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**COMMENTARY**

**Barnes' Notes on the Bible**  
**Volume 6 -**  
**Ecclesiastes**

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*To the Students of the Words, Works and Ways of God:*

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# ECCLESIASTES

## INTRODUCTION

**I.** This book is placed, in the most ancient Jewish and Christian lists, between the other two books (Proverbs and the Song of Songs) attributed to Solomon, and the constant tradition of the Jewish and Christian congregations has handed down Solomon as the author without question.

Some modern critics have indeed alleged that Solomon could not have written it:

- (a) because the language is such as no Jew in his age could have used;
- (b) because the language differs from that of Proverbs and the Song of Songs; and
- (c) because the historical allusions in the book do not agree with the period and the circumstances of Solomon.

(a) In answer to this, it would appear that every word quoted from Ecclesiastes as impossible to be used before the captivity has been shown either:

- (1) to be used in books written, as is generally believed, BEFORE the captivity; or
- (2) to be formed from words, and by a grammatical process, in use BEFORE the captivity; or
- (3) to be represented in such books by a derivative; or
- (4) to be undoubtedly common to other Semitic dialects besides Chaldee, and therefore, presumably, to Hebrew BEFORE the captivity, although not found in extant writings of earlier date than Ecclesiastes.

The allegation, therefore, that the language of this book shows distinct traces of the Chaldean invasion, of the Babylonian captivity, or of any later event which affected the Hebrew tongue, may be considered sufficiently answered.

(Writers who maintain that the language of Ecclesiastes could not have been used by a Jew in Solomon's age, diverge so widely from one another on the question of date as to suggest a serious doubt whether such grammatical knowledge of Hebrew as is now attainable ought to be allowed all the weight that is claimed for it in deciding the date of the composition of this book. If the majority place it between the 4th and 6th centuries B.C., some place it as high as the tenth century, and some as low as the first century)

**(b)** The dissimilarity in style and diction between this book and Proverbs or the Song of Songs is admitted; but it has been accounted for to some extent, first, by the difference of subject. Abstract ideas may be expressed up to a certain point by words which originally denoted something else: but philosophic thought such as distinguishes this book from the other two, gradually forms its own terminology. Next, it is argued, that there was an interval of many years between the composition of the two former books and of this; and that in that time there was a natural change in the temperament, views, and style of the writer; a change which may be traced partly to Solomon's familiarity with foreign women sprung from various Semitic races, partly also to his extensive negotiations and personal contact with the representatives of other nations, some of whom were not of Semitic origin (<sup><H10></sup>1 Kings 10:22).

(The history of literature supplies many instances of the same writer expressing his thoughts in different styles. Compare the difference between the speeches and the narrative of the Greek historian Thucydides; and compare the difference in the dialect, diction, and meter of the chorus with the dialogue of Greek tragedy. The style of Milton in his "Ode on the Nativity," written in his 21st year, differs widely from "Samson Agonistes," a product of his old age. Holy Scripture itself supplies a striking instance of the same kind; the Revelation of John presents some remarkable differences of style and language, if compared with the Gospel and Epistles; yet this dissimilarity does not prevent critics, after taking all the facts into account, from considering the whole of these books as the work of the same author.)

Lastly, to balance the differences, it is to be noted that there are some characteristic resemblances between these books. It is reasonable to regard these as an indication of a common origin.

(c) It is alleged that the particular mention of Jerusalem (~~2001~~ Ecclesiastes 1:1,12) as the seat of Solomon's reign, implies that the book was written at a time when there was more than one seat of kingly authority in Israel, i.e. after the separation of the ten tribes and the erection of another capital, Samaria. The answer is that there is an obvious fitness in the specific mention of Jerusalem previous to the account of Solomon's labors in Ecclesiastes 1; 2, for it was the scene of his special work for many years, and the place which he had made the chief monument of his grandeur.

It is alleged that the expression, "I was king" (~~2012~~ Ecclesiastes 1:12), implies that, at the time when these words were written, Solomon was no longer king, and that, consequently, the passage must have been written by someone who was impersonating him after his death. But, in Hebrew, the preterite is used with strict grammatical propriety in describing a past. It does not prevent critics, after taking all the facts into account, from considering the whole of these books as the work of the same author. which extends into the present. Solomon is as a speaker who views the action or state expressed by the verb as then first about coming to pass, in progress, or perhaps occurring at the instant. The phrase therefore, would be both grammatically correct, if used by Solomon before the close of his reign, and a natural expression of his feelings in his old age.

It is argued that such a state of violence, popular oppression, and despotic rule, as that which is instanced in ~~2003~~ Ecclesiastes 4:1 did not exist in Palestine in the peaceful reign of Solomon. This allegation has no foundation in fact. The significant statements of historians (e.g. ~~1123~~ 1 Kings 12:4 and ~~4217~~ 2 Chronicles 2:17,18; 8:7-9) and the numerous unmistakable allusions in the Book of Proverbs (e.g. ~~2010~~ Ecclesiastes 1:10-13; 6:16-19; 11:26; 14:20; 22:22,23; 24:21; 25:5; 28:2,16) agree with the descriptions in Ecclesiastes in showing that the kingdom of Israel, even in its most prosperous days, afforded grievous instances of the common evils of Asiatic despotism.

(It has also been argued that Solomon, as the supreme ruler of the people, and therefore responsible for the oppression, would not have placed on record a description of it. But, even supposing that Solomon's own subjects are here referred to by him; yet all sovereigns, intimately acquainted with the condition of their people, are aware of and must deplore the infliction of much misery which they are unable to prevent or to avenge.)

It is stated that such passages as <sup><2117></sup>Ecclesiastes 12:7,14 show a knowledge of revealed truth beyond what was given prior to the captivity. (See the introduction to the Book of Psalms.) But if the exact words of Ecclesiastes are compared with the obscure intimations given by Moses on the one hand, and with the later utterances of Daniel on the other, this book appears to hold a middle place. It tallies very closely with some of the Psalms which were probably written about the age of Solomon. (e.g. with regard to the judgment of the world, <sup><3016></sup>Psalms 1:5; 9:8; 96:13, and with regard to the souls of the dead being with God, <sup><916></sup>Psalms 16:8-11.) After all, does not the argument (mentioned above) proceed on an assumption that we are more competent than we really are to find out the ways of the Author of Revelation? Are we qualified to decide positively that so much, as is recorded on those subjects in Ecclesiastes came out of its proper season if it was given to Solomon?

On the whole, therefore, it seems the most reasonable course to accept as a simple statement of fact the words with which Ecclesiastes begins; and, in accordance with the voice of the church from the beginning, to regard SOLOMON as the author of this book.

## II. What was the object of the writer in composing this book?

The method of Greek philosophy and its principles — Epicurean, Stoic, and Cynic — have been attributed to the author of Ecclesiastes; but on no better ground than might be found in the writings of any thoughtful and sensitive man who has felt, contemplated, and described the perplexities of human life.

The author was evidently a man of profound faith in God, of large and varied personal experience, of acute observation of people and things, and of deep sensibility. He was probably first moved to write by a mind that was painfully full of the disappointing nature of all things viewed apart from God. Next, he was moved by a deep sympathy with fellow human beings who were touched by the same natural feelings as himself, and suffering like him, though each in their various ways; and thirdly, he was moved by the evident desire to lead other men, and especially young men, out of the temptations which he had felt, and out of the perplexities which once entangled and staggered him. Whether his heart was chilled by old age or by the cold shadow of some former eclipse of faith can only be conjectured; but there is in Ecclesiastes an absence of that fervor of zeal for the glory of God which glows in other books, and which we are

justified in regarding as a feature of Solomon's character in his early days. His immediate object would seem then to be to relieve his mind by pouring out the results of his own life, to comfort those who bore the same burden of humanity, and to lift up those who were naturally feeble or depressed by circumstances and to lead them in the way of God's commandments.

As regards a plan, the writer of the book evidently regarded it as complete in itself; the first part of the book being contemplative or doctrinal, and the latter part being practical.

First, there is the writer's statement of his subject, and his detailed account of his personal experience of the influence of vanity pervading human proceedings (Ecclesiastes 1—2). Then, there is the announcement of an external law to which also human affairs are subject, i.e. the will of God, Whose plan, incomprehensible in its extent, is found by all to be more or less in conflict with man's will (Ecclesiastes 3—4), the result of such conflict being disappointment and perplexity to man. Then there is the commencement (Ecclesiastes 5) of personal practical advice, followed by a mixture of reflections, maxims, and exhortations, in which the vanity of riches, the practical superiority of wisdom and patience, and the supreme power of God, are the prominent topics set forth in various ways (Ecclesiastes 6—8). The writer's reflections are found in Ecclesiastes 9. His maxims are brought to an end in Ecclesiastes 10. And, in Ecclesiastes 11—12 we have a concluding exhortation to such conduct and sentiments as are most likely to alleviate the vanity of this life, namely, to charity, industry, patience and the reverence of God.

If the book was composed, as seems probable, toward the end of Solomon's reign, its direct tendency is obvious. In an age when "silver were like stones in Jerusalem" (i.e. common), no lesson was more necessary, and none would tell with deeper effect, than those powerful and touching declarations of the vanity of wealth and grandeur which are perhaps the most conspicuous feature in this book. Further, if the book appealed then, as it has ever since appealed, to an inner circle of more thoughtful readers, they especially, who in those days discerned the signs of the approaching dismemberment of the kingdom and the diminution of the glory of Jerusalem, would find their comfort in its lessons of patient endurance and resignation to the sovereign will of God. Whenever the church has been threatened with approaching calamity this book has always shown its consolatory effect upon devout believers.

(Augustine refers to it as setting forth the vanity of this life, only that we may desire that life wherein, instead of vanity beneath the sun, there is truth under Him who made the sun. It was the same tendency which induced the author of the “De Imitatione Christi” to borrow from Ecclesiastes the key-note of his golden book.)

It served, before Christ came, to lighten for Jews the darkness of those “crooked” ways of God which have exercised the Christian penetration of Pascal and Butler. To the desolation of religious doubt, Ecclesiastes brings a special message of consolation and direction: for it shows that a cry of perplexity finds a place even in the sacred books; and it indicates a nearer approach to the living God in reverent worship (<sup>2101</sup>Ecclesiastes 5:1), in active service (<sup>2110</sup>Ecclesiastes 11:6), in humble acknowledgment of His power (<sup>2130</sup>Ecclesiastes 3:10-17), in reliance on His final justice (<sup>2188</sup>Ecclesiastes 5:8; 12:13,14), as the means by which that cry has been, and may again be, hushed.

