parallel this are: “He doesn’t know enough to come in when it rains”; “He is so ignorant that he can’t tie his own shoe strings.” He is indeed a fool because he brags endlessly of his future success, and yet his labor isn’t productive. If he cannot find his way over clearly marked roads, one could not expect him to succeed in his plans. The way to the city is the way most traveled and thus the easiest road to follow. Such facts heighten the ignorance of the fool.

FACT QUESTIONS 10:12-15

510. *Poison* in the mouth of fools will destroy whom? (Cf. verse 12)
511. The conversation of fools starts with jest but ends with what?
512. What characteristics mark the fools of verse fourteen?
513. Identify both ways one is proven to be a fool according to verse fifteen.
514. What is the significance of the statement: “He does not even know how to go to the city”?

2. Rulers 10:16-17

TEXT 10:16-17

- 16 Woe to you, O land, whose king is a lad and whose princes feast in the morning.
- 17 Blessed are you, O land, whose king is of nobility and whose princes eat at the appropriate time—for strength and not for drunkenness.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 10:16-17

388. Why is it a dangerous thing to have rulers who feast in the morning?
389. Why were they eating at this time (verse 17)?
390. A land is blessed when a king eats for what purpose?

PARAPHRASE 10:16-17

A country is in great trouble when the king behaves as a youth, and the princes frolic and feast in the morning hours! A country is rich whose king is concerned more with justice than he is with jesting, and eats to gain strength in order to carry out his labors rather than participating in drunkenness.

COMMENT 10:16-17

v. 16 The land is impoverished when the ruler behaves as a child. It does not mean that a young king would be a curse to a land. Josiah proved a blessing to Israel and became king when he was but eight years of age. Rehoboam is an illustration of the intent of the verse, when at forty-one years, he behaved with childish thoughts and in childish ways (II Chronicles 13:7). Compare with this Isaiah 3:12 where corrupted rulers are

described as women and children. (Cf. I Corinthians 14:20) The irresponsible behavior of childish kings carries over to the princes who start the day frolicking in intoxication and sensual enjoyment. They should have attended to honest work and important matters of state (Jeremiah 21:12). Isaiah also spoke of similar circumstances in 5:11-12: "Woe to those who rise early in the morning that they may pursue strong drink; who stay up late in the evening that wine may inflame them! And their banquets are accompanied by lyre and harp, by tambourine and flute, and by wine; but they do not pay attention to the deeds of the Lord. Nor do they consider the work of His hands." The lesson is clear: When wisdom is disregarded by the rulers of the land, the people will have to endure injustices and uncommon trials. The "woe" that comes upon them is the inescapable sorrow which results from the land being controlled by fools.

v. 17 In this verse the opposite picture is presented. The king is not only mature in his behavior, he is also of *noble* birth. Noble not only in blood, but also in virtuous behavior. No longer is the true prince walking upon the ground while the fool triumphs on horseback. Wisdom reigns. The Jews assign to the word "noble" the idea of "freeborn." This suggests a greater opportunity for one to enjoy learning and the employment of wisdom. Such men would be a blessing rather than a curse to the land. Such wise men will eat for strength and not for sensual enjoyment. They will judge wisely in the morning hours rather than selfishly pursue the pleasures of the flesh. Instead of harsh judgments and sorrow falling upon the land, the land is blessed and happy. (Cf. Isaiah 32:8; 31:4)

FACT QUESTIONS 10:16-17

515. How do irresponsible, childish kings start their days?
 516. What is the "woe" experienced by such a country?
 517. Describe the conditions in the land where wisdom reigns.

3. Warnings 10:18-20

TEXT 10:18-20

- 18 Through indolence the rafters sag, and through slackness the house leaks.
- 19 Men prepare a meal for enjoyment, and wine makes life merry, and money is the answer to everything.
- 20 Furthermore, in your bedchamber do not curse a king, and in your sleeping room do not curse a rich man, for a bird of the heavens will carry the sound, and the winged creature will make the matter known.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 10:18-20

391. What two things are said to happen to a house when a lazy man lives within?
392. Instead of repairing the house, the lazy man plans for what?
393. The indolent man looks upon what as an answer to everything?
394. Explain how the truth which states, "Be sure your sins will find you out!" is illustrated in verse twenty.

PARAPHRASE 10:18-20

Because a man is lazy and concerned only with merriment, the rafters of his house sag and soon he will have a leaky house. His whole attitude toward life is colored by his slackness. He makes a feast for enjoyment, pours wine for enjoyment, and believes every problem he has can be resolved with money. Do not revile a king, not even in the privacy of your own mind. Do not revile a rich man, not even in the privacy of your own bedroom. You can be sure they will learn of your thoughts and your words—a winged creature, like a bird, will carry your voice and disclose to others what you say.

COMMENT 10:18-20

A demonstration of the supreme value of wisdom over folly continues in the closing three verses of this chapter. It is illustrated, however, through three negative warnings. The subject of the discussion turns from the examples of noble and honorable men to the foolish rulers and the blight cast upon the land as a result of the attitudes and actions. Since the rulers or king serves as the subject, the use of "rafters" and "house" should be taken figuratively for the nation's state of affairs. Solomon was bordering upon the brink of rebellion. Both Rehoboam and Jeroboam were setting their sights on the throne. Although the picture is applicable to the later Persian period and well represents the conditions of that day, it also vividly describes the conditions in the day of Solomon. As a matter of fact, the principles which are interwoven throughout the narrative are applicable in any generation where the leaders are given to wine, merriment and money, and where a segment of godly souls long for the restoration of justice, righteousness and honor.

v. 18 "Indolence" is an intensive word and in the original language, it carries the idea of *much* slothfulness. Not just one idle hand, but both are meant. A vivid picture of such laziness is presented in Proverbs 26:14-16: "As the door turns on its hinges, so does the sluggard on his bed. The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; he is weary of bringing it to his mouth again. The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can give a discreet answer." Since those who are in control have little welfare for their subjects, the judicial matters go unattended. The picture of a house is introduced to convey a common illustration which would be understood by all, and actually experienced by some. First the rafters sag and through inattentiveness the house leaks. When those in authority are more concerned with their own personal pleasure (Cf. 1:2-10) than the welfare of the state, even the innocent suffer. (Cf. Amos 6:6) How different the admonition toward industry found in chapter nine verse ten! *Diligent work is the way*

of wisdom.

v. 19 It is because of the three erroneous attitudes expressed in this verse that the condition discussed in verse eighteen existed. Instead of repairing the breaches, the officials seek a feast, wine and money. They spend their time and energy in revelry rather than looking after the affairs of the state. A Jewish tradition puts the following words in the mouth of Solomon's mother as she scolds him for just such irresponsible behavior for a king: "Do not give your strength to women, or your ways to that which destroys kings. It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to desire strong drink. Lest they drink and forget what is decreed, and pervert the rights of all the afflicted. Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to him whose life is bitter. Let him drink and forget his poverty, and remember his trouble no more. Open your mouth for the dumb, for the rights of all the unfortunate. Open your mouth, judge righteously, and defend the rights of the afflicted and needy."

