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COMMENTARIES

EXPOSITION OF THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS ECCLESIASTES

by John Gill

*Thou hast given a standard to them that fear thee;
that it may be displayed because of the truth
— Psalm 60:4*

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INTRODUCTION TO ECCLESIASTES, OR THE PREACHER

This book has been universally received into the canon of the Scriptures, by Jews and Christians. The former, indeed, had once some controversy^{f1} about it; and they thought to have hid it, or put it among the apocryphal books; because, at first sight, some things seemed contradictory to each other^{f2}, and to incline to heresy^{f3}, atheism, and epicurism, and to assert the eternity of the world^{f4}: but they better considered of it; and when they observed those passages were capable of a good sense, and that the whole agreed with the law of God, they changed their minds^{f5}. And so likewise it has been rejected by some heretical persons, of the Christian name, as Theodore and Mopsuest, and others; and by deists, and some deistically inclined. But it carries in it such internal evidences of a divine original, as cannot well be denied; it delivers out and inculcates such divine instructions, concerning the duties of men to God, and one another; concerning the contempt of the world, and the carnal pleasures of it; the fear and worship of God, and a future judgment; as none but the wisdom of God could suggest. There are various things in it which seem to be referred to by Christ and his apostles; at least there is an entire agreement between them: among the many things that might be observed, compare (^{<21105>}Ecclesiastes 11:5 12:11) with (^{<4088>}John 3:8 10:16); and (^{<21109>}Ecclesiastes 11:9 12:14) with (^{<4750>}2 Corinthians 5:10 ^{<4045>}1 Corinthians 4:5); and (^{<2072>}Ecclesiastes 7:20) with (^{<6108>}1 John 1:8). As to the author of it, there are evident marks of its being written by Solomon; yet, by some Jewish writers, it is ascribed to Isaiah^{f6}, which seems exceeding strange; for though he was a great prophet, and an evangelical preacher, yet no king in Jerusalem; whatever may be said for his being of the house of David, and of the royal family, as some have thought: and, besides, there is no agreement in style between this book and the writings of Isaiah. Others of them ascribe it to Hezekiah and his men^{f7}: Hezekiah was indeed the son of David, and David in expressly called his father; and he was a prince of great character, both with respect to religion, and to wealth and grandeur; (see ^{<4292>}2 Chronicles 29:2 32:27-29 ^{<4285>}2 Kings 18:5); which might induce them to such a conceit; though it seems to take its rise from Hezekiah's men being the copiers of some of Solomon's proverbs, (^{<21201>}Proverbs 25:1); but the proof from thence must be exceeding weak; that because they were

the transcribers of some of his proverbs, therefore were the writers of this book; and especially King Hezekiah; for, whatever may be said of his character, it falls greatly short of Solomon's wisdom or riches; and such things are said, with respect to both, in this book, as cannot agree with him: and, on the other hand, it does not appear that he was addicted to wine and women, and gave himself a loose to carnal pleasures, as the writer of this book had formerly done. Grotius thinks it was written by some persons in the times of Zerubbabel, and published under the name of Solomon, as a penitent; which is quite shocking, that an inspired writing should have a false title put to it, and be imposed upon the church of God under a wrong name: besides, the name of Solomon is never mentioned in it; though this, by the way, betrays a conviction that he is intended in the title of it: nor are many persons concerned in it; it appears throughout the whole to be the work of a single person, who often speaks as such in it. That Zerubbabel should be meant by the one shepherd, (²¹²¹Ecclesiastes 12:11), is a mere fancy; it is better interpreted, as by many, of Jesus Christ: his chief argument for this conjecture is, because there are three or four Chaldee words in it, as he supposes; which yet does not appear, and are nowhere to be found but in Daniel, Ezra, and the Chaldee interpreter: and so there are in the book of Proverbs, (²¹⁸¹Proverbs 31:2,3); but it does not follow, that because these words, or others, are but once used in Scripture, that they are not originally Hebrew; since the language was more extensive and better understood in Solomon's time than now, when we have only the copy of the Old Testament in which it is preserved. In short, what is said of the descent and dignity of the writer of this book, of his wisdom, wealth, riches, and grandeur, of his virtues and of his vices, agrees with none as with Solomon; to which may be added, that there is one passage in it, the same he used in his prayer at the dedication of the temple, (²¹⁷¹Ecclesiastes 7:20); compared with (¹¹⁸⁶1 Kings 8:46). As to the time in which it was written by him, it seems to have been in his old age, as the Jewish writers observe¹⁸; after his sin and fall, and recovery out of it, and when he was brought to true repentance for it: it was after he had made him great works, and built houses, his own house and the house of God, which were twenty years in building; it was after he had acquired not only vast riches and treasures, which must require time, but had gotten knowledge of all things in nature; and had seen all the works that are done under the sun, and had made trial of all pleasures that were to be enjoyed; (see ²¹⁰¹Ecclesiastes 1:1-2:26); it was after he had been ensnared by women, which he confesses and laments, (²¹⁷⁵Ecclesiastes 7:26); and his description