# ECCLESIASTES

## OR THE PREACHER

### NOTES ON ECCLESIASTES 1

The introductory verses (<2000>Ecclesiastes 1:1-3) serve to describe the writer, and to state the subject of his book.

<2000>**Ecclesiastes 1:1.** *Preacher* literally, Convener. No one English word represents the Hebrew *Koheleth* <46953> adequately. Though capable, according to Hebrew usage, of being applied to men in office, it is strictly a feminine participle, and describes a person in the act of calling together an assembly of people as if with the intention of addressing them. The word thus understood refers us to the action of Wisdom personified (<2000>Proverbs 1:20; 8:8). In Proverbs and here, Solomon seems to support two characters, speaking sometimes in the third person as Wisdom instructing the assembled people, at other times in the first person. So our Lord speaks of Himself (compare <2114>Luke 11:49 with <1234>Matthew 23:34) as Wisdom, and as desiring (<2134>Luke 13:34) to gather the people together for instruction; It is unfortunate that the word “Preacher” does not bring this personification before English minds, but a different idea.

<2000>**Ecclesiastes 1:2.** *Vanity* This word (*Hebel*) <41892>, or, when used as a proper name, in <1002>Genesis 4:2, “Abel”), occurs no less than 37 times in Ecclesiastes, and has been called the key of the book. Primarily it means “breath,” “light wind;” and denotes what:

- (1) passes away more or less quickly and completely.
- (2) leaves either no result or no adequate result behind, and therefore
- (3) fails to satisfy the mind of man, which naturally craves for something permanent and progressive: it is also applied to:
- (4) idols, as contrasted with the Living, Eternal, and Almighty God, and, thus, in the Hebrew mind, it is connected with sin.



In this book it is applied to all works on earth, to pleasure, grandeur, wisdom, the life of man, childhood, youth, and length of days, the oblivion of the grave, wandering and unsatisfied desires, unenjoyed possessions, and anomalies in the moral government of the world.

Solomon speaks of the world-wide existence of “vanity,” not with bitterness or scorn, but as a fact, which forced itself on him as he advanced in knowledge of men and things, and which he regards with sorrow and perplexity. From such feelings he finds refuge by contrasting this with another fact, which he holds with equal firmness, namely, that the whole universe is made and is governed by a God of justice, goodness, and power. The place of vanity in the order of Divine Providence — unknown to Solomon, unless the answer be indicated in <sup><2072></sup>Ecclesiastes 7:29 — is explained to us by Paul, Romans 8, where its origin is traced to the subjugation and corruption of creation by sin as a consequence of the fall of man; and its extinction is declared to be reserved until after the Resurrection in the glory and liberty of the children of God.

*Vanity of vanities* A well-known Hebrew idiom signifying vanity in the highest degree. Compare the phrase, “holy of holies.”

*All* Solomon includes both the courses of nature and the works of man (<sup><2004></sup>Ecclesiastes 1:4-11). Compare <sup><4822></sup>Romans 8:22.

<sup><2003></sup>**Ecclesiastes 1:3.** *What profit ...* The question often repeated is the great practical inquiry of the book; it receives its final answer in <sup><2123></sup>Ecclesiastes 12:13,14. When this question was asked, the Lord had not yet spoken (<sup><4123></sup>Matthew 11:28). The word “profit” (or pre-eminence) is opposed to “vanity.”

*Hath a man* Rather, hath man.

<sup><2004></sup>**Ecclesiastes 1:4.** *Vanity* is shown in mankind, the elements, and all that moves on earth; the same course is repeated again and again without any permanent result or real progress; and events and people alike are forgotten.

*Abideth* The apparent permanence of the earth increases by contrast the transitory condition of its inhabitants.

*Ever* The word does not here absolutely signify “eternity” (compare <sup><2081></sup>Ecclesiastes 3:11 note), but a certainly short period (compare

<1206>Exodus 21:6): here it might be paraphrased “as long as this world, this present order of things, lasts.”

<2005>**Ecclesiastes 1:5.** *Hasteth ...* literally, at his place panting (in his eagerness) riseth he there.

<2006>**Ecclesiastes 1:6.** More literally, Going toward the south and veering toward the north, veering, veering goes the wind; and to its veerings the wind returns.

<2007>**Ecclesiastes 1:7.** *The place* i.e., The spring or river-head. It would seem that the ancient Hebrews regarded the clouds as the immediate feeders of the springs (<2088>Proverbs 8:28, and <9A40>Psalm 104:10,13).

<1006>Genesis 2:6 indicates some acquaintance with the process and result of evaporation.

<2008>**Ecclesiastes 1:8.** *All things ... utter it* This clause, as here translated, refers to the immensity of labor. Others translate it, “all words are full of labor; they make weary the hearers,” or “are feeble or insufficient” to tell the whole; and are referred to the impossibility of adequately describing labor.

<2009>**Ecclesiastes 1:9.** *Hath been ... is done* i.e., Hath happened in the course of nature ... is done by man.

<2011>**Ecclesiastes 1:11.** *Things* Rather, men.

<2012>**Ecclesiastes 1:12.** Solomon relates his personal experience (Ecclesiastes 2); the result of which was “no profit,” and a conviction that all, even God’s gifts of earthly good to good men, in this life are subject to vanity. His trial of God’s first gift, wisdom, is recounted in <2012>Ecclesiastes 1:12-18.

*Was* This tense does not imply that Solomon had ceased to be king when the word was written. See the introduction to Ecclesiastes. He begins with the time of his accession to the throne, when the gifts of wisdom and riches were especially promised to him (<1082>1 Kings 3:12,13).

<2013>**Ecclesiastes 1:13.** *Wisdom* As including both the powers of observation and judgment, and the knowledge acquired thereby (<1083>1 Kings 3:28; 4:29; 10:8, ...). It increases by exercise. Here is noted its application to people and their actions.

*Travail* In the sense of toil; the word is here applied to all human occupations.

*God* God is named as *Elohim*<sup><430></sup> thirty-nine times in this book; a name common to the true God AND to false gods, and used by believers AND by idolators: but the name Yahweh, by which He is known especially to the people who are in covenant with Him, is never once used.

Perhaps the chief reason for this is that the evil which is the object of inquiry in this book is not at all unique to the chosen people. All creation (Romans 8) groans under it. The Preacher does not write of (or, to) the Hebrew race exclusively. There is no express and obvious reference to their national expectations, the events of their national history, or even to the divine oracles which were deposited with them. Hence, it was natural for the wisest and largest-hearted man of his race to take a wider range of observation than any other Hebrew writer before or after him. It became the sovereign of many peoples whose religions diverged more or less remotely from the true religion, to address himself to a more extensive sphere than that which was occupied by the twelve tribes, and to adapt his language accordingly. See the <sup><2001></sup>Ecclesiastes 5:1 note.

<sup><2014></sup>**Ecclesiastes 1:14.** *Vexation of spirit* A phrase which occurs 7 times, and may be otherwise translated, “feeding on wind.” Modern Hebrew grammarians assert that the word rendered “vexation” must be derived from a root signifying “to feed,” “follow,” “strive after.” This being admitted, it remains to choose between two translations:

(1) “Striving after wind,” or “windy effort;” adopted by the Septuagint and the majority of modern interpreters; or

(2) feeding on wind. Compare <sup><2201></sup>Hosea 12:1: and similar phrases in <sup><2054></sup>Proverbs 15:14; <sup><2440></sup>Isaiah 44:20; <sup><1978></sup>Psalms 37:3.

<sup><2015></sup>**Ecclesiastes 1:15.** He saw clearly both the disorder and incompleteness of human actions (compare the marginal reference), and also man’s impotence to rectify them.

<sup><2016></sup>**Ecclesiastes 1:16.** *I am come ...* Rather, I have accumulated (literally “enlarged and added”) wisdom more than etc.

*They that have been ...* The reference is probably to the line of Canaanite kings who lived in Jerusalem before David took it, such as Melchizedek

(~~<1148>~~Genesis 14:18), Adonizedek (~~<6101>~~Joshua 10:1), and Araunah (~~<1223>~~2 Samuel 24:23); or, it may be, to Solomon's contemporaries of his own country (~~<1061>~~1 Kings 4:31) and of other countries who visited him (~~<1064>~~1 Kings 4:34; 10:24). for "in" Jerusalem render over.

~~<2017>~~**Ecclesiastes 1:17.** *To know madness and folly* A knowledge of folly would help him to discern wisdom, and to exercise that chief function of practical wisdom — to avoid folly.

~~<2018>~~**Ecclesiastes 1:18.** We become more sensible of our ignorance and impotence, and therefore sorrowful, in proportion as we discover more of the constitution of nature and the scheme of Providence in the government of the world; every discovery serving to convince us that more remains concealed of which we had no suspicion before.

## NOTES ON ECCLESIASTES 2

<sup><200></sup>**Ecclesiastes 2:1ff.** Solomon's trial of God's second gift, namely, riches, and the enjoyment which riches supply; this brought him to the sane result (compare <sup><2012></sup>Ecclesiastes 1:12).

Comparing Solomon's action with <sup><2126></sup>Luke 12:16-21, it must be remembered that Solomon's object was the acquisition of WISDOM, not self-indulgence, and that he did not fail to look forward to the certainty of death overtaking him.

<sup><2008></sup>**Ecclesiastes 2:3.** *I sought ...* Rather, I resolved (literally "I turned in my heart") to draw my flesh with wine (see the margin), my heart guiding me with wisdom. In the course of his attempt to answer the question of <sup><2008></sup>Ecclesiastes 1:3, while his heart was directing him (as a charioteer directs his horses or a shepherd his sheep) with wisdom, and while he was following that guidance, he determined to draw with him his flesh by wine, thus making his flesh, which he speaks of as distinct from himself (compare <sup><8025></sup>Romans 7:25), a confederate and subsidiary in his attempt.

<sup><2004></sup>**Ecclesiastes 2:4.** Compare <sup><1006></sup>1 Kings 7:1-12; 9:15-19; 10:14-27; and <sup><1404></sup>2 Chronicles 8:4.