"Money answers all." How did Solomon acquire the money to carry out his outlandish experiments, and pursue his luxurious personal pleasures? *The Amplified Bible* says that he "depends on (tax) money to answer for all of it" (10:19c). Solomon taxed the people heavily and survived the criticism of the people. However, upon his death excessive taxation proved to be the undoing of Rehoboam and occasioned the loss of the ten tribes. In troubled times, when justice is perverted, money is secured from many illegitimate sources. Extortion, exorbitant taxation, bribes, and numerous opportunities for graft are only a few examples. Thus, money grants all that *such* people want. It is of course a perversion that money answers all. Truly it is more than just perversion, it is *idolatry*. Meander says: "Silver and gold,—these are according to my opinion, the most useful gods; if these have a place in the house, wish what you wilt, all will be thine." Such is the obsession which conquers the fool. The Preacher is already on record concerning the superiority of wisdom over money. Not only is wisdom greater than money, it has the

inherent quality of preserving "the lives of its possessors" (7:11-12). Of course the philosophy that money will resolve every problem and supply the answer to every desire is the expression of the sinner, not the godly of Israel.

v. 20 In the concluding verse, wise counsel is offered to those who must suffer through the abuse of leaders whose character has been identified in the preceding verses. It is dangerous to react in an unwise way to the behavior of leaders who work contrary to the will of God. Thus the warning, "Curse not the king." The motive of prudence is sufficient for one to refrain from lifting a voice against the king—one should have regard for his own personal safety. The idea of cursing either God or the ruler is prohibited (Exodus 22:28). Here the word "curse" means "speaking lightly of." The "bird of the heavens," and "the winged creatures" simply means, in almost every culture, that secrets have wings. Words spoken in confidence often find wings and fly to the ears of those spoken about. Today one would say, "a little bird told me." Jesus said, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Luke 6:45). One must guard against entertaining evil thoughts in the heart, for in some unguarded moment the words will find their way through the lips to the ears of others.

FACT QUESTIONS 10:18-20

518. What is meant by "rafters" and "houses" if they are taken figuratively?
519. In what way is such a picture applicable to Solomon's latter reign?
520. How intense is the laziness mentioned in verse eighteen?
521. What will take care of *all* the problems according to unwise rulers?
522. How did Solomon acquire his riches?
523. In what sense does the statement "money answers all" suggest idolatry?
524. Why is wisdom greater than money? (Cf. verse 19; 7:11-12)

525. Explain what is meant by the statement: “*Prudence* is sufficient for one to refrain from lifting a voice against the king.”
526. Why refer to a “bird” and “winged creatures” when speaking of words spoken in private?

F. EXHORTATIONS TO WORK IN HARMONY
WITH WISDOM 11:1—12:8

1. Trust God and be cheerful in all of your activities. 11:1-8

TEXT 11:1-8

- 1 Cast your bread on the surface of the waters, for you will find it after many days.
- 2 Divide your portion to seven, or even to eight, for you do not know what misfortune may occur on the earth.
- 3 If the clouds are full, they pour out rain upon the earth; and whether a tree falls toward the south or toward the north, wherever the tree falls, there it lies.
- 4 He who watches the wind will not sow and he who looks at the clouds will not reap.
- 5 Just as you do not know the path of the wind and how bones are formed in the womb of the pregnant woman, so you do not know the activity of God who makes all things.
- 6 Sow your seed in the morning, and do not be idle in the evening, for you do not know whether morning or evening sowing will succeed, or whether both of them alike will be good.
- 7 The light is pleasant, and it is good for the eyes to see the sun.
- 8 Indeed, if a man should live many years, let him rejoice in them all, and let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many. Everything that is to come will be futility.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 11:1-8

395. After reading this section (verses one-eight), list at least five principles on stewardship which are taught here.
396. What is meant by the figure of speech which states "Cast your bread upon the surface of the waters"?
397. Is benevolence taught in verse two? Explain.
398. Identify the arguments used to establish the fact that one should plant his crops regardless of the weather signs.
399. Give evidence that weather is under the control of God.
400. What two things should a man do if he lives a long time (verse eight)?

PARAPHRASE 11:1-8

Do not be afraid to send forth your merchandise upon the waters in commercial trade—you will surely have a good return although you may have to wait a long time. Divide into portions what you have—seven or even eight parts—as you know not what evil will come on the earth. If clouds are full of rain, they will empty themselves upon the earth. If the wind blows from either the north or south and blows the tree over, in the place where the tree falls, there it remains. Since these illustrations speak to truth, one cannot afford to be too cautious or wait too long to sow. If you wait until all weather conditions are just exactly right before you sow, you will never reap a crop. You do not know the path the wind follows or the way bones are formed in the womb of a pregnant woman. Neither do you know how God works in all the things He does. Therefore, sow your seed from daylight until dark for you have no way of discovering at this time whether the morning or the evening sowing will produce the best harvest. Perhaps both the morning and evening sowing will be good. Indeed the light of day is sweet! It is very pleasant for one to work in the sunshine. If you are fortunate to live many years in the sunlight, rejoice in them all. One thing you can be certain of—the days of darkness will be many: all that lies ahead is emptiness and futility.

COMMENT 11:1-8

To teach through precepts and proverbs was characteristic of the wise men of Solomon's day. He includes himself in this category (12:9). In what is considered among the most beautiful language in the Bible, the Preacher now turns to his final advice. He urges his readers to trust God and work hard! He demonstrates a concern for the happiness of others (note the difference in attitude from that found in 2:1-11), and urges wise industry, combined with pleasure, before old age makes such activity impossible.

This division, which includes verses one through seven of chapter twelve with chapter eleven, is accepted by most modern commentators. The emphasis is thrilling and exciting: Give of your substance and yourself; above all, make the most of your youth. Enjoy. How badly youth need this lesson today. There is no curtailment from God on approved pleasure. No somber, spiritual straight jacket for the believer. "Rejoice," "let your heart be pleasant," "remove vexation," "put away pain," "follow the impulses of your heart and desires of your eyes" are all admonitions to enjoy life. Just remember, the Preacher warns, "God will bring you to judgment." The spirit of this final section under discussion is that one should find the work and happiness which God approves and pursue it with all his strength.

vs. 1-2 These two verses should be considered together. It is possible that the second verse is an explanation of the metaphor in verse one. However, the exact meaning of both verses is much contested. It is highly improbable that the actual meaning and application can be made with any certainty. No less than six distinct explanations have been offered by commentators. Some are so fanciful that they do not merit consideration.¹ The two views which are most generally held are:

¹ For a review of the various interpretations of these two verses, one should study the two following sections:

George A. Barton. *The International Critical Commentary: The Book of Ecclesiastes*. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), pp. 181-183.

George A. Buttrick (ed.). *The Interpreter's Bible*, V. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), pp. 81-82.

(1) The traditional Jewish view holds that the lesson is one of charity, and that one's benevolence should be practiced freely without a view to personal return. There is the awareness, however, that should one give freely of his substance, in due season a substantial gain will be forthcoming. (2) The other interpretation encourages the daily pursuit of labor, resigning oneself to the providence of God's certain control and promise of future reward.

The image of a trading ship is understood as the meaning of "cast your bread on the surface of the waters." "Cast" means "send forth" and coincides with a merchant sending forth his ships laden with trade goods. One does not know when the ship will return. Often large periods of time lapsed before the ship arrived at home port with goods in trade. Solomon practiced such ventures as it is recorded of him that "the king had at sea the ships of Tarshish with the ships of Hiram; once every three years the ships of Tarshish came bringing gold and silver ivory and apes and peacocks" (I Kings 10:22). (Cf. Proverbs 31:14) The idea is that just as the ship returns to reward the one who sent it forth, so God will restore generously the one who demonstrates compassion upon others. A beautiful description of this principle was written by Solomon. He said, "He who is gracious to a poor man lends to the Lord, and He will repay him for his good deed" (Proverbs 19:17).