of old age seems to be made, not merely upon the theory of it, but from a feeling experience of the evils and infirmities of it, (~~2111~~ Ecclesiastes 12:1-6). The general scope and design of it is to expose the vanity of all worldly enjoyments; to show that a man's happiness does not lie in natural wisdom and knowledge; nor in worldly wealth; nor in civil honour, power, and authority; nor in the mere externals of religion; but in the fear of God, and the worship of him. It encourages men to a free use of the good things of life in a moderate way, with thankfulness to God; to submit with cheerfulness to adverse dispensations of Providence; to fear God and honour the king; to be dutiful to civil magistrates, and kind to the poor; to expect a future state, and an awful judgment; with many other useful things.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO ECCLESIASTES 1

After the title of the book, which describes the author of it, by his office, as a preacher; by his descent, as the son of David; and by his dignity, king in Jerusalem, (^{2100P}Ecclesiastes 1:1); the principal doctrine insisted on in it is laid down, that the world, and all things in it, are most vain things, (^{2100D}Ecclesiastes 1:2). Which is proved in general, by the unprofitableness of all labour to attain them, be they what they will, wisdom, knowledge, riches, honours, and pleasures, (^{2100B}Ecclesiastes 1:3); by the short continuance of men on earth, though that abides, (^{2100A}Ecclesiastes 1:4); by the constant revolution, going and returning, of the most useful creatures, the sun, winds, and water, (^{2100S}Ecclesiastes 1:5-7); by the unfruitful and unsatisfactory labour all things are full of, (^{2100R}Ecclesiastes 1:8); by the continual repetition of the same things, and the oblivion of them, (^{2100O}Ecclesiastes 1:9-11); and by Solomon's own experience in one particular thing; his search after, and acquisition of, knowledge and wisdom, which he attained a large share of; and which he found attended with labour, difficulty, and little satisfaction; nay, was vanity and vexation of spirit; for, as his knowledge increased, so did his grief and sorrow, (^{2100I}Ecclesiastes 1:12-18).

Ver. 1. *The words of the preacher*, etc.] Or the preacher's sermon. The whole book is one continued discourse, and an excellent one it is; consisting not of mere words, but of solid matter; of things of the greatest importance, clothed with words apt and acceptable, which the preacher sought out, (²¹²⁰Ecclesiastes 12:10). The Targum is,

“the words of the prophecy, which the preacher, who is Solomon, prophesied.”

According to which this book is prophetic; and so it interprets it, and owns it to be Solomon's. The word “Koheleth”, rendered “preacher”, is by some taken to be a proper name of Solomon; who, besides the name of Solomon, his parents gave him, and Jedidiah, as the Lord called him, had the name of Koheleth; nay, the Jews say^{f9}, he had seven names, and to these three add

four more, Agur, Jake, Ithiel, and Lemuel; the word by many is left untranslated^{f10}; but it seems rather to be an appellative, and is by some rendered “gathered”, or the “soul gathered”^{f11}. Solomon had apostatized from the church and people of God, and had followed idols; but now was brought back by repentance, and was gathered into the fold, from whence he had strayed as a lost sheep; and therefore chooses to call himself by this name, when he preached his recantation sermon, as this book may be said to be. Others rather render it, “the gatherer”^{f12}; and was so called, as the Jewish writers say^{f13}, either because he gathered and got much wisdom, as it is certain he did; or because he gathered much people from all parts, to hear his wisdom, (~~1066~~ 1 Kings 4:34 10:1); in which he was a type of Christ, (~~0490~~ Genesis 49:10 ~~4326~~ John 3:26 ~~4237~~ Matthew 23:37); or this discourse of his was delivered in a large congregation, got together for that purpose; as he gathered and assembled together the heads and chief of the people, at the dedication of the temple, (~~1080~~ 1 Kings 8:1); so he might call them together to hear the retraction he made of his sins and errors, and repentance for them: and this might justly entitle him to the character of a “preacher”, as we render it, an office of great honour, as well as of great importance to the souls of men; which Solomon, though a king, did not disdain to appear in; as David his father before him, and Noah before him, the father, king, and governor of the new world, (~~4341~~ Psalm 34:11 ~~6015~~ 2 Peter 2:5). The word used is in the feminine gender, as ministers of the Gospel are sometimes expressed by a word of the like kind; and are called maidens, (~~0681~~ Psalm 68:11 ~~4108~~ Proverbs 9:3); to denote their virgin purity, and uncorruptness in doctrine and conversation: and here some respect may be had to Wisdom, or Christ, frequently spoken of by Solomon, as a woman, and who now spoke by him; which is a much better reason for the use of the word than his effeminacy, which his sin or his old age had brought him to. The word “soul” may be supplied, as by some, and be rendered, “the preaching soul”^{f14}; since, no doubt, he performed his work as such with all his heart and soul. He further describes himself by his descent,