<sup><2005></sup>**Ecclesiastes 2:5.** *Orchards* literally, "paradises," i.e., parks or pleasure-grounds (compare <sup><1008></sup>Nehemiah 2:8 note). Indications of at least three of these have been pointed out; one at Jerusalem near the pool of Siloam, called "the king's garden" (<sup><1005></sup>Nehemiah 3:15; <sup><2507></sup>Jeremiah 52:7); a second near Bethlehem (compare <sup><2006></sup>Ecclesiastes 2:6); and a third in the remote north, on the heights of Hermon (<sup><2048></sup>Song of Solomon 4:8; 8:11).

<sup><2006></sup>**Ecclesiastes 2:6.** *Pools* A short distance south of Bethlehem, in a valley in the defile of Urtas, three "Pools of Solomon" are still shown and an adjoining hill still bears the name of the "Little Paradise."

<sup><2007></sup>**Ecclesiastes 2:7.** *I got* Rather, I bought, in distinction from those born in the house. The "children of Solomon's servants" (compare <sup><1025></sup>Ezra 2:55,58) were more probably of Canaanite origin (<sup><1001></sup>1 Kings 9:20,21; 5:15) than Hebrews (<sup><1022></sup>1 Kings 9:22).

*Possessions of great and small cattle* Rather, herds of oxen and sheep.

*All ... before me* King David's herds and flocks are mentioned in <sup><1372></sup>1 Chronicles 27:29,31: but we have no specific account of the wealth of other Canaanite or Hebrew inhabitants of Jerusalem before Solomon.

<sup><2008></sup>**Ecclesiastes 2:8.** *Kings* Both tributary (<sup><1105></sup>1 Kings 10:15) and independent (<sup><1101></sup>1 Kings 5:1; 9:14; 10:2); the "provinces" probably correspond to the kingdoms mentioned in <sup><1102></sup>1 Kings 4:21.

*As musical ... sorts* Rather, Many women (compare <sup><1110></sup>1 Kings 11:1-3).

<sup><2020></sup>**Ecclesiastes 2:10.** *Portion* A word of frequent occurrence. By it Solomon describes the pleasure found in the act of working and also perhaps the pleasure felt in the process of acquiring wisdom; this pleasure is admitted to be good, if received from God (<sup><2025></sup>Ecclesiastes 2:26; 5:18; compare <sup><5044></sup>1 Timothy 4:4); but being transitory it is subject to vanity, and therefore does not afford a sufficient answer to the repeated question, "What profit etc.?" (<sup><2003></sup>Ecclesiastes 1:3).

<sup><2022></sup>**Ecclesiastes 2:12-26.** Solomon having found that wisdom and folly agree in being subject to vanity, now contrasts one with the other (<sup><2023></sup>Ecclesiastes 2:13). Both are brought under vanity by events (<sup><2024></sup>Ecclesiastes 2:14) which come on the wise man and the fool alike from without — death and oblivion (<sup><2026></sup>Ecclesiastes 2:16), uncertainty (<sup><2029></sup>Ecclesiastes 2:19), disappointment (<sup><2021></sup>Ecclesiastes 2:21) — all happening by an external law beyond human control. Amidst this vanity, the good (see <sup><2020></sup>Ecclesiastes 2:10 note) that accrues to man, is the pleasure felt (<sup><2024></sup>Ecclesiastes 2:24-26) in receiving God's gifts, and in working with and for them.

<sup><2022></sup>**Ecclesiastes 2:12.** *What can the man do ...* i.e., "What is any man — in this study of wisdom and folly — after one like me, who, from my position, have had such special advantages (see <sup><2016></sup>Ecclesiastes 1:16, and compare <sup><2025></sup>Ecclesiastes 2:25) for carrying it on? That which man did of old he can but do again: he is not likely to add to the result of my researches, nor even to equal them." Some hold that the "man" is a reference to Solomon's successor — not in his inquiries, but in his kingdom, i.e., Jeroboam.

<sup><2024></sup>**Ecclesiastes 2:14.** *Event* Or, "hap" (<sup><808B></sup>Ruth 2:3). The verb from which it is derived seems in this book to refer especially to death. The word does not mean chance (compare <sup><2000></sup>Ecclesiastes 9:1,2), independent

of the ordering of Divine Providence: the Gentile notion of “mere chance,” or “blind fate,” is never once contemplated by the writer of this book, and it would be inconsistent with his tenets of the unlimited power and activity of God.

<sup>2026</sup>**Ecclesiastes 2:16.** *Seeing that ...* Compare <sup>2011</sup>Ecclesiastes 1:11. Some render, “as in time past, so in days to come, all will be forgotten;” others, “because in the days to come all will have been long before forgotten.”

<sup>2027</sup>**Ecclesiastes 2:17.** *I hated life* Compare this expression, extorted from Solomon by the perception of the vanity of his wisdom and greatness, with <sup>8182</sup>Romans 8:22,23. The words of Moses (<sup>04115</sup>Numbers 11:15), and of Job (<sup>8182</sup>Job 3:21; 6:9), are scarcely less forcible. With some people, this feeling is a powerful motive to conversion (<sup>2043</sup>Luke 14:26).

<sup>2029</sup>**Ecclesiastes 2:19.** *Labour* Compare <sup>2034</sup>Ecclesiastes 2:4-8.

<sup>2022</sup>**Ecclesiastes 2:20.** *I went about* i.e., I turned from one course of action to another.

<sup>2023</sup>**Ecclesiastes 2:23.** *Are sorrows ... grief* Rather, sorrows and grief are his toil. See <sup>2013</sup>Ecclesiastes 1:13.

<sup>2024</sup>**Ecclesiastes 2:24.** *Nothing better for a man, than that ...* literally, no good in man that etc. The one joy of working or receiving, which, though it be transitory, a man recognizes as a real good, even that is not in the power of man to secure for himself: that good is the gift of God.

<sup>2025</sup>**Ecclesiastes 2:26.** The doctrine of retribution, or, the revealed fact that God is the moral Governor of the world, is here stated for the first time (compare <sup>2015</sup>Ecclesiastes 3:15,17ff) in this book.

*This also is vanity* Not only the travail of the sinner. Even the best gifts of God, wisdom, knowledge, and joy, so far as they are given in this life, are not permanent, and are not always (see <sup>2011</sup>Ecclesiastes 9:11) efficacious for the purpose for which they appear to be given.

## NOTES ON ECCLESIASTES 3

It follows from <sup><2026></sup>Ecclesiastes 2:26 that the works of people are subject in their results to another will (God's) besides that of the doer. Here is the germ of the great question of later times — how to reconcile man's free will with God's decrees. Solomon's way of stating it is that to every separate work, which goes to make up the great aggregate of human activity (the "travail," <sup><2080></sup>Ecclesiastes 3:10), there is a season, an appropriate time which God appoints for its being done (<sup><2080></sup>Ecclesiastes 3:1-8). To the question (<sup><2080></sup>Ecclesiastes 3:9) What profit? he answers that the works of people, if done according to God's appointment, are a part of that beautifully arranged scheme of Divine Providence which, as a whole, is, by reason of its extent and duration, incomprehensible to us (<sup><2081></sup>Ecclesiastes 3:11). Man's good is to rejoice and do good in his lifetime, which he can do only as God appoints (<sup><2082></sup>Ecclesiastes 3:12,13). God's work, of which this would be a part, is forever, is perfect (and so not subject to vanity), and is calculated to teach people to revere Him (<sup><2084></sup>Ecclesiastes 3:14). His work, which was begun long ago, is now going on to completion; His work hereafter will be a complement of something which was done previously; and He recalls the past in order to add to it what shall make it complete and perfect (<sup><2085></sup>Ecclesiastes 3:15). The principle of divine government — that every work in order to be permanent and successful must be God's work as well as man's work — is also declared in <sup><1801></sup>Psalm 127:1,2 (attributed to Solomon).

<sup><2080></sup>**Ecclesiastes 3:1.** *Everything* More particularly, the actions of people (e.g. his own, <sup><2080></sup>Ecclesiastes 2:1-8) and events which happen to people, the world of Providence rather than the world of creation. It would seem that most of his own works described in <sup><2080></sup>Ecclesiastes 2:1-8 were present to his mind. The rare word translated "season" means emphatically "fitting time" (compare <sup><1686></sup>Nehemiah 2:6; <sup><1927></sup>Esther 9:27,31).

<sup><2085></sup>**Ecclesiastes 3:5.** Stones may be regarded either as materials for building, or as impediments to the fertility of land (see <sup><1301></sup>2 Kings 3:19,25; <sup><2082></sup>Isaiah 5:2).

<sup><2086></sup>**Ecclesiastes 3:6.** *Get ... lose* Rather, seek, and a time to give up for lost.



**Ecclesiastes 3:7.** *Rend* i.e., Tear garments in sign of mourning or anger. See <sup><21012></sup>2 Samuel 1:2, 11 ff.

**Ecclesiastes 3:11.** *Rather*, He hath made all (the travail, <sup><21010></sup>Ecclesiastes 3:10) beautiful (fit, in harmony with the whole work of God) in its time; also He hath set eternity in their heart (i.e., the heart of the sons of men, <sup><21010></sup>Ecclesiastes 3:10).

The word, translated “world” in the text, and “eternity” in this note, is used seven times in Ecclesiastes.

The interpretation “eternity,” is conceived in the sense of a long indefinite period of time, in accordance with the use of the word throughout this book, and the rest of the Old Testament. God has placed in the inborn constitution of man the capability of conceiving of eternity, the struggle to apprehend the everlasting, the longing after an eternal life.

With the other meaning “the world,” i.e., the material world, or universe, in which we dwell, the context is explained as referring either to the knowledge of the objects with which this world is filled, or to the love of the pleasures of the world. This meaning seems to be less in harmony with the context than the other: but the principal objection to it is that it assigns to the word in the original a sense which, although found in rabbinical Hebrew, it never bears in the language of the Old Testament.

*So ... find* i.e., Without enabling man to find. Compare <sup><21013></sup>Ecclesiastes 7:13; 8:17.

**Ecclesiastes 3:12.** *In them* i.e., in the sons of men.

*To do good* In a moral sense. Physical enjoyment is referred to in <sup><21013></sup>Ecclesiastes 3:13.

**Ecclesiastes 3:14.** The last clause of this verse goes beyond a declaration of the fact of God’s government of the world (<sup><21026></sup>Ecclesiastes 2:26) by adding the moral effect which that fact is calculated to produce on those who see it. It is the first indication of the practical conclusion (<sup><21123></sup>Ecclesiastes 12:13) of the book.