The division into seven parts suggests in the metaphor that one is wise if he does not trust his entire fortune to one ship. The idea is to help many different people. The additional thought of the "eight" divisions may imply an unlimited number and could be expressed by "seven and *more*." This would be making friends "for yourselves by means of the mammon of unrighteousness" (Luke 16:9). As one would say today, it is unwise "putting all one's eggs in the same basket." The "misfortune" is thus understood to be an evil that results in loss of possessions or friends, and since one has helped numerous individuals, when his time of need is apparent, help will be forthcoming.

If the saying "Cast your bread on the surface of the waters"

is taken at face value, it would mean that one freely and generously distributes his riches to those in need. It carries the idea of doing good without hope of gratitude or return. (Cf. Luke 6:32-35) Although the motive is pure there is the promise that "you will find it after many days." As Ranston said, "Be generous, do not be narrow in your liberality; even on the thankless waters scatter broadcast the seeds of kindness; be sure that sooner or later you will be rewarded."²

What if the Preacher's intention is not to teach benevolence? What other lesson is justified by these two verses? Assuming continuity in the writing of Ecclesiastes, which has been consistently demonstrated, a close study of the context suggests that the subject at hand is the same subject discussed in chapter ten and obviously pursued in verses three through six of chapter eleven. What is this subject? It is the idea that the way of wisdom is superior to the way of the fool. Although one cannot control the acts of nature (God) or the evil misfortunes produced by fools (sometimes rulers) there is the admonition in the midst of it all to simply trust God—there are certain things one neither knows nor controls which may have tremendous effects upon his life, yet he must work with all his might and commit himself to God's providential care. The figure of speech—"Cast your bread on the surface of the waters"—need not be restricted to a single aspect of one's work or labor. Let it speak to the total picture of industry. Let it encompass charity, but allow more than this. If one's life is lived in its totality according to the righteous rules and principles preached by Koheleth in his book, then the reward will assuredly come to him "after many days."

Verse two is simply an admonition to be wise in various activities of life. Allow wisdom to prepare one for the unexpected misfortunes of life which are beyond control. Note how the following verses fortify this argument.

v. 3 One law of God which alters man's activities upon the

² Harry Ranston. *Ecclesiastes and Early Greek Wisdom Literature*. (London: Epworth Press, 1925), p. 40.

earth, and over which man has absolutely no control, is the fact that when "the clouds are full, they pour out rain upon the earth." A similar example of the same principle is seen in the fact that a tree remains where it falls. E. M. Zerr comments: "This verse is to be considered especially in connection with the last clause of the preceding verse. The laws of nature are fixed so that man should make use of present opportunities for doing good, before some action of nature (which is unseen and unavoidable) cuts off the opportunity."³

Man may fret or even suffer over too much rain or too little, but he cannot control it. The tree falls very likely from the blowing of the wind. Note the use of "south" and "north" in this verse as well as in chapter one verse six. The tree could have been a fruit tree in full bloom or a much desired shade tree, but man does not prevent its destruction. The following verse describes how wise men act under such circumstances. One must admit to conditions of life which are beyond his control.

v. 4 The admonition which states, "whatever your hands find to do, verily, do it with all your might" (9:10), is not heeded by the one who excessively worries over matters he cannot control. Under all circumstances one should do the very best work he can and let God care for him. The wind may threaten to blow away the seeds at sowing time, and the clouds threaten to drop heavy rains to damage or destroy the harvest. (Cf. I Samuel 12:7; Proverbs 26:1) However, one must employ wise judgment, not fear or inactivity under such circumstances. There is no assurance for the farmer who does the best he can, but he does something.

Some see in the verse a broader application than literal sowing and reaping which would have special meaning for farmers. Luther said it pertains "in general to all human activity, but especially to charity." Delitzsch said, "The cultivation of the land is the prototype of all labor."⁴ (Cf. Genesis 2:15b) The

³ E. M. Zerr. *Bible Commentary*, III (Marion, Indiana: Cogdill Foundation Publications, 1954), p. 224.

⁴ Delitzsch. *op. cit.*, p. 395.

principle established in verse one and amplified in these verses is applicable to many situations, but it serves the purpose of the Preacher's reasoning to view it in the context of the farmer who is always watching the skies and fails to sow his crop.

v. 5 The Preacher is still discussing "the activity of God." One should not stumble over the difficulty of understanding the first part of this verse and miss the obvious. There are two examples presented in the verse which illustrate the mysterious activities of God in nature. The point is made that one can not know what God does. This truth has been previously demonstrated. (Cf. 1:13; 3:10, 11; 8:17)

One difficulty is presented by the fact that the word translated "wind" (*ruach*) may also be translated "spirit." However, the wind has just been under consideration (verse four), and this could very well be a reflection of this same truth. We know, too, that Jesus discussed the subject in John 3:18 where He observed that the wind blows where it wishes but man doesn't know where it is going or where it came from. If the "wind" is misunderstood to be the true meaning, then there are two distinct illustrations.

On the other hand, if *ruach* is to be translated "spirit," then there is but one illustration as the "spirit" and "bones formed in the womb" would speak to the mysterious "making" of a baby—a mystery which even today baffles modern science. (Cf. Psalms 139:13-16)

Regardless of which interpretation is preferred, neither the essence nor the application of the lesson is changed. The point is that *man does not know* the activity of God.

"Who makes all things" does not speak to the total universe but rather specifically to things mentioned here such as wind and bones in the womb. Zerr observes, "The lesson still is that man should make use of present and known advantages, not waiting to figure out the ways of God as to the future."⁵

v. 6 The Preacher continues to admonish toward hard work.

⁵ Zerr. *op. cit.*, p. 224.

The positive emphasis "sow your seed," and the negative warning, "do not be idle," clearly demonstrates his intention. Repetition is a technique used in effective preaching. Restating this theme (Cf. verses three-four) is like hitting the same nail repeatedly until it is well-fastened (12:11). The specific explanation is found once again in the figure of the farmer who must work from morning until night, and in addition must trust God as he does not know which effort will succeed. The broader application would encourage one to work diligently at every task he undertakes as this is obviously the overriding message which Solomon relentlessly preaches.

v. 7 "To see the sun" may communicate no other meaning than to be alive. (Cf. 6:5; 7:11) The basic *joy of living* is the tenor of Solomon's emphasis now, but it is conveyed through this verse by the words "pleasant" and "good," and not necessarily by "to see." Solomon's quest is clearly set forth in 2:3, 24; 3:12; 22; 5:18 and 8:15. "Light" is a metaphor and represents life. No matter how difficult tasks may become, or how sad the circumstances surrounding life, it is still a good thing to be alive. Especially is this true when one is yet in his youth with health and vigor on his side. Oppression or misfortune could temporarily cause one to despair, but the energy of youth will assist one in rising above such adversity. The day will come when one edges toward the "darkness." (Cf. 12:2, 6-7) At that time, all opportunities for joyful activities will be lost.

v. 8 Here Solomon is careful to note that throughout life, from youth to old age, it is possible to find "good" and "pleasant" activities. How can one "rejoice" in "all" his days? The answer has been labored by the Preacher. It is best summarized by his own words, "Let your clothes be white all the time, and let not oil be lacking on your head. Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life, and and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun" (9:8-9).

The "days of darkness" do not refer to the "misfortunes"

which may occur on the earth. Neither do they refer to the end years of one's life. The reference is to the abiding place of the soul when it is no longer in the light or "under the sun." In other words it is the period of time one must spend in the grave or Sheol. (Cf. 9:10; Genesis 37:35; Job 21:13; 17:13; Isaiah 38:10) Solomon also uses the term "eternal home" (12:5) in describing Sheol. Such pensive meditation on the certainty of this truth has a sobering effect on the wise (7:2-4). He does not despair but becomes more determined that he will make the most of his opportunities. In the grave, when the soul abides in Sheol, "everything" will be futility. There is *nothing* that promises any kind of positive experience in the grave. How appropriate to this comment are the words of Jesus in John 9:4 when He said, "We must work the works of Him who sent me, as long as it is day; night is coming, when no man can work."