the son of David; which he mentions either as an honour to him, that he was the son of so great, so wise, so holy, and good a man; or as an aggravation of his fall, that being the descendant of such a person, and having had so religious an education, and so good an example before him, and yet should sin so foully as he had done; and it might also encourage him, that he had interest in the sure mercies of David, and in the promises

made to him, that when his children sinned, they should be chastised, yet his lovingkindness and covenant should not depart from them.

King of Jerusalem; not of Jerusalem only, but of all Israel, for as yet no division was made; (see ^{<2012>}Ecclesiastes 1:12). In Jerusalem, the city of Wisdom, as Jarchi observes, where many wise and good men dwelt, as well as it was the metropolis of the nation; and, which was more, it was the city where the temple stood, and where the worship of God was performed, and his priests ministered, and his people served him; and yet he, their king, that should have set them a better example, fell into idolatry!

Ver. 2. *Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher*, etc.] This is the preacher's text; the theme and subject he after enlarges upon, and proves by an induction of particulars; it is the sum of the whole book;

vanity of vanities, all [is] vanity; most extremely vain, exceedingly so, the height of vanity: this is repeated, both for the confirmation of it, men being hard of belief of it; and to show how much the preacher was affected with it himself, and to affect others with the same. The Targum reads, "vanity of vanities [in] this world"; which is right as to the sense of the passage; for though the world, and all things in it, were made by God, and are very good; yet, in comparison of him, are less than nothing, and vanity; and especially as become subject to it through sin, a curse being brought upon the earth by it; and all the creatures made for the use of men liable to be abused, and are abused, through luxury, intemperance, and cruelty; and the whole world usurped by Satan, as the god of it. Nor is there anything in it, and put it all together, that can give satisfaction and contentment; and all is fickle, fluid, transitory, and vanishing, and in a short time will come to an end: the riches of the world afford no real happiness, having no substance in them, and being of no long continuance; nor can a man procure happiness for himself or others, or avert wrath to come, and secure from it; and especially these are vanity, when compared with the true riches, the riches of grace and glory, which are solid, substantial, satisfying, and are for ever: the honours of this world are empty things, last a very short time; and are nothing in comparison of the honour that comes from God, and all the saints have, in the enjoyment of grace here, and glory hereafter: the sinful pleasures of life are imaginary things, short lived ones; and not to be mentioned with spiritual pleasures, enjoyed in the house of God, under the word and ordinances; and especially with those pleasures, for evermore, at the right hand of God. Natural wisdom and knowledge, the best thing in

the world; yet much of it is only in opinion; a great deal of it false; and none saving, and of any worth, in comparison of the knowledge of Christ, and of God in Christ; all the forms of religion and external righteousness, where there is not the true fear and grace of God, are all vain and empty things. Man, the principal creature in the world, is “vain man”; that is his proper character in nature and religion, destitute of grace: every than is vain, nay, vanity itself; high and low, rich and poor, learned or unlearned; nay, man at his best estate, as worldly and natural, is so; as even Adam was in his state of innocence, being fickle and mutable, and hence he fell, (~~1315~~ Psalm 39:5,11 62:9); and especially his fallen posterity, whose bodies are tenements of clay; their beauty vain and deceitful; their circumstances changeable; their minds empty of all that is good; their thoughts and imaginations vain; their words, and works, and actions, and their whole life and conversation; they are not at all to be trusted in for help, by themselves or others. The Targum is,

“when Solomon, king of Israel, saw, by the spirit of prophecy, that the kingdom of Rehoboam his son would be divided with Jeroboam, the son of Nebat; and that Jerusalem, and the house of the sanctuary, would be destroyed, and the people of the children of Israel would be carried captive; he said, by his word, Vanity of vanities in this world, vanity of vanities; all that I and my father David have laboured for, all is vanity!”