**Ecclesiastes 3:15.** *Rather*, What has been — what was before, and what shall be has been before. The word “is” in our the King James Version is erroneously printed in Roman letters: it does not exist in the

Hebrew (it should have been italicized); and the word there translated “now” is the same which is translated as “already.”

*Requireth* i.e., requireth for judgment, as the word specially means in <sup><1041></sup>2 Samuel 4:11; <sup><1048></sup>Ezekiel 3:18 ... It is obvious from the context of the last clause of <sup><1044></sup>Ecclesiastes 3:14, and <sup><1046></sup>Ecclesiastes 3:16,17, that this is the meaning here.

*Past* literally, “put to flight.”

The meaning of the verse is that there is a connection between events — past, present and future — and that this connection exists in the justice of God who controls all.

<sup><1046></sup>**Ecclesiastes 3:16-22.** That great anomaly in the moral government of this world, the seemingly unequal distribution of rewards and punishments, will be rectified by God, who has future times and events under His control (<sup><1046></sup>Ecclesiastes 3:16,17). As for people, they are placed by God, who is their teacher, in a humble condition, even on a level with inferior animals, by death, that great instance of their subjection to vanity (<sup><1048></sup>Ecclesiastes 3:18,19), which reduces to its original form all that was made of the dust of the ground (<sup><1030></sup>Ecclesiastes 3:20). And though the destinies of man and beast are different, yet in our present lack of knowledge as to God’s future dealing with our spirits (<sup><1042></sup>Ecclesiastes 3:21), man finds his portion (see the <sup><1020></sup>Ecclesiastes 2:10 note) in such labor and such joy as God assigns to him in his lifetime (<sup><1042></sup>Ecclesiastes 3:22).

<sup><1046></sup>**Ecclesiastes 3:16.** *I saw ...* Rather, I have seen (as in <sup><1030></sup>Ecclesiastes 3:10) under the sun the place etc. The place of judgment means the seat of the authorized judge. Compare “the place of the holy” (<sup><1030></sup>Ecclesiastes 8:10).

<sup><1047></sup>**Ecclesiastes 3:17.** *A time there* i.e., a time with God.

<sup><1048></sup>**Ecclesiastes 3:18.** literally, I said in my heart with regard to the sons of men, it is that God may prove them and show them that they are beasts, they themselves. “Showing” is the reading of the Septuagint and Syriac: the present Hebrew text reads “seeing.” The meaning is that the long delay of God’s judgment (<sup><1046></sup>Ecclesiastes 3:16,17) is calculated to show people

that the brevity of their life renders them incapable of following out and understanding His distributive justice.

<sup><2189></sup>**Ecclesiastes 3:19.** *That which befalleth the sons of men* literally, the event (happenstance) of the sons of men, i.e., what comes upon them from outside, by virtue of the ordinance of God. See the <sup><2124></sup>Ecclesiastes 2:14 note. Death in particular (<sup><2182></sup>Ecclesiastes 3:2,11) is a part of the “work that God doeth.”

<sup><2182></sup>**Ecclesiastes 3:21.** The King James Version of this verse is the only rendering which the Hebrew text, as now pointed, allows. It is in accordance with the best Jewish and many modern interpreters. A slightly different pointing would be requisite to authorize the translation, “Who knows the spirit of the sons of man whether it goes above, and, the spirit of the beast whether it goes down below?” etc., which, though it seems neither necessary nor suitable, is sanctioned by the Septuagint and other versions and by some modern interpreters.

*Who knoweth* This expression (used also in <sup><2129></sup>Ecclesiastes 2:19; 6:12) does not necessarily imply complete and absolute ignorance. In <sup><3911></sup>Psalms 90:11, it is applied to what is partially understood: compare similar forms of expression in <sup><1810></sup>Proverbs 31:10; <sup><1946></sup>Psalms 94:16; <sup><2501></sup>Isaiah 53:1. Moreover, it is evident from marginal references that Solomon did not doubt the future existence and destination of the soul. This verse can only be construed as a confession of much ignorance on the subject.

<sup><2182></sup>**Ecclesiastes 3:22.** *What shall be after him* i.e., What shall become of the results of his work after he is dead. Compare <sup><2129></sup>Ecclesiastes 2:19; 6:12.

## NOTES ON ECCLESIASTES 4

Having arrived (<sup><21082></sup>Ecclesiastes 3:22) at a partial answer to his question (<sup><21003></sup>Ecclesiastes 1:3); namely, that there is positive good (= a portion) in that satisfaction which is found in working, Solomon now turns to the case of such happiness being interrupted and reduced to vanity by various contingencies — by oppression (<sup><21001></sup>Ecclesiastes 4:1-3); by envy (<sup><21004></sup>Ecclesiastes 4:4-6); by loneliness (<sup><21007></sup>Ecclesiastes 4:7-12); and by decay of working power (<sup><21013></sup>Ecclesiastes 4:13-16). The first two instances seem taken from the lower ranks of life, and the last two derived from the higher ranks of life.

<sup><21001></sup>**Ecclesiastes 4:1.** *So I returned, and considered* Rather, And I returned and saw. He turns to look upon other phenomena, and to test his previous conclusion by them.

*Oppressed* See the introduction to Ecclesiastes.

<sup><21004></sup>**Ecclesiastes 4:4.** *Every right work* Rather, every success in work.

*For this ...* i.e., “This successful work makes the worker an object of envy.” Some understand the meaning to be, “this work is the effect of the rivalry of man with his neighbor.”

<sup><21005></sup>**Ecclesiastes 4:5.** *Foldeth his hands* The envious man is here exhibited in the attitude of the sluggard (marginal references).

*Eateth his own flesh* i.e., “Destroys himself:” compare a similar expression in <sup><23426></sup>Isaiah 49:26; <sup><49270></sup>Psalms 27:2; <sup><31003></sup>Micah 3:3.

<sup><21006></sup>**Ecclesiastes 4:6.** Either the fool’s sarcasm on his successful but restless neighbor; or the comment of Solomon recommending contentment with a moderate competence. The former meaning seems preferable.

<sup><21007></sup>**Ecclesiastes 4:7-12.** The spectacle of a prosperous man whose condition is rendered vain by his brotherless, childless isolation.

<sup><21008></sup>**Ecclesiastes 4:8.** *A second* Any one associated or connected with him.

<sup>21049</sup>**Ecclesiastes 4:9-12.** Compare a saying from the Talmud: “A man without companions is like the left hand without the right.”

<sup>21043</sup>**Ecclesiastes 4:13-16.** These verses set forth the vanity of earthly prosperity even on a throne. Opinion as to their application is chiefly divided between considering them a parable or fiction like that of the childless man in <sup>21048</sup>Ecclesiastes 4:8: or as setting forth first the vicissitudes of royal life in two proverbial sayings (<sup>21043</sup>Ecclesiastes 4:13,14), and then (<sup>21045</sup>Ecclesiastes 4:15,16), the vicissitudes or procession of the whole human race, one generation giving place to another, Which in its turn will be forgotten by its successor. On the whole, the first appears to have the better claim.

<sup>21043</sup>**Ecclesiastes 4:13.** *Child* Rather, young man.

<sup>21044</sup>**Ecclesiastes 4:14.** Rather: For out of the house of bondage he goes forth to be a king; although he was born poor in his kingdom, i.e., in the country over which he became king.

<sup>21045</sup>**Ecclesiastes 4:15.** *I considered ...* literally, I saw “all the population of the young man’s kingdom.”

*The second child* This second youth is generally understood to be identical with the one mentioned in <sup>21043</sup>Ecclesiastes 4:13.

<sup>21046</sup>**Ecclesiastes 4:16.** *There is* Rather: There was.

*That have been before them* Rather, before whom he was, i.e., at the head of whom the young king was. Compare <sup>3023</sup>Micah 2:13.

*They also that ... him* i.e., The next generation shall forget this chosen king.

## NOTES ON ECCLESIASTES 5

**Ecclesiastes 5.** The Preacher now begins to address his hearer in the second person. The soliloquy, hitherto unbroken, is henceforth interrupted by personal addresses, which are repeated with increasing frequency from this place to the end of the book. They who divide the whole book into two parts (the first theoretical, the second practical) begin the second division here.

There is a striking resemblance between the line of thought pursued in this book and that of Asaph in Psalm 73. As the Psalmist, so the Preacher, after setting forth his view of human life, takes his hearer into the house of God for an explanation and directions. If the expression “goest to the house of God” (<sup>2001</sup>Ecclesiastes 4:1) has also the spiritual sense of entering into communion with God, Solomon here admonishes generally that reverence is due to God, and particularly that the “vanity” which is mingled with the “portion” that God assigns to every man, ought to be treated as a divine mystery, not to be made an occasion of idle thought, hasty words, and rash resolutions, but to be considered in the fear of God (<sup>2001</sup>Ecclesiastes 4:1-7); that the spectacle of unjust oppression is to be patiently referred to God’s supreme judgment (<sup>2003</sup>Ecclesiastes 4:8,9); that mere riches are unsatisfying, bring care with them, and if hoarded are transitory (<sup>2000</sup>Ecclesiastes 4:10-17); and that a man’s enjoyment of his portion in life, including both labor and riches, is the gift of God (<sup>2001</sup>Ecclesiastes 4:18-20).

<sup>2001</sup>**Ecclesiastes 5:1.** *Keep thy foot* i.e., Give thy mind to what thou art going to do.

*The house of God* It has been said that here an ordinary devout Hebrew writer might have been expected to call it “the house of Yahweh;” but to those who accept this book as the work of Solomon after his fall into idolatry, it will appear a natural sign of the writer’s self-humiliation, an acknowledgment of his unworthiness of the privileges of a son of the covenant, that he avoids the name of the Lord of the covenant (see <sup>2003</sup>Ecclesiastes 1:13 note).

*Be more ready to hear* Perhaps in the sense that, “to draw near for the purpose of hearing (and obeying) is better than etc.”

<sup><2016></sup>**Ecclesiastes 5:6.** *Suffer not thy mouth ...* i.e., Do not make rash vows which may hereafter be the cause of evasion and prevarication, and remain unfulfilled.

*Before the angel* The Septuagint and some other versions render “before the face of God,” meaning a spiritual being representing the presence of God, a minister of divine justice (<sup><0221></sup>Exodus 23:21), such a one as inflicted judgment upon David (<sup><0247></sup>2 Samuel 24:17). Others, with less probability, understand the angel to be a priest, and refer to <sup><0317></sup>Malachi 2:7.