FACT QUESTIONS 11:1-8

527. What primary admonition to youth comes through in this section?
528. Youth should temper their activities remembering what future event?
529. What is the traditional Jewish view of verses one and two.
530. Explain the major alternative interpretation of verses one and two.
531. What is suggested by the division of one's goods into seven parts?
532. If "cast your bread on the surface of the water" speaks to the total of one's life, what is the lesson to be learned?
533. How do the "clouds" and the "tree" demonstrate that man has no control over certain activities of God?
534. What will keep one from meaningful industry?
535. What do the two examples in verse five illustrate?
536. What technique of preaching, mentioned in verse eleven of chapter twelve is used in verse six?

537. What two words in verse seven are to have special emphasis?
538. When will joyful activities be lost?
539. To what does "days of darkness" refer? (Cf. verse eight)

2. Enjoy the days of your youth. 11:9-10

TEXT 11:9-10

- 9 Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood. And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes. Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things.
- 10 So, remove vexation from your heart and put away pain from your body, because childhood and the prime of life are fleeting.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 11:9-10

401. Although young men are encouraged to enjoy their "childhood" and "young manhood," what warning should they remember (verse nine)?
402. Should youth follow *all* the "impulses" and "desires" of their heart? Discuss.
403. Why should young people withdraw from vexation and evil ("pain")?

PARAPHRASE 11:9-10

Make the most, young man, of your youth as well as your more mature young manhood. Rejoice and be happy in both of them! Follow the delight of your eyes and the way the desire of your heart leads you. Explore the many facets of life

utilizing all the vigor of your youth. However, keep ever before your eyes the fact that God will call you to account. Remove care and evil from your mind and body—these things will prove to rob you of your joy. Youth is fleeting and the vigor experienced in your manhood is soon lost.

COMMENT 11:9-10

v. 9 Note the Preacher's admonition is directed to young men. The youth have the pathway of life before them. Their hopes, dreams and ambitions will be shaped by attitudes formed while still young. Parker remarks: "Cohemoth thus does not fear to enforce religious considerations upon the young mind. How noble a spectacle is a young life of joy consecrated to the service of truth, eager in upholding the claims of all pureness and wisdom! There is no nobler sight in all the earth than consecrated youth, sanctified enthusiasm, exuberant joy, used as a stimulus in sacred service."¹

There is a unit relationship that exists in the admonitions in 11:9, 10 and 12:1. The unity of the section is somewhat minimized by the chapter break. However, Leupold² wisely points out that in verse nine, youth are to rejoice in all good things that give the heart true cheer; in verse ten he is told to put aside all that might interfere with such legitimate joy; and in chapter twelve verse one, provision is made for the youth to see that his roots are to run deep in *remembering God* which alone assures joy.

Solomon is encouraging the pursuit of pleasure tempered with the awareness that God will bring all activities into judgment. Some view the pleasures as sinful and thus the verse is taken as a prohibition or warning. The argument states that Solomon is using "stern irony" with a charge that one is free

¹ Joseph Parker. *The People's Bible*, XIV (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, n.d.), p. 114.

² Leupold. *op. cit.*, pp. 268-269.

to enjoy all the sinful pleasures that youth finds exciting, but one must not forget that God will inevitably bring all deeds to judgment. Such an interpretation, however, is totally foreign to the spirit of the passage. What is evident is the fact that in the prime of life all that is wholesome activity, and thus approved of God, should be pursued.

"Follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes." Job speaks of the heart following after the eyes (Job 31:7). This type of wholesome pleasure has previously been approved. (Cf. 2:10, 24; 3:12, 13, 22; 5:18; 8:15) Much of what the Preacher identifies as both wise and foolish, he has observed with his eyes. The eyes stimulate impulses and desires. The caution expressed here is toward the innocent use of sight and that which is pleasing to God. The caution comes in the stern form of a reminder "that God will bring you into judgment." One does not know many of the activities of God (verses five-six), but what he *must know* is that God will one day judge him. What is the nature of this judgment? Various views are offered: (1) The judgment is the pain and debility that comes to one in old age, but is increased because of the sowing of wild oats in one's youth. The more one corrupts his youth, the more he suffers in old age. (2) the calamities that befall one are the direct result of sins and should be interpreted as an outpouring of God's wrath. This kind of temporal judgment is in harmony with the principle of retribution previously discussed. (3) The interpretation which appears the most defensible in the light of 3:17; 12:1, 7 and 14 is that there will be a final time of judgment. The Preacher's view of the final judgment is not clear or detailed, but he appeals to proper behavior on the premise that such a judgment is coming. Existence beyond the grave was hinted at in 9:5, 6, 10 and confirmed in 12:7.

v. 10 Solomon now urges the removal of vexation and pain. The final argument offered which should motivate this action is that the years of youth are temporary. One should avoid that which injures the inner and the outer man—the spiritual and the physical. That which robs youth of good times, pleasant

days, desires of the eyes, and general happiness are to be shunned. The emphasis through this section is on a positive note. Young people are exhorted to find genuine joy in their youth. Sin brings decay and sickness (I Corinthians 6:18). For the person today who wishes to capture the same spirit of this passage, the words of Paul should be followed: "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (II Corinthians 7:1).

FACT QUESTIONS 11:9-10

540. What shapes the dreams of young men?
541. Explain the unity that exists in the three verses found in 11:9-10 and 12:1.
542. Why should the pleasures discussed in verses nine and ten be considered as wholesome and not evil?
543. What influence do the eyes have on the heart?
544. Identify the three possible types of judgment that lie before youth.
545. What is the final argument offered in verse ten?

3. Remember God in your youth. 12:1

TEXT 12:1

1 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 delight in them";

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 12:1

404. At what time in life should one remember God?
405. What are the "evil" days? (Cf. 11:8)

406. Young people are to enjoy and find delight in life. Is this same delight available all through life? Discuss.

PARAPHRASE 12:1

The evil days are coming! When they do come you will be unable to enjoy or find delight in them. My advice is to remember God the Creator while you are a young man and not wait until the joy of living is past.

COMMENT 12:1

v. 1 Young people are to have fun, but they are also to keep in mind who made them and why they were made. Since it is God who is the Creator, He has the right to speak through His servant and admonish toward wise behavior. Thus, not only should one remember God, he should allow God to influence all of life. Since God made man, He knows what will bring man happiness. The term "Creator" is definitely a reference to God as it is the participle form of the same word translated in Genesis 1:1 which speaks of God's creative work. It is also a plural form which suggests to many a reference to the work of the Godhead.

Since youth and strength are both marked by vanity—that is they are very fleeting—it is foolish to waste them. There is not a better time to follow God than in one's youth! The open grave invites all men too soon, even as the Psalmist said, "My days are like a lengthened shadow; and I wither away like grass" (Psalms 102:11). Now, however, life is vigorous, the accent is on youth, the joys are sweet, the time to be alive is now. Soon the joys which are now within the reach of youth will slip away. Man always moves into the period of decline. One has wisely expressed the experience of growing old as "his last days sloped gently toward the grave."

"The evil days" are obviously a reference to the following

graphic pictures presented by the Preacher of the final, crippling stages of old age. Previously "The days of darkness" (11:8), referred to the grave, but this is not the meaning here. "I have no delight" means that such closing years of life have lost the pleasure of youth and the prime of life. One does not find pleasure in the loss of strength, eyesight, and hearing; or does he look forward to the time when he no longer can walk or properly chew his food.

FACT QUESTIONS 12:1

546. What is the significance of speaking of God as Creator?
 547. Explain what is meant by "the evil days."

G. DEATH COMES TO EVERY MAN. 12:2-8

TEXT 12:2-8

- 2 before the sun, the light, the moon, and the stars are darkened, and clouds return after the rain;
 3 in the day that the watchmen of the house tremble, and mighty men stoop, the grinding ones stand idle because they are few, and those who look through windows grow dim;
 4 and the doors on the street are shut as the sound of the grinding mill is low, and one will arise at the sound of the bird, and all the daughters of song will sing softly.
 5 Furthermore, men are afraid of a high place and of terrors on the road; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags himself along, and the caperberry is ineffective. For man goes to his eternal home while mourners go about in the street.
 6 Remember Him before the silver cord is broken and the golden bowl is crushed, the pitcher by the well is shattered and the wheel at the cistern is crushed;
 7 Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the

spirit will return to God who gave it.

8 "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "all is vanity!"

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 12:2-8

407. Identify all that will be withheld from the eyes when one finally loses his sight in old age (verse two)?
408. If the darkness in verse two is the same as that of 11:8, to what does it refer?
409. After reading through verses three through five, find the corresponding word or phrase which best matches the following parts of the body: (1) white hair; (2) the eyes; (3) the molar teeth; (4) the feet and knees; (5) the hands and arms; (6) the voice and ears; (7) the lips. For additional explanation of these analogies, study the COMMENTS on 12:3-5.
410. What is man's "eternal home" (verse five)?
411. When man has gone to his "eternal home," who goes about in the streets?
412. The *two* figurative descriptions presented in verses two-five and verses six-seven picture what stage or event in life?
413. It is good for a man when he comes to the end of life if he remembered whom in the days of his youth?
414. What happens to the physical body at death?
415. What happens to the spirit of man when the body dies?

PARAPHRASE 12:2-8

The time will come when your sight will be diminished and you will no longer see the light from the sun, moon, or stars. At this time the clouds of sorrow return. When that day comes, the protectors of the house will tremble and the powerful, upright, strong men will be bent low, the grinders will have to stop because they are few, and they will see only darkness who look out through the windows. As the sound of the grinding

mill fades away, the doors to the street will be closed. One will be surprised at the sound of a bird as all who sing songs will be hushed. Also, when the hair becomes as the blooms of the almond tree the old will fear high places and dangers along the way. The ability to move about as a grasshopper will fail. The appetite and drives of life will vanish. The reason for this inactivity is that man is nearing his final resting place—his everlasting home. Listen! The mourners go about the streets and into the market places. It is important, therefore, to remember God before the silver cord pulls apart or the golden bowl is broken, before the pitcher is broken at the spring or the water wheel breaks down at the cistern. At that time the body will return to the earth from which it originally came, and the spirit will return to God who gave it. Life is indeed transitory. Like a vapor of vapors, life quickly fades from view. All is futility and unfulfilling.

COMMENT 12:2-8

This section pictures the final "evil days" which await men. Death terminates the decaying process and the Preacher appropriately turns to the oft-repeated "vanity of vanities." Nowhere in the book could the idea of transitoriness be more to the point than in verse eight.

v. 2 This verse most logically represents the end of life under the sun. "Light" is used throughout the Bible for *life* and *joy*. In this context it undoubtedly refers to life. Just as man's life slowly slips toward the grave, so the light diminishes: first the sun and then the lesser light, the moon; finally the faintest light represented by the stars. The diminishing order of light is intentionally arranged to represent life from "childhood" to the "prime of life" until the "evil days." Each light is finally extinguished and the darkness (death) comes. "Clouds" are symbolic of trouble and could refer to the judgment. Usually the clouds and rain pass and the sun shines to renew happiness and joy. This time, however, the storm continues with the

threatening clouds returning *after* the rain. Although this interpretation is imaginative and without definite support, it fits the context of the book and the immediate context of this section.

v. 3 This highly figurative language (verses three-five) has challenged the imagination and inventiveness of many. There is general unanimity, however, that regardless of the individual meaning given to each symbol, the passage is describing the frailties of old age, and ultimately of death itself.

The "house" represents the whole person while the "watchmen" would be the arms or hands. They are the protectors or guards of the house. They were mentioned first because they would be noticed first. They are also afflicted with palsy and thus tremble. Scriptural references of the body likened unto a house are found in II Corinthians 5:1-4; II Peter 1:13-14.

"The mighty men" are the legs which now are bent and stooped. Man can no longer walk erectly. Formerly the legs carried the youth pillars of strength, but now they are feeble.

"The grinding ones" are the teeth. They cease to function and "stand idle," because they are few and undoubtedly arranged in such a way that they are inefficient in the chewing process. The "millers" (grinders) is the feminine form. This is probably because women did the grinding. (Cf. Exodus 11:5; Job 31:10; Isaiah 47:2; Matthew 24:41)

"Those who look through windows" refer to the eyes. No longer will they see the light under the sun. The sun, moon and stars will only be a memory as they begin to experience total darkness.

v. 4 "The doors" refer to the mouth. Such reference is given in Psalms 141:3: "Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips." It is possible that since the teeth are nearly gone, the lips now shut more closely. The chewing is then described by "a door opening onto a street so the sound inside could not be heard by those on the street."¹

¹ E. M. Zerr. *op. cit.*, p. 225.

Also, in Hebrew, the form is dual and may refer to the double door (*lips*): "On the streets" suggests communication with the world, but now such activity has ceased. In youth the appetite is keen and the mouth is employed in work and pleasure, but now the lips are drawn over the toothless gums and "the sound of the grinding mill is low."

"The sound of the bird" has numerous interpretations, but the one that appears most likely suggests that older people arise at the *same time* as the first sounds of birds in the morning. It does not follow that they are awakened by the chirping sparrow or crowing rooster, but they are anxious to start the day after restless and sometimes painful nights. The hearing is impaired and thus they would not be wakened by the faint chirp of the small bird.

"The daughters of song" represent the voice and ears of the aged when they no longer can produce melodious songs or discern those sung by others. When David offered to take Barzillai to Jerusalem and care for him in return for favors previously received, Barzillai answered him with the words: "How long have I yet to live, that I should go up with the king to Jerusalem? I am now eighty years old. Can I distinguish between good and bad? Or can your servant taste what I eat or what I drink? Or can I hear any more the voice of singing men and women? Why then should your servant be an added burden to my lord the king?" (II Samuel 19:34-35). To the elderly, the notes of song run together and the tones are indistinct. On the basis of this, some interpret the former "sound of the bird" to be a description of the high, shrill voice of the older person when he arises at the early hour. The fact that the "daughters of song will sing softly" implies deafness and supports the interpretation that this section refers to the voice and ears.

v. 5 "Men are afraid of a high place" is to be taken literally. The preacher departs from the highly figurative language and states a universal truth in simple language. When one grows old and his speech and hearing are dulled, he often finds difficulty in ascending steps or hills, and is often short of breath.

The energy which such activity demands is now missing. The strong muscles are atrophied, and the bones, which carried him securely and confidently in his youth, are bowed and fragile.

"Terrors on the road" could refer to the obstacles over which they would stumble or wicked individuals against whom they would have little or no defense. The obvious interpretation, however, would be to simple travel on the way. Their bones are brittle, their muscles are weak, and they have difficulty ascending even the slightest incline. Narrow and crowded streets would enhance the difficulty.