<sup><2017></sup>**Ecclesiastes 5:7.** *For ... vanities* Or, For so it happens through many dreams and vanities and many words.

<sup><2018></sup>**Ecclesiastes 5:8.** *Matter* Rather, purpose (as in the margin, and <sup><0318></sup>Ecclesiastes 3:1), referring either to the will of God or to the edict of an oppressive ruler.

*For he ... they* literally, for high watches over high and the highest over them, i.e., the king in the capital watches over the judge or governor in the province, and God over both. This seems more in harmony with the preceding verses, and more agreeable to the scope of this passage than to understand the passage only of earthly rulers.

<sup><2019></sup>**Ecclesiastes 5:9.** *The king himself is served by the field* Rather, the king is subject to the field, i.e., is dependent on its cultivation. The higher ranks, if they oppress the lower, lose thereby their own means of subsistence.

<sup><2020></sup>**Ecclesiastes 5:11.** *They ... that eat them* i.e., The laborers employed, and the household servants.

<sup><2022></sup>**Ecclesiastes 5:12.** *Labouring man* Not a slave (Septuagint), but everyone who, according to the divine direction, earns his bread in the sweat of his brow.

<sup><2024></sup>**Ecclesiastes 5:14.** *Evil travail* Adverse accident, or unsuccessful employment (compare <sup><2013></sup>Ecclesiastes 1:13; 4:8).

<sup><2027></sup>**Ecclesiastes 5:17.** *Hath much sorrow ...* Rather, is very sad and hath pain and vexation.

~~2068~~ **Ecclesiastes 5:18.** Rather, Behold what I have seen to be good, it is pleasant for a man to eat. Such thankful enjoyment is inculcated by the Law (~~1617~~ Deuteronomy 12:7,18).

~~2069~~ **Ecclesiastes 5:20.** The days will pass smoothly and pleasantly, while he lives in the consciousness of God's favor.

*Answereth him* i.e., grants his prayers.



## NOTES ON ECCLESIASTES 6

The Preacher in this chapter contemplates the case of people to whom God gives wealth, honor, success, children, and long life, yet withholds from them the capacity of enjoyment, rest, permanence or contentment (<sup>2003</sup>Ecclesiastes 6:1-9). What then is good for man to do, whose lot in life is so thoroughly subject to vanity? (<sup>2060</sup>Ecclesiastes 6:10-12).

<sup>2005</sup>**Ecclesiastes 6:1.** *Common among* Rather, great (heavy) upon people.

<sup>2005</sup>**Ecclesiastes 6:3.** *No burial* For a corpse to lie unburied was a circumstance in itself of special ignominy and dishonor (compare the marginal references).

<sup>2005</sup>**Ecclesiastes 6:4.** *He ... his* Rather, it ... its. The untimely birth is spoken of.

<sup>2005</sup>**Ecclesiastes 6:5.** Rather, it hath not seen nor known the sun: this (the untimely birth) hath rest rather than the other.

<sup>2005</sup>**Ecclesiastes 6:6.** *He live* Rather, he hath lived. "He" refers to the man (<sup>2003</sup>Ecclesiastes 6:3). His want of satisfaction in life, and the dishonor done to his corpse, are regarded as such great evils that they counterbalance his numerous children, and length of days, and render his lot viewed as a whole no better than the common lot of all.

<sup>2005</sup>**Ecclesiastes 6:7-9.** Connect these verses with <sup>2002</sup>Ecclesiastes 6:2,3: "All labor is undertaken with a view to some profit, but as a rule the people who labor are never satisfied. What advantage then has he who labors if (being rich) he is wise, or if being poor he knows how to conduct himself properly; what advantage have such laborers above a fool? (None, so far as they are without contentment, for) a thing present before the eyes is preferable to a future which exists only in the desire."

<sup>2005</sup>**Ecclesiastes 6:8.** *What* literally, what profit (as in <sup>2003</sup>Ecclesiastes 1:3).

*Knoweth ... living* i.e., "Knows how to conduct himself rightly among his contemporaries."

<sup><2160></sup>**Ecclesiastes 6:10.** Or, “That which has been named — i.e., events past or current, either (<sup><2100></sup>Ecclesiastes 1:9) as they present themselves to man, or (<sup><2185></sup>Ecclesiastes 3:15) as they are ordered by God — was long ago (i.e., was decreed, its nature and place were defined by the Almighty), and was known that it is man;” i.e., the course of events shapes the conduct and character of man, so that what he does and suffers is said to be or constitute the man. God from the beginning definitely ordained the course of events external to man, and constituted man in such a way that events materially affect his conduct and his destiny. Hence, God, by withholding from certain people the gift of contentment, and thus subjecting them to vanity, is acting according to the predetermined course of His Providence which man cannot alter (compare <sup><480></sup>Romans 8:20). Others translate, “What there is, its name is named long ago and known, that it is man;” i.e., “What hath been and is, not only came into existence long ago (<sup><2100></sup>Ecclesiastes 1:9; 3:15), but also has been known and named, and is acknowledged that it, besides other things, is specially man; that man always remains the same, and cannot go beyond his appointed bounds.”

*Him that is mightier* i.e., God; compare <sup><2101></sup>Ecclesiastes 9:1; <sup><612></sup>1 Corinthians 10:22, and marginal references.

<sup><2161></sup>**Ecclesiastes 6:11.** *Things* Namely, the various circumstances detailed in the foregoing chapters, from the Preacher’s personal experience, and his observation of other people, ending with the comprehensive declaration in <sup><2160></sup>Ecclesiastes 6:10 to the effect that vanity is an essential part of the constitution of creation as it now exists, and was foreknown.

*What is man the better?* Rather, what is profitable to man?

<sup><2162></sup>**Ecclesiastes 6:12.** *After him* i.e., On earth, in his own present sphere of action, after his departure hence (compare <sup><2109></sup>Ecclesiastes 2:19; 3:22).

## NOTES ON ECCLESIASTES 7

Ecclesiastes 7 and Ecclesiastes 10 show a striking resemblance to the style of the writer of the Book of Proverbs. Hereto the principal object has been to state the vanity of the conditions of human life: henceforth, the principal object will be to direct man how to conduct himself under those conditions.

The general drift of the writer's counsels throughout the last six chapters, and particularly in <sup><2008></sup>Ecclesiastes 7:1-22, points to wisdom united with the fear of God as the "good for man in this life." It is illustrated by frequent reference to, and contrast with, that evil which consists of folly allied with wickedness.

<sup><2008></sup>**Ecclesiastes 7:1.** *Name ... ointment* The likeness between reputation and odor supplies a common metaphor: the contrast is between reputation, as an honorable attainment which only wise people win, and fragrant odor, as a gratification of the senses which all people enjoy.

The connection of this verse with the preceding verses is this: the man, who wants to know what is profitable for man and good in this life, is here told to act in such a way as ordinarily secures a good reputation (i.e., to act like a wise man), and to teach himself this hard lesson — to regard the day of death as preferable to the day of birth. Though Solomon seems in some places to feel strongly (<sup><2016></sup>Ecclesiastes 2:16; 3:19,20ff) that natural fear of death which is, in a great measure, mistrust founded on the ignorance which Christ dispelled; yet he states the advantage of death over life in respect of its freedom from toil, oppression, restlessness (<sup><2017></sup>Ecclesiastes 2:17; 4:2; 6:5), and in respect of its implying an immediate and a nearer approach to God (<sup><2008></sup>Ecclesiastes 3:21; 12:7). While Solomon preferred the day of death, he might still (with Luther here) have regarded birth as a good thing, and as having its place in the creation of God.

<sup><2008></sup>**Ecclesiastes 7:2.** *That* Namely, what is seen in the house of mourning.

*Lay it to his heart* Consider it attentively.

<sup><2008></sup>**Ecclesiastes 7:3.** *Sorrow* Rather, Seriousness.

*The heart is made better* i.e., is made bright and joyful (compare <sup><4760></sup>2 Corinthians 6:10). The mind which bears itself equally in human concerns, whether they be pleasant or sorrowful, must always be glad, free, and at peace.

<sup><2107></sup>**Ecclesiastes 7:4.** *House of mourning ... house of mirth* These phrases acquire a forcible significance from the Eastern custom of prolonging both festive and mournful celebrations through several days. See <sup><01510></sup>Genesis 50:10; <sup><07417></sup>Judges 14:17. This verse indicates that a life of enjoyment, does not mean the abandonment of ourselves to pleasures, but the thankful and sober use of the beautiful things which God gives us.

<sup><2107></sup>**Ecclesiastes 7:6.** *As the crackling of thorns* Noisy while it lasts, and quickly extinguished. See <sup><15809></sup>Psalm 58:9 note.

<sup><2107></sup>**Ecclesiastes 7:7.** Rather, oppression (or extortions) maketh a wise man foolish; and a bribe etc. If a wise man, being in a high position, exercises oppression (see <sup><19210></sup>Psalm 62:10), or practices extortion, he becomes a fool in so doing. This verse is a warning against impatience in the exercise of power or the acquisition of riches.

<sup><2107></sup>**Ecclesiastes 7:8.** *Better* Inasmuch as something certain is attained, man contemplates the end throughout an entire course of action, and does not rest upon the beginning.

*Patient ... proud* literally, “Long,” long-suffering ... “high,” in the sense of impatient.

<sup><2107></sup>**Ecclesiastes 7:11.** *And by it there is profit ...* literally, And is profitable to the living. The same word as in <sup><2107></sup>Ecclesiastes 6:11, to the question in which it looks like an answer.

<sup><2107></sup>**Ecclesiastes 7:12.** *Wisdom is a defense ...* See the margin and <sup><15015></sup>Psalm 121:5, i.e., He who is defended from adversity by his wisdom is in as good a position as he who is defended by his riches.

*Excellency* literally, Profit.

*Giveth life to* literally, “Causes to live,” “makes alive” (<sup><2107></sup>Proverbs 3:18); the deeper meaning of which is elicited by comparing these words with <sup><1316></sup>John 6:63; <sup><4104></sup>Matthew 4:4.