"The almond tree blossoms" refers to the white hair which indicates he is come to the final stages of life and is "ripening for the tomb." The almond tree first puts forth light, pink blossoms which turn snowy white before falling from the limbs to the ground.

"The grasshopper drags himself along" is clearly a vivid analogy of the inept physical condition of the dying man. Biblical analogy would point also to the symbol of smallness. (Cf. Numbers 13:33; Isaiah 40:22) In the light of this it would be understood that the message is, that to the elderly, even the most insignificant task becomes a burden. However, the comparison of the condition of the elderly with that of the appearance of the grasshopper best fits the context. Note the following description: "The dry, shriveled, old man, his backbone sticking out, his knees projecting forwards, his arms backwards, his head down, and the apophyses enlarged, is like that insect."²

"The caperberry" is also translated "desire" and "appetite." The difficulty in translation stems from the fact that the word appears only here in the entire Old Testament. "Caperberry" would necessitate a figurative meaning while "desire" or "appetite" would be literal. This does not aid the translation,

² Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, David Brown. *A Commentary: Critical Experimental, and Practical on the Old and New Testaments*, II (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973), p. 542.

however, as both figurative and literal terms are used in the Preacher's picture of old age and death. The caperberry is considered a stimulant and the obvious meaning is that neither the appetite or sexual desire can be aroused. Since the caperberry was not believed to be an aphrodisiac until the Middle Ages, the safe explanation would be that the stimulant is to preserve life (through eating, which desire is often lost in old age) not propagate it. However, as Luther says, "all desire fails," and again, "an old man has pleasure in nothing."

"The eternal home" or "house of eternity" speaks more to *duration* than it does to the place. It is a future state of being as compared with the existence "under the sun." Life here is transitory compared with "eternal" life there. The term "eternal home" is found only in Ecclesiastes. Characteristic of inspired literature, the meaning of certain terms often penetrate beyond the limits of man's present knowledge. Future revelation, on the same subject, often amplifies the meaning, and it becomes clear that God *intended* for the reader to look back and see that the term held the full-grown truth in seed form. The terms used by Solomon, who claims inspiration for his writing (12:11) are exact. However, the understanding of the terms, even by the author, is often very limited. Solomon says nothing to negate the richness of the full orb of the doctrine of eternal life taught by Jesus and the Apostles.

On the subject of the "eternal home," read and study Job 10:21; 30:23; Psalms 49:11 and John 14:1-6.

"The mourners" are, as tradition teaches, the paid "wailers" who prepare even before the death event to make loud lamentation in the streets and places of commerce. (Cf. II Samuel 3:31; Jeremiah 9:17; 34:5; Amos 5:16-17; Matthew 9:23; 11:17) The implication of such terms as "silver" and "gold" in the following verse would suggest affluency on the part of the one about to be mourned.

v. 6 The translators add "remember" because the "before" of this verse refers one to 12:1 where the Preacher is admonishing young men to live their lives in harmony with the designs of their Creator.

Two distinct figures are mentioned in this verse which speak to the final termination of life under the sun. The preceding detailed insights to the frailties of old age were intended to motivate young men to live thier lives to the fullest joys (Cf. 11:9-10) *before* the body breaks and the soul slips away.

"The silver cord" and "golden bowl" are to be considered together. They represent the lamp which hangs from the ceilings of oriental or near-eastern homes. The cord is interspersed with silver and the lamp itself is made of gold. Nothing is intended beyond the fact that life, like silver and gold, is valuable and much to be desired. The intention is to show that "light," which is here symbolic of one's life, is going to be extinguished regardless of how fine it is. Death does not come because one terminates his own life, but the cord *breaks* allowing the bowl to fall to the floor and break and the oil to be released upon the floor. The separation of the oil from the container negates the utilitarian purpose of the lamp. The original design of the lamp has been thwarted; the value of the practical aspect of the lamp is now nullified. So when death comes, the body returns to its source and the spirit slips away.

"The pitcher" and "the wheel" illustrate the same truth as the cord and lamp. The symbol is different, however, as the lamp represents life as light and the pitcher represents life as water. Jesus took advantage of both physical symbols to demonstrate spiritual truths. (Cf. John 8:12; 9:5 and John 4:10-11; 7:38) The NASB mentions both "well" and "cistern." The broken pitcher would render the well useless, while the wheel which falls into the cistern when it breaks, prevents the water from being drawn. The intent of both pictures painted by Solomon in this verse is intentionally clear in the following observation.

v. 7 Throughout the book the Preacher's emphasis has been on the transitory nature of man, and the fact that he, together with the world in which he lives, has been marked by vanity. (Cf. COMMENT 6:10) The body of man returns to its primary source—the dust of the earth. The admonition to the young man to enjoy life in his youth is based on the fact

that man will soon begin to die and move slowly toward the dust.

"The dust will return to the earth as it was." This doctrine complements similar passages on the same subject. The Preacher has previously stated that "all (men and beasts) came from the dust and all return to the dust" (3:20). (Cf. Genesis 2:7; 3:19; Job 34:14-15; Psalms 104:29) In this section (verses two-six) there has been strong emphasis upon the *dust nature* of men. When the spirit is released from the body through the death event, it does not join the process of decay and regression, but it returns to God.

"The spirit will return to God who gave it." Solomon's reference to God as Creator has established a principle of ownership. He now argues for right behavior on the basis of the certainty of final retribution. The judgment is a doctrine which has already been introduced but now takes on major intensity as the Preacher moves through the final stages of his arguments. There is no full doctrine of immortality taught here, but the fact of eternal life is not denied and the spirit is distinguished from the body with the emphasis upon the fact that it is the spirit that God receives. For the sinner, the ungodly person who has been described so often throughout the book, there is nothing for him to anticipate but the depressing picture of death and then the sudden and sure appearing before God's judgment. Leupold wisely states that Solomon is teaching such a judgment as a motivating factor to lead all men to live righteously. He adds, "You personally will at your death appear before the judgment seat of God, therefore get ready."³

v. 8 There is nothing new in this verse that has not already been thoroughly discussed, but the insertion of the subtheme of the book (Cf. 1:2) at this particular place serves to prove that the Preacher believes that such "vanity" has been sufficiently demonstrated. It serves to terminate his discussion in the first part of this chapter, and also introduces the final

³ Leupold, *op. cit.*, p. 287.

section of the book. Hengstenberg offers a word of warning when he writes, "The knowledge of the vanity of earthly things conducts to the fear of God afterwards recommended. Since all things are vain, man, who is subject to vanity, should do all in his power to enter into a living relation to Him who is the true absolute being, and through fellowship with him to participate, himself, in a true eternal being."⁴

The fact that Solomon once again refers to himself as "the Preacher" reflects upon the hortatory nature of the closing two chapters of the book. Especially is he eloquent in this final section. In the epilogue (verse nine through fourteen) he speaks of himself as the Preacher two more times. Never can a preacher reach a higher pinnacle of confidence than when he claims divine authority for his message. The following "conclusion of the whole matter" is driven to the heart with strong conviction.

FACT QUESTIONS 12:2-8

548. Why is it appropriate that the oft-occurring "vanity of vanities" *immediately* follows this section?
549. What is the significance of the "light" order of first the sun, then the moon and finally the stars?
550. What is significant about the fact that the clouds return again *after* the rain? Explain.
551. Although the language beginning in verse three is highly figurative, it is generally accepted that it has what meaning?
552. Identify the "house."
553. What is the significance of the "watchmen" *trembling*?
554. Why are the "grinding ones" in the feminine form in the original language?
555. "The doors" refer to what part of the body? The Hebrew

⁴ Hengstenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 257.

form is *dual* and implies what?