<sup><2073</sup>**Ecclesiastes 7:13.** *The work of God* The scheme of Divine Providence, the course of events which God orders and controls (compare <sup><2081</sup>Ecclesiastes 3:11). It comprises both events which are “straight,” i.e., in accordance with our expectation, and events which are “crooked,” i.e., which by their seeming inequality baffle our comprehension.

<sup><2074</sup>**Ecclesiastes 7:14.** Good and prosperous days are in God’s design special times of comfort and rejoicing: the days of affliction and trouble, are in God’s design the proper seasons of recollection and serious consideration. The Providence of God hath so contrived it, that our good and evil days should be intermingled each with the other. This mixture of good and evil days is by the Divine Providence so proportioned, that it sufficiently justifies the dealings of God toward the sons of men, and obviates all their discontent and complaints against Him.

*Set the one over against the other* Rather, made this as well as that, i.e., the day of adversity, as well as the day of prosperity. The seeming imitation of this passage in Ecclesiasticus (Ecclesiasticus 36:13-15) affords a strong presumption that this book was written before the days of the son of Sirach.

*To the end ...* God hath constituted the vicissitude of prosperity and adversity in such a way that no man can forecast the events that shall follow when he is removed from his present state. Compare the <sup><2062</sup>Ecclesiastes 6:12 note.

<sup><2075</sup>**Ecclesiastes 7:15.** *The days of my vanity* This does not imply that those days of vanity were ended (see <sup><2012</sup>Ecclesiastes 1:12 note).

<sup><2075</sup>**Ecclesiastes 7:15-17.** The meaning may be best explained by a paraphrase. Solomon states how the wise man should regard the “crooked (<sup><2073</sup>Ecclesiastes 7:13) work of God” when it bears upon him. He says in effect, “Do not think that thou couldst alter the two instances (described in <sup><2075</sup>Ecclesiastes 7:15) of such crooked work so as to make it straight, that thou art more righteous or more wise than He is Who ordained these events. To set up thy judgment in opposition to His would imply an excess of wickedness and folly, deserving the punishment of premature death. But rather it is good for thee to grasp these seeming anomalies; if thou ponder them they will tend to impress on thee that fear of God which is a part of wisdom, and will guide thee safely through all the perplexities of this life”

(compare <sup><21082></sup>Ecclesiastes 8:12,13). The suggestion that these verses are intended to advocate a middle course between sin and virtue is at variance with the whole tenor of the book.

<sup><21076></sup>**Ecclesiastes 7:16.** *Destroy thyself* The Septuagint and Vulgate render it: “be amazed.” Compare “marvel not” (<sup><21078></sup>Ecclesiastes 5:8).

<sup><21074></sup>**Ecclesiastes 7:20.** The connection of this verse with <sup><21078></sup>Ecclesiastes 7:18,19 becomes clearer if it is borne in mind that the fear of God, wisdom, and justice, are merely different sides of one and the same character, the formation of which is the aim of all the precepts in this chapter. The words “just” (<sup><21075></sup>Ecclesiastes 7:15,20) and “righteous” (<sup><21076></sup>Ecclesiastes 7:16) are exactly the same in Hebrew.

<sup><21072></sup>**Ecclesiastes 7:21,22.** *Curse ... cursed* Rather, speak evil of ... spoken evil of.

<sup><21073></sup>**Ecclesiastes 7:23.** *I will be* Or, I am. There was a time when Solomon thought himself wise enough to comprehend the work of God, and therefore needed for himself the self-humbling conviction declared in this verse.

*It* i.e. Wisdom. Compare <sup><21087></sup>Ecclesiastes 8:17.

<sup><21074></sup>**Ecclesiastes 7:24.** literally, Far off is that which hath been i.e., events as they have occurred in the order of Divine Providence), and deep, deep, who can find it out?

<sup><21075></sup>**Ecclesiastes 7:25.** *Reason* The same word is translated “account” (<sup><21077></sup>Ecclesiastes 7:27), “invention” (<sup><21079></sup>Ecclesiastes 7:29), and “device” (<sup><21090></sup>Ecclesiastes 9:10): it is derived from a root signifying “to count.”

<sup><21076></sup>**Ecclesiastes 7:26.** Compare the account of Solomon’s wives (<sup><11100></sup>1 Kings 11:1-8): see also <sup><21026></sup>Proverbs 2:16-19; 5:3 ...

<sup><21078></sup>**Ecclesiastes 7:28.** *One man* One whose good qualities quite satisfy our expectation. Compare the expression “one among a thousand” (marginal reference).

*A woman* The number of Solomon’s wives and concubines (<sup><11100></sup>1 Kings 11:3) was a thousand.

~~20729~~ **Ecclesiastes 7:29.** *God hath made* Rather, God made. A definite allusion to the original state of man: in which he was exempt from vanity.

## NOTES ON ECCLESIASTES 8

Although in some degree baffled in his own pursuit of wisdom, Solomon yet regards wisdom as the nearest approach to “that good for man” which he is seeking; and presses here, as a part of that wisdom, a spirit of obedience (<sup><2001></sup>Ecclesiastes 8:1-5). In the face of the incomprehensible course of external events, he determined to abide in the fear and trust of God (<sup><2006></sup>Ecclesiastes 8:6-14), and to acknowledge the natural incompetence of every man to find out the unsearchable ways of God (<sup><2005></sup>Ecclesiastes 8:15-17).

<sup><2002></sup>**Ecclesiastes 8:1.** *And who* Rather, and as he who knoweth. The possessor of wisdom excels other people: it imparts serenity to his countenance, and removes the expression of gloom or fierceness (see the marginal reference).

<sup><2002></sup>**Ecclesiastes 8:2.** *Oath* A reference to the oath of allegiance taken to Solomon at his accession to the throne (the margin of <sup><1004></sup>1 Chronicles 29:24).

<sup><2002></sup>**Ecclesiastes 8:3.** *Stand not ...* i.e., “Do not persist in rebellion.”

<sup><2002></sup>**Ecclesiastes 8:5.** *Feel* literally, know. The meaning is, “He who obeys the commandment (i.e., the word of the king, <sup><2004></sup>Ecclesiastes 8:4), will not be an accomplice in any act of rebellion; and if he be a wise man he discerns (literally knows) that the king’s commandment or action is liable to correction, if it be wrong, in God’s time and by God’s judgment.” Compare <sup><2001></sup>Ecclesiastes 3:11,17.

<sup><2006></sup>**Ecclesiastes 8:6.** *Because, therefore,* Or, as in <sup><2000></sup>Ecclesiastes 8:7, “for.”

The possibility of God’s time and judgment being in opposition to a king’s purpose or commandment (<sup><2005></sup>Ecclesiastes 8:5), suggests the thought that such discord is a misery (= evil, <sup><2000></sup>Ecclesiastes 6:1) common to man (or, mankind).

<sup><2007></sup>**Ecclesiastes 8:7.** *When* Or, as in the margin. For the meaning of this verse, compare marginal references.



<sup><2108></sup>**Ecclesiastes 8:8.** *Neither hath he power* Rather: “and there is no power.” Compare <sup><2108></sup>Ecclesiastes 3:19.

*No discharge ...* i.e., “No exemption from the final hour of struggle between life and death.”

*Wickedness* Though the life of the wicked may be prolonged (<sup><2107></sup>Ecclesiastes 7:15), yet wickedness itself has no inherent power to prolong that life.

<sup><2109></sup>**Ecclesiastes 8:9.** *To his own hurt* Or, “to the hurt of the subject.” The case is still that of an unwise king whose command is obeyed (<sup><2109></sup>Ecclesiastes 8:2) even to the hurt of the wise man who obeys him.

<sup><2108></sup>**Ecclesiastes 8:10.** i.e., “I saw wicked (rulers) buried, who came into the world and went from the Holy place (the seat of authority and justice, <sup><6917></sup>Deuteronomy 19:17; <sup><4496></sup>2 Chronicles 19:6), and they were forgotten in the city where they had so ruled to the hurt of their subjects: this — their death and oblivion — shews their lot also to be vanity.” Others interpret the verse: “I have seen wicked men buried; and (others) came into the world, and from the Holy place they went out of the world, and were forgotten in the city where they had done rightly” (compare <sup><1109></sup>2 Kings 7:9).

<sup><2102></sup>**Ecclesiastes 8:12.** *His days be prolonged* i.e., in his wickedness (<sup><2108></sup>Ecclesiastes 8:8).

“I” is emphatic, as if to mark the opposition to the “sons of men” (<sup><2101></sup>Ecclesiastes 8:11).

<sup><2104></sup>**Ecclesiastes 8:14.** *Which is done upon the earth* The instance of vanity, to which these words are applied, is the seeming inequality of God’s justice; but if they are considered in connection with the profession of personal faith in God’s absolute justice (<sup><2102></sup>Ecclesiastes 8:12), the conclusion is irresistible, that, whatever reason the Preacher had for reserve in declaring his belief, he certainly looked forward to final judgment in a future state of existence (compare <sup><2107></sup>Ecclesiastes 3:17; 12:14).

<sup><2105></sup>**Ecclesiastes 8:15.** *Mirth* Better, Gladness, or “joy” (as in <sup><2100></sup>Ecclesiastes 2:10). The Hebrew word is applied not only to the pleasures arising from the physical senses, but also frequently to religious

joy. The sentiment of this verse is a frequent conclusion of the writer's personal experience (compare marginal references), and is unfairly charged with Epicureanism. The Preacher is careful to set forth pleasure as a gift from God, to be earned by labor, and received with thankfulness to the Giver, and to be accounted for to Him. His estimate of the pleasures of the senses is recorded in <sup>2107D</sup>Ecclesiastes 7:2-6.

<sup>2108E</sup>**Ecclesiastes 8:16,17.** These verses supplement <sup>2108E</sup>Ecclesiastes 8:15 with the reflection that the man who goes beyond that limited sphere within which he can labor and be contented, and investigates the whole work of God, will find that his finite intelligence cannot grasp it.

<sup>2108E</sup>**Ecclesiastes 8:16.** *Business* Or, "travail" (<sup>2101B</sup>Ecclesiastes 1:13; 3:10). The sleeplessness noted probably refers to the writer himself.

## NOTES ON ECCLESIASTES 9

In <sup><2001></sup>Ecclesiastes 9:1-12 reasons are adduced for the universal conclusion (<sup><2087></sup>Ecclesiastes 8:17) that no person can understand the works of God. This does not, however, prevent the assertion of the practical advantage in this life of that wisdom which includes the fear of God (<sup><2093></sup>Ecclesiastes 9:13ff). Compare <sup><2001></sup>Ecclesiastes 9:1-10 with Wisd. 2:1-9.