556. If the elderly are not *awakened* by the “sound of birds,” what is the significance of mentioning the birds?
557. Is verse five to be taken figuratively or literally? Explain.
558. Why are elderly people afraid to travel on the road?
559. Explain why the grasshopper is an appropriate symbol of the elderly.
560. How does Luther translate the *idea* that “the caperberry is ineffective”?
561. “The eternal home” suggests what primary lesson?
562. Why are the “mourners” going about the streets prior to the death of the elderly person?
563. The two figures in verse six suggest what event?
564. Explain the lesson of the “bowl.”
565. How does verse seven relate to the two symbols of verse six?
566. Why say the body will return to dust?
567. To what extent does Solomon explain the doctrine of immortality in verse seven? Discuss.
568. Identify the “sub-theme” of the book.

CONCLUSION 12:9-14

A. MAN IS ADMONISHED TO WORK IN HARMONY WITH GOD THROUGH THE WORDS OF ONE SHEPHERD. 12:9-12

TEXT 12:9-12

- 9 In addition to being a wise man, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, and he pondered, searched out and arranged many proverbs.
- 10 The Preacher sought to find delightful words and to write words of truth correctly.
- 11 The words of wise men are like goads, and masters of these collections are like well-driven nails; they are given by one

Shepherd.

- 12 But beyond this, my son, be warned: the writing of many books is endless, and excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 12:9-12

416. What reason is given why the Preacher taught the people?
 417. How many proverbs did Solomon seek out? (Cf. I Kings 4:32)
 418. Give evidence that Solomon was concerned about writing a truthful account.
 419. Explain why words from wise teachers would be like "goads" and "well-driven nails."
 420. What evidence in verse eleven speaks to Divine inspiration of Ecclesiastes?
 421. When does devotion to books become wearying to the body?

PARAPHRASE 12:9-12

In addition, because the Preacher was wise, he desired that others become wise also. Therefore he instructed them in the knowledge which he had learned. He was careful to examine, ponder and sort out many wise proverbial sayings. He not only desired to impart instruction to others, he wanted to say it in a way which would be a delightful experience for those who heard. Above all, he wanted to write down correctly the words of truth—to be certain that that which he taught was exactly right. The words which he spoke served as goads to prod his readers onward. His words also served as nails to securely fix his truth in their minds. This collection of sayings actually proceeds from one Shepherd. My son, be warned about going beyond those words which do not proceed from one Shepherd. You should realize that the writing of this kind of information

is endless, and studying such books exhausts the body and the mind.

COMMENT 12:9-12

Solomon has sufficiently defended and supported the thesis that all is vanity. Now he turns to a clear summation of his methodology and a statement of his objective in composing the book. He classifies himself among the "wise," and offers, as it were, his credentials in the form of a claim to inspiration. In addition to being wise, he professes to be a disseminator of knowledge, an imaginative arranger of proverbs, a speaker of truth, and most importantly divinely inspired. He drives home (nails well-fastened) important lessons which come to him from God. (Cf. verse 11; I Kings 3:12) He warns against one searching for truth in books which are not inspired, and that devotion to such an endless number of books is "wearying to the body."

v. 9 As a wise man, whose authority was respected and accepted, Solomon arranged many proverbs through which he taught the people. Some believe the reference is to the book of Proverbs which many attribute to Solomon. The word translated "proverbs" can mean maxims, parables, or allegories. (Cf. I Kings 4:32)

v. 10 Solomon's words are "delightful" words in that he never turned to obscene language, but spoke discretely and guardedly. He had written: "Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances" (Proverbs 25:11). Also, "Listen, for I shall speak noble things; and the opening of my lips will produce right things. For my mouth will utter truth; and wickedness is an abomination to my lips. All the utterances of my mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing crooked or perverted in them. They are all straight-forward to him who understands, and right to those who find knowledge" (Proverbs 8:6-9). The Preacher's words are framed for the spiritual minded and in them they will find their "delight."

In addition to skilfully arranging his words, he gave diligence "to write words of truth correctly." Most commentators see in this verse a twofold intention: (1) he wants to write sincerely—that is he spoke from the heart as honestly as he could; (2) he also spoke objectively—that is he presented factual knowledge apart from a bias. He intended for his words to be well received, but he was not willing to sacrifice truth in order to retain his readers.

v. 11 Wisdom is directive. The "words of wise men" are designed to guide both the teacher and his audience on the road of right behavior. (Cf. Matthew 7:24) These words of truth are "like goads." A goad is a stick or pole with a sharp point which is used to prod oxen or sheep in the direction one wishes them to move. (Cf. Judges 3:3; I Samuel 13:31; Acts 9:5) The "collections" could refer to the material found in Ecclesiastes. It would mean that he has arranged his material in such a way that one is drawn to a path of proper conduct because he is motivated by the thought and content of the ordered material. On the other hand, it could refer to the "joint-authors of the collected canonical Scriptures." (Cf. II Peter 1:21) The truth taught by inspired teachers is now likened unto "well-driven nails." The figure of the nails is used because it is the nature of the nail to penetrate easily. It could mean to plant or drive in, to fasten and secure. So the words of the wise "nail down" the truths which change men's lives and their eternal destinies.

Solomon's reference here to the fact that such truths have their origin with the "one Shepherd" is a clear claim to inspiration. The collected sayings have but one source and thus one authority. The "one Shepherd" is God who is elsewhere called the "Shepherd of Israel." (Cf. Genesis 48:15; 49:24; Psalms 23:1; 80:1; Isaiah 40:11; Jeremiah 31:10; Ezekiel 34:11-12; John 10:14-16; Hebrews 13:20; I Peter 2:25; 5:4) On the subject of inspiration as claimed by Solomon, Leupold states: "Observe what a correct and clear conception of the inspiration of the sacred writings prevailed in Israel at this time, especially of the fact that it was a unified work done

by the Lord for the good of His people. Observe also that the Preacher is aware of the fact that God was pleased to use him to share in this work."⁵

v. 12 There is more in this verse than the simple jest over the prolific number of volumns written on the subject of the meaning of life, and the subsequent weariness that comes to one who attempts to read all of what has been written. Solomon's tender address of "my son" suggests the teacher-student relationship and not the physical father-son relationship. It implies that *all* may come and hear these wise words which have been given through the Preacher, but which come from God. "The writing of many books" is in contrast to the Sacred Scriptures. They represent the thinking of men outside the circle of divine inspiration. The charge is not against "studying" as such, as it is wise to study human nature, and it is especially wise to study the inspired books. The warning is against those books or writings which contradict the truth and which lead one away from the path of righteousness. It is the nature of the wisdom of this world to never give a final answer to the most basic and penetrating questions of life. Paul spoke of this matter to Timothy when he said that men were "always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (II Timothy 3:7). Although Ecclesiastes does not delineate the specifics of correct behavior, it does press hard toward the correct road: the fear of God. It motivates toward this conclusion by demonstrating the foolishness of searching in areas where God has not hidden the answers. It has been said that Ecclesiastes raises the question that the rest of the Bible answers. While this is partly true, it is not the complete picture. Ecclesiastes proves the emptiness of life apart from God, but it also demands that one fill the void of his life with the activity of doing the will of God.

⁵ Leupold. *op. cit.*, p. 296.

FACT QUESTIONS 12:9-12

569. Explain the methodology used by Solomon.
570. Give proof that Solomon arranged many proverbs.
571. "Delightful" words are prepared for what group of people?
572. What does it mean to write objectively? (Cf. verse ten)
573. What is the purpose of a goad? What is the relation of goad to the fact that Solomon was wise?
574. To what could the "collection" of verse eleven refer?
575. Identify and explain the claim Solomon makes for inspiration.
576. "My son" implies what relationship? (Cf. verse 12)
577. "The writing of many books" is in contrast to what?