<sup><2001></sup>**Ecclesiastes 9:1.** A good man's trust in God is set forth as a counterpoise to our Ignorance of the ways of Providence.

*In the hand of God* Under His special protection (<sup><633B></sup>Deuteronomy 33:3ff) as righteous, and under His direction (<sup><2001></sup>Proverbs 21:1) as people.

*No man ...* literally, both love and also hatred man knoweth not: all are before them. Love and hatred here mean the ordinary outward tokens of God's favor or displeasure, i.e., prosperity and adversity. "Man knoweth not" probably means: "man knows not whether to expect prosperity or adversity from God; all his earthly future is in obscurity."

<sup><2002></sup>**Ecclesiastes 9:2.** *Event* See <sup><2024></sup>Ecclesiastes 2:14 note.

*Swareth* i.e., Swears lightly or profanely.

<sup><2003></sup>**Ecclesiastes 9:3.** Compare <sup><2081></sup>Ecclesiastes 8:11. The seeming indiscriminateness of the course of events tends to encourage evil-disposed men in their folly.

<sup><2004></sup>**Ecclesiastes 9:4.** *For to him* Rather: "Yet to him." Notwithstanding evils, life has its advantage, and especially when compared with death.

*Dog* To the Hebrews a type of all that was contemptible (<sup><0974B></sup>1 Samuel 17:43).

<sup><2005></sup>**Ecclesiastes 9:5,6.** See <sup><2082></sup>Ecclesiastes 8:12,14 note. The living are conscious that there is a future before them: but the dead are unconscious; they earn nothing, receive nothing, even the memory of them soon disappears; they are no longer excited by the passions which belong to people in this life; their share in its activity has ceased. Solomon here describes what he sees, not what he believes; there is no reference here to

the fact or the mode of the existence of the soul in another world, which are matters of faith.

The last clause of <sup>2006</sup>Ecclesiastes 9:6 indicates that the writer confines his observations on the dead to their portion in, or relation to, this world.

<sup>2006</sup>**Ecclesiastes 9:6.** *Now* Rather: “long ago.”

<sup>2007</sup>**Ecclesiastes 9:7-12.** Read these six verses connectedly, in order to arrive at the meaning of the writer; and compare <sup>2008</sup>Ecclesiastes 2:1-12.

After the description (<sup>2005</sup>Ecclesiastes 9:5,6) of the portionless condition of the dead, the next thought which occurs is that the man who is prosperous and active should simply enjoy his portion all through this life (<sup>2007</sup>Ecclesiastes 9:7-10); and then (<sup>2001</sup>Ecclesiastes 9:11,12) follows the correcting thought (see <sup>2001</sup>Ecclesiastes 3:1-15 note), introduced as usual (<sup>2002</sup>Ecclesiastes 2:12; 4:1,7) by “I returned,” namely, that the course of events is disposed and regulated by another will than that of man.

The person addressed is one whose life of labor is already pleasing to God, and who bears visible tokens of God’s favor.

<sup>2007</sup>**Ecclesiastes 9:7.** *Now accepteth* Rather: “already has pleasure in.” Joy (the marginal reference note) is regarded as a sign of the approbation and favor of God.

<sup>2008</sup>**Ecclesiastes 9:8.** White garments and perfume are simply an expressive sign of joy.

<sup>2000</sup>**Ecclesiastes 9:10.** The works which we carry on here with the combined energies of body and soul come to an end in the hour of death, when the soul enters a new sphere of existence, and body and soul cease to act together. Compare <sup>4004</sup>John 9:4.

*Device* See <sup>2025</sup>Ecclesiastes 7:25 note.

<sup>2001</sup>**Ecclesiastes 9:11.** *Chance* Or, “incident,” that which comes to us from without, one of the external events described in Ecclesiastes 3. Compare <sup>2024</sup>Ecclesiastes 2:14 note.

<sup>2002</sup>**Ecclesiastes 9:12.** *Time* See <sup>2001</sup>Ecclesiastes 3:1ff.

<sup>2093</sup>**Ecclesiastes 9:13.** Or, Also this have I seen — wisdom under the sun, and great it seemed to me.

From this verse to the end of Ecclesiastes 10, the writer inculcates, in a series of proverbs, wisdom in contrast to folly, as the best remedy in the present life to the evil of vanity.

<sup>2094</sup>**Ecclesiastes 9:14,15.** A parable probably without foundation in fact. Critics who ascribe this book to a late age offer no better suggestion than that the “little city” may be Athens delivered 480 B.C. from the host of Xerxes through the wisdom of Themistocles, or Dora besieged 218 B.C. by Antiochus the Great.

<sup>2096</sup>**Ecclesiastes 9:16,17** are comments on the two facts — the deliverance of the city and its forgetfulness of him who delivered it — stated in <sup>2095</sup>Ecclesiastes 9:15.

<sup>2098</sup>**Ecclesiastes 9:18.** *Sinner* The word in the original indicates intellectual as well as moral error.

## NOTES ON ECCLESIASTES 10

**Ecclesiastes 10.** This chapter resembles a portion of the Book of Proverbs, consisting entirely of rhythmical sentences giving advice, more or less direct, as to conduct. It is part of the writer's answer to the question (<sup><2108></sup>Ecclesiastes 2:3; 6:12) "What is good for men to do?" The thought which underlies the whole chapter is the advantage of that wisdom which includes piety and patience, as practical guidance through all the perplexities of life: various traits of wisdom are set forth in a favorable light, heightened by contrast with folly. A great part of the advice seems, in addition to its general application, to have a special reference to servants of a king.

<sup><2108></sup>**Ecclesiastes 10:1.** This verse is by its meaning so closely connected with <sup><2108></sup>Ecclesiastes 9:18 that the selection of it for the beginning of a new chapter seems unfortunate.

*Apothecary* Rather: a dealer in spices and perfumes (compare <sup><2125></sup>Exodus 30:25). The swarms of flies in the East very soon corrupt and destroy any moist unguent or mixture left uncovered, and pollute a dish of food in a few minutes.

*So doth ...* literally, more weighty than wisdom, than honor, is a little folly.

<sup><2102></sup>**Ecclesiastes 10:2.** The metaphor perhaps means "A wise man's sense is in its place, ready to help and protect him; but a fool's sense is missing when it is wanted, and so is useless."

<sup><2108></sup>**Ecclesiastes 10:3.** "Way" may be understood either literally (compare <sup><2105></sup>Ecclesiastes 10:15), or figuratively, of the course of action which he follows.

*He saith ...* He exposes his folly to every one he meets.

<sup><2104></sup>**Ecclesiastes 10:4.** *If the spirit ...* i.e., If he is angry.

*Leave not thy place* i.e., Do not lose thy self-control and quit his presence. Gentleness on thy part will calm both thyself and him, and prevent great wrongs being committed by either.

<sup>2106</sup>**Ecclesiastes 10:6,7.** The “evil” of <sup>2105</sup>Ecclesiastes 10:5 is here specified as that caprice of a king by which an unworthy favorite of low origin is promoted to successive dignities, while a noble person is degraded or neglected.

<sup>2108</sup>**Ecclesiastes 10:8-10.** The figures seem to be taken from the work of building up and pulling down houses. In their general application, they recommend the man who would act wisely to be cautious when taking any step in life which involves risk.

<sup>2108</sup>**Ecclesiastes 10:8.** *Breaketh an hedge* Rather: “breaks through a wall.”

*Serpent* The habit of snakes is to nestle in a chink of a wall, or among stones (compare <sup>3159</sup>Amos 5:19).

<sup>2109</sup>**Ecclesiastes 10:9.** *Be endangered* Rather: “cut himself.”

<sup>2101</sup>**Ecclesiastes 10:11.** Rather: “If a serpent without enchantment (i.e., not being enchanted) bites, then there is no advantage to the charmer”: i.e., if the charmer is unwisely slack in exercising his craft, he will be bitten like other people. See <sup>4584</sup>Psalm 58:4 note.

<sup>2104</sup>**Ecclesiastes 10:14.** *Full of words* Confident talking of the future is indicated rather than mere loquacity. Compare Jas. 4:13.

<sup>2105</sup>**Ecclesiastes 10:15.** The sense is: “The fool wearies himself with ineffectual attempts, he has not sufficient knowledge for the transaction of ordinary business.”

<sup>2106</sup>**Ecclesiastes 10:16-20.** Foolish rulers, by their weakness, self-indulgence and sloth, bring decay upon the state: nobleness and temperance insure prosperity: yet the subject must not rebel in word or thought against his king.

<sup>2106</sup>**Ecclesiastes 10:16.** *A child* Rather, young. The word is applied to Rehoboam (<sup>4437</sup>2 Chronicles 13:7) at the time of his accession to the throne, when he was 41 years old.

*Eat in the morning* A sign of intemperance (compare <sup>2351</sup>Isaiah 5:11).

<sup>2107</sup>**Ecclesiastes 10:17.** *Son of nobles* i.e., of a noble disposition.

<sup><2108></sup>**Ecclesiastes 10:18.** The “building” or “house” represents the state. Compare <sup><2086></sup>Isaiah 3:6; <sup><3090></sup>Amos 9:10.

*Droppeth through* i.e., Lets the rain through the roof.

<sup><2109></sup>**Ecclesiastes 10:19.** literally, For merriment they make a feast (= bread), and wine gladdens the living, and money supplies all things.

<sup><2100></sup>**Ecclesiastes 10:20.** *Curse* Compare <sup><2072></sup>Ecclesiastes 7:21,22.



## NOTES ON ECCLESIASTES 11

There ought to be no division between <sup><2100></sup>Ecclesiastes 10:20 and <sup><2100></sup>Ecclesiastes 11:1.

As if in contrast to the self-indulgence described in <sup><2100></sup>Ecclesiastes 10:16-19, the opposite virtue, readiness to give to others, is inculcated. The use of the word “bread” in both <sup><2100></sup>Ecclesiastes 10:19 (see the note) and <sup><2100></sup>Ecclesiastes 11:1 points the contrast.

<sup><2100></sup>**Ecclesiastes 11:1.** The verse means: “Show hospitality, even though the corresponding return of hospitality to you may seem improbable; nevertheless, be hospitable in faith.” Compare <sup><2143></sup>Luke 14:13,14; <sup><832></sup>Hebrews 13:2. Some interpreters (not unreasonably) understand by “bread” the seed from the produce of which bread is made. Seed cast upon the fertile soil flooded by the early rains would be returned to the sower in autumn with large increase.