B. MAN IS ADMONISHED TO FEAR GOD
AND KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS. 12:13

TEXT 12:13

- 13 The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 12:13

422. Explain *what* "has been heard." (Cf. 12:9-12)
423. Is Solomon's conclusion in harmony with the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles? Give evidence.
424. Identify what it is that applies to every man.

PARAPHRASE 12:13

All that I proposed to say, I have said. The conclusion then from what I have said is this: Revere and worship God; keep

His commandments. This is the complete, fulfilling work of man, and no man shall escape its implications.

COMMENT 12:13

v. 13 Whatever difficulty one may encounter in the explanation of certain sections of Ecclesiastes, there can be little doubt about the intention of Solomon as he moves to his conclusion. His final observations are stated with great clarity. The "conclusion" is literally "the *sum* of all." It should be noted that his personal claim to inspiration is made prior to his final warning which he says applies to all men.

The "fear of God" is now underscored as the major theme of the book. "Vanity" and the testimony values of this world are contrasted with true wisdom. This true wisdom leads one to shun evil and do good (Psalms 34:11-12) and is thus defined as the "fear of the Lord." The fear of God and keeping His commands are inseparable. To obey God, in this context, is not an indication that one fears Him it *is* the fear of God. It is worthy of note that Solomon now applies his message "to every man." Verse fourteen confirms the universality of the message. The Septuagint captures the meaning better than does the Authorized Version when it renders the statement as "For this is the whole duty of man." Similar translations read, "This is the duty of all men," "This concerns all mankind," "The whole of mankind," "For this, all men," and "The whole duty for every man." Paul draws this same conclusion as he said, "Or is God the God of the Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also" (Romans 3:29).

The Vanities of Ecclesiastes Contrasted With the Fear of the Lord which follows this immediate section, illustrates the negative pursuits of men which the Preacher declares to be but transitory and unfulfilling. The positive practice of the *fear of the Lord* fills the emptiness in man's life and directs him to satisfaction and joy.

FACT QUESTIONS 12:13

578. The “conclusion” literally means what?
 579. Identify the major theme of the book.
 580. Which is the better translation: “For this is the whole duty of man,” or “This is the duty of all men”? Explain.

THE VANITIES OF ECCLESIASTES
 CONTRASTED WITH THE FEAR OF THE LORD

(1) Man’s advantages	1:3; 2:11; 3:9; 5:16
(2) The desire to learn all things	1:13; 2:23; 26; 3:10
(3) Excessive wisdom	1:18; 2:15; 7:16
(4) Pursuit of pleasure	2:1; 7:4; 8:15; 10:16
(5) Mad mirth	2:2; 7:2-5
(6) Increase of earthly possessions	2:4-9; 6:2; 5:11
(7) Personal accomplishments	2:11, 17, 18, 20
(8) Living only for tomorrow	3:22; 2:18; 6:12; 8:7; 10:14
(9) Envy, rivalry	4:4
(10) Laziness	4:5, 6; 10:18
(11) Greed	4:8; 1:8; 5:10, 13; 8:13, 17
(12) Hypocritical worship	5:1-6
(13) Discontentment	6:2-3; 7:10, 11:9
(14) Self righteousnes	7:16-18
(15) Sexual immorality	7:26, 29
(16) Lawlessness	8:3-4
(17) Self-deceit	8:11; 9:3
(18) Wicked oppression	8:12-13
(19) Identity with evil	9:18; 10:1
(20) Intellectual pride	10:10, 12-14
(21) Self-reliance	11:1-6
(22) Youth spent without God	12:1

C. MAN IS ADMONISHED TO WORK IN HARMONY WITH GOD BECAUSE GOD WILL BRING EVERY WORK INTO JUDGMENT. 12:14

TEXT 12:14

14 Because God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 12:14

425. Is the judgment *eternal judgment* or *judgment which takes place in this world*? Explain and discuss.
426. What truth taught by Jesus in Matthew 10:26 is taught in this final verse?
427. Who will judge the "secrets" of the heart? (Cf. Romans 2:16)
428. How thorough will be the final judgment? (Cf. I Corinthians 4:5)

PARAPHRASE 12:14

I say that no man shall escape because God shall bring every deed into judgment whether the motive is good or evil.

COMMENT 12:14

v. 14 Appropriately the reader is drawn to God in this final sentence of the book. God is the Creator (Cf. 12:1; 7:13-14; 7:29; 8:15; 11:5; 12:7), the One worshipped (Cf. 5:1, 2, 4, 6, 7; 8:2), the One who permits man's enjoyment, (Cf. 9:7) the One who knows the end from the beginning (Cf. 3:11, 15), the One who has placed the desire to know in the heart of man (Cf. 3:10), the One who supplies food, and water, and gives

His approval of labors (Cf. 2:24; 3:13; 5:18-20), the One who works that men will fear Him (Cf. 3:14), the One who is the final judge of all men (Cf. 3:17; 11:9; 12:14), the One who proves that man is different from beasts (Cf. 3:18), the One who blesses the godly (Cf. 7:18), the One who delivers the godly from sin (Cf. 7:26), the One who is the author of the words of life (Cf. 12:11).

The fact that God will bring "every act" into judgment has been established. He had previously stated: "I said to myself, 'God will judge both the righteous man and the wicked man, for a time for every matter and for every deed is there' " (3:17). In 11:9 the emphasis of the judgment is on "all these things." Nothing escapes the knowledge of God. The "eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth" (II Chronicles 16:9). (Cf. Zechariah 4:10; Matthew 12:36; Acts 17:30-31; Romans 2:16; I Corinthians 4:5; II Corinthians 5:10) This *final judgment* will test the works of men to determine what is vanity and what endures (I Corinthians 3:11-15).

There is a sense in which present judgment takes place "under the sun." (Cf. John 3:18-20; Galatians 6:7-8; Ephesians 5:13) However, the judgment Solomon refers to must be the eternal judgment as no earthly judgment could include every man and every act.

FACT QUESTIONS 12:14

581. Would a partial judgment of sins on this earth satisfy the demands of this verse? Explain.

EPILOGUE

This final word.

Much closer to our generation than Solomon, there stands a man who represents the *same* world. He caused laughter to flash across the faces of literally thousands. Yet, in a more

serious moment he contemplated life apart from *the fear of the Lord* and his words are strikingly similar to those of the Preacher. On that occasion Mark Twain wrote:

“A myriad of men are born; they labor and sweat and struggle for bread; they squabble and scold and fight; they scramble for little mean advantages over each other. Age creeps upon them; infirmities follow; those they love are taken from them. At length ambition is dead; pride is dead; longing for release is in their place. It comes at last—the only unpoisoned gift earth ever had for them—and they vanish from a world where they were of no consequence. Then another myriad takes their place, and copies all they did, and goes along the same profitless road, and vanishes as they vanished—to make room for another and another and a million more myriads to follow the same arid path through the same desert and accomplish what the first myriad and all the myriads that came after it accomplished—nothing.”

One bows in deep gratitude before the throne of Grace. Indeed the vacuum within man is Christ-shaped. When through faith and submission to His Lordship He floods into our lives, there is fulfillment and purpose. The Sun of Righteousness has risen with healing in His wings. Let Jesus have the final word:

“I am the door of the sheep. All who came before Me are thieves and robbers; but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy; I CAME THAT THEY MIGHT HAVE LIFE, AND HAVE IT MORE ABUNDANTLY. I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep” (John 10:7-11).

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