<sup><2100></sup>**Ecclesiastes 11:2.** The verse means: “Let your hospitality and your alms be extensive: for you know not what reverses may befall either that person who by your liberality will be strengthened to meet them, or yourself who may come to need grateful friends.” Compare <sup><2143></sup>Luke 16:9.

*Seven, and also to eight* A definite number for an indefinite (compare marginal reference).

<sup><2100></sup>**Ecclesiastes 11:3-6.** “Unforeseen events come from God; and the man who is always gazing on the uncertain future will neither begin nor complete any useful work: but do thou bear in mind that times and circumstances, the powers of nature and the results to which they minister, are in the hand of God; and be both diligent and trustful.” The images are connected chiefly with the occupation of an agricultural laborer: the discharge of rain from the cloud, and the inclination of the falling tree, and the direction of the wind, are beyond his control, though the result of his work is affected by them. The common application of the image of the fallen tree to the state of departed souls was probably not in the mind of the inspired writer.

**Ecclesiastes 11:5.** *Spirit* The same Hebrew word (like Πνευμα <4151> in Greek and “Spirit” in English) signifies both the wind (<21104> Ecclesiastes 11:4) and the Spirit (compare marginal reference). The Old Testament in many places recognizes the special operation of God (<8308> Job 10:8-12; <4093> Psalm 139:13-16; <2006> Jeremiah 1:5), and distinctly of the Spirit of God (<8315> Job 31:15) in the origination of every child. Compare <0007> Genesis 2:7.

**Ecclesiastes 11:7-12:7.** The preceding exhortation to a life of labor in the sight of God is now addressed especially to the active and the young; and is enforced by another consideration, namely, the transitory character of all that sustains youth.

**Ecclesiastes 11:7.** *The light ... the sun* Gifts of God which cheer man’s toil, but which he almost ceases to appreciate in his old age.

**Ecclesiastes 11:8.** *Days of darkness* The time of old age, and perhaps any time of sorrow or misfortune. Compare <2112> Ecclesiastes 12:2.

*All that cometh* i.e., “The future,” which must not be reckoned on by the active man, as if his present state of healthy energy were to continue.

**Ecclesiastes 11:9.** *Rejoice ... cheer ... walk* The imperative mood is used to encourage one who possesses certain gifts from God to remember that they come from God and are to be used in accordance with His will.

*In the ways ...* The words are probably used in an innocent sense (<2020> Ecclesiastes 2:10; <0169> Proverbs 16:9).

*Judgment* This includes a judgment beyond the grave; though the writer’s view of it was dim and indefinite if compared with Christian’s.

**Ecclesiastes 11:10.** The sense appears to be, “Let the timely recollection of God’s judgment, and of the fleeting character of youth, so influence your conduct that you will refrain from acts which entail future remorse and pain.”

## NOTES ON ECCLESIASTES 12

**2112B Ecclesiastes 12:1.** *Remember now* Rather, And remember. The connection between this verse and the preceding one is unfortunately interrupted by our division of chapters.

*Creator* Gratitude to God as Creator is here inculcated, as just previously (2110B Ecclesiastes 11:9) fear of God as Judge. Godliness, acquired as a habit in youth, is recommended as the proper compensation for that natural cessation of youthful happiness which makes the days of old age more or less evil; more evil in proportion since there is less of godliness in the heart, and less evil where there is more godliness.

*While the evil days come not* Rather, before the evil days come.

**2112B Ecclesiastes 12:2.** *While ... not* Or, Before. The darkening of the lights of heaven denotes a time of affliction and sadness. Compare 2512B Ezekiel 32:7,8; 2812B Job 3:9; 2150B Isaiah 5:30. Contrast this representation of old age with 2123B 2 Samuel 23:4,5.

**2112B Ecclesiastes 12:3** The body in old age and death is here described under the figure of a decaying house with its inmates and furniture.

This verse is best understood as referring to the change which old age brings to four parts of the body, the arms (“the keepers”), the legs (“the strong men”), the teeth (“the grinders”), and the eyes.

**2112B Ecclesiastes 12:4.** *And the doors ... is low* The house is viewed from without. The way of entry and exit is stopped: little or no sound issues forth to tell of life stirring within. The old man, as he grows older, has less in common with the rising generation; mutual interest and social contact decline. Some take the doors and the sound of the mill as figures of the lips and ears and of the speech.

*He shall rise ...* Here the metaphor of the house passes out of sight. The verb may either be taken impersonally (= “they shall rise,” compare the next verse): or as definitely referring to an old man, who as the master of the house rises out of sleep at the first sound in the morning.

*All the daughters of musick* i.e., Singing women (2102B Ecclesiastes 2:8).

*Be brought low* i.e., Sound faintly in the ears of old age.

<sup><1118></sup>**Ecclesiastes 12:5.** *High* The powerful and the proud, such persons as an old man in his timidity might shrink from opposing or meeting: or, high ground which old men would avoid ascending.

*Fears ... in the way* Compare <sup><1153></sup>Proverbs 26:13.

*The almond tree* The type of old age. Many modern critics translate “The almond shall be despised,” i.e., pleasant food shall no longer be relished.

*The grasshopper* Rather: “the locust.” The clause means, heaviness and stiffness shall take the place of that active motion for which the locust is conspicuous.

*Desire* literally, the caper-berry; which, eaten as a provocative to appetite, shall fail to take effect on a man whose powers are exhausted.

*Long home* literally, “eternal (see <sup><2004></sup>Ecclesiastes 1:4 note) house;” man’s place in the next world. Without attributing to the author of Ecclesiastes that deep insight into the future life which is shown by the writer of the Epistles to the Corinthians, we may observe that He by whom both writers were inspired sanctioned in both books (see <sup><1711></sup>2 Corinthians 5:1-6) the use of the same expression “eternal house.” In 2 Corinthians it means that spiritual body which shall be hereafter; and it is placed, as it is here (see <sup><1118></sup>Ecclesiastes 12:3), in contrast with that earthly dissolving house which clothes the spirit of man in this world.

*Mourners* The singing women who attend funerals for hire (see <sup><1023></sup>Matthew 9:23).

<sup><1116></sup>**Ecclesiastes 12:6.** *Be loosed* The termination of life is signified generally by the snapping of the silver cord by which the lamp hangs from the ceiling; by the dashing in pieces of the cup or reservoir of oil; by the shattering of the pitcher used to bring water from the spring; and by the breaking of the wheel by which a bucket is let down into the well. Others discern in the silver cord, the soul which holds the body in life; in the bowl, the body; and in the golden oil (compare <sup><3012></sup>Zechariah 4:12) within it, the spirit.

*The spirit* i.e., The spirit separated unto God from the body at death. No more is said here of its future destiny. To return to God, who is the fountain (<sup><1310></sup>Psalms 36:9) of Life, certainly means to continue to live. The

doctrine of life after death is implied here as in <sup><1016></sup>Exodus 3:6 (compare <sup><1126></sup>Mark 12:26), <sup><1715></sup>Psalms 17:15 (see the note), and in many other passages of Scripture earlier than the age of Solomon. The inference that the soul loses its personality and is absorbed into something else has no warrant in this or any other statement in this book, and would be inconsistent with the announcement of a judgment after death (<sup><1214></sup>Ecclesiastes 12:14).

<sup><1118></sup>**Ecclesiastes 12:8-14.** This passage is properly regarded as the Epilogue of the whole book; a kind of apology for the obscurity of many of its sayings. The passage serves therefore to make the book more intelligible and more acceptable.

Here, as in the beginning of the book (<sup><2100></sup>Ecclesiastes 1:1,2), the Preacher speaks of himself (<sup><2118></sup>Ecclesiastes 12:8,9,10) in the third person. He first repeats (<sup><2118></sup>Ecclesiastes 12:8) the mournful, perplexing theme with which his musings began (<sup><2100></sup>Ecclesiastes 1:2); and then states the encouraging practical conclusion (<sup><2123></sup>Ecclesiastes 12:13,14) to which they have led him. It has been pointed out that the Epilogue assumes the identity of the Preacher with the writer of the Book of Proverbs.

<sup><2121></sup>**Ecclesiastes 12:11.** literally, Words of wise men are as goads, and as nails driven in (by) masters of assemblies; they are given from one shepherd: “goads,” because they rouse the hearer and impel him to right actions; “nails” (perhaps tent-spikes), because they remain fixed in the memory: “masters of assemblies” are simply “teachers” or “preachers” (see <sup><2100></sup>Ecclesiastes 1:1 note), instructors of such assemblies as Wisdom addresses (<sup><2103></sup>Proverbs 1:20).

*One shepherd* i.e., GOD, who is the supreme Giver of wisdom (<sup><2116></sup>Proverbs 2:6), and the chief Shepherd (<sup><2101></sup>Jeremiah 23:1-4). Compare <sup><4112></sup>1 Corinthians 2:12,13.

<sup><2122></sup>**Ecclesiastes 12:12.** *By these* i.e., “By the words of wise men.”

*Books* Rather, “Writings.” Probably the proverbs current in the Preacher’s age, including, though not especially indicating, his own.

The Preacher protests against the folly of protracted, unprofitable, meditation.

<sup>2123</sup>**Ecclesiastes 12:13.** literally, “The conclusion of the discourse” (or “word,” = words, 1:1), “the whole, let us hear.”

*The whole duty of man* Rather, the whole man. To revere God and to obey Him is the whole man, constitutes man’s whole being; that only is conceded to Man; all other things, as this book teaches again and again, are dependent on a Higher Incomprehensible Being.

<sup>2124</sup>**Ecclesiastes 12:14.** *Judgment with* Rather, judgment (which shall be held) upon etc.: i.e., an appointed judgment which shall take place in another world, as distinct from that retribution which frequently follows man’s actions in the course of this world, and which is too imperfect (compare <sup>2125</sup>Ecclesiastes 2:15; 4:1; 7:15; 9:2, ...) to be described by these expressions. He that is fully convinced that there is no solid happiness to be found in this world, and that there is a world to come wherein God will adjudge people to happiness or misery respectively, as they have made their choice and acted here, must necessarily subscribe to the truth of Solomon’s conclusion, that true religion is the only way to true happiness.