Ver. 3. *What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?*] This is a general proof of the vanity of all things, since there is no profit arises to a man of all his labour; for, though it is put by way of question, it carries in it a strong negative. All things a man enjoys he gets by labour; for man, through sin, is doomed and born unto it, (~~1316~~ Job 5:7); he gets his bread by the sweat of his brow, which is a part of the curse for sin; and the wealth and riches got by a diligent hand, with a divine blessing, are got by labour; and so all knowledge of natural and civil things is acquired through much labour and weariness of the flesh; and these are things a man labours for “under the sun”, which measures out the time of his labour: when the sun riseth, man goeth forth to his labour; and, by the light and comfortable warmth of it, he performs his work with more exactness and cheerfulness; in some climates, and in some seasons, its heat, especially at noon, makes labour burdensome, which is called, bearing “the heat and burden of the day”, (~~1317~~ Matthew 20:12); and, when it sets, it closes the time of service and labour, and therefore the servant earnestly

desires the evening shadow, (~~802~~Job 7:2). But now, of what profit and advantage is all this labour man takes under the sun, towards his happiness in the world above the sun? that glory and felicity, which lies in super celestial places in Christ Jesus? none at all. Or, “what remains of all his labour?”^{f15} as it may be rendered; that is, after death: so the Targum,

“what is there remains to a man after he is dead, of all his labour which he laboured under the sun in this world?”

nothing at all. He goes naked out of the world as he came into it; he can carry nothing away with him of all his wealth and substance he has acquired; nor any of his worldly glory, and grandeur, and titles of honour; these all die with him, his glory does not descend after him; wherefore it is a clear case that all these things are vanity of vanities; (see ~~802~~Job 1:21 ~~507~~1 Timothy 6:7 ~~19916~~Psalm 49:16,17 ~~2055~~Ecclesiastes 5:15). And, indeed, works of righteousness done by men, and trusted in, and by which they labour to establish a justifying righteousness, are of no profit and advantage to them in the business of justification and salvation; indeed, when these are done from right principles, and with right views, the labour in them shall not be in vain; God will not forget it; it shall have a reward of grace, though not of debt.

Ver. 4. [*One*] generation passeth away, and [*another*] generation cometh, etc.] This shows that a man can have no profit of all his labour under the sun, because of his short continuance; as soon almost as he has got anything by his labour, he must leave it: not only particular persons, but families, nations, and kingdoms; even all the inhabitants of the world, that are contemporaries, live together in the same age, in a certain period of time; these gradually go off by death, till the whole generation is consumed, as the generation of the Israelites in the wilderness were. Death is meant by passing away; it is a going out of time into eternity; a departure out of this world to another; a quitting of the earthly house of this tabernacle for the grave, the house appointed for all living; it is man’s going to his long home: and this is going the way of all the earth; in a short time a whole race or generation of men go off the stage of the world, and then another succeeds^{f16}; they come in by birth; and men are described from their birth by such as “come into the world”; for which there is a set time, as well as for going out, (~~809~~John 1:9 ~~208~~Ecclesiastes 3:2); and these having been a while in the world, go off to make room for another generation; and so things have been from the beginning of the world, and

will be to the end of it. Homer^{f17} illustrates this by the succession of leaves of trees; as is the generation of trees, he says, such is that of men; some leaves, the wind sheds them on the ground; others the budding forest puts forth, and they grow in their room in the springtime; so is the generation of men; one is born, and another ceases. Now death puts an end to all a man's enjoyments got by labour, his riches, honour, and natural knowledge; these all cease with him, and therefore he has no profit of all his labour under the sun;

but the earth abideth for ever; for a long time, until the dissolution of all things; and then, though that and all in it will be burnt up, yet it will rather be changed than destroyed; the form of it will be altered, when the substance of it will continue; it will not be annihilated, but renewed and refined. This is mentioned to show that the earth, which was made for man, of which he is the inhabitant and proprietor, is more stable than he himself; he soon passes off from it, but that continues; he returns to the earth, from whence he came, but that remains as it did; he dies, and leaves the earth behind him, and all his acquisitions in it; and therefore what profit has he of all his labours on it? Besides, that remains to have the same things transacted on it, over and over again, as has been already; God, that made it for men to dwell in, has determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of men's habitations in it; he has appointed who shall dwell on it, and where, in successive generations; and till all these men are born and gone off, age after age, the earth shall continue, and then pass through its last change. The Targum is,

“the earth stands for ever, to bear the vengeance that is to come upon the world for the sins of the children of men.”

The Midrash Tanchuma, as Jarchi observes, interprets it of all the righteous of Israel, called the earth; and he himself, of the meek that shall inherit the earth: says R. Isaac^{f18},

“one kingdom comes, and another goes, but Israel abideth for ever.”

Ver. 5. *The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose.*] The sun rises in the morning and sets at evening in our hemisphere, according to the appearance of things; and then it makes haste to go round the other hemisphere in the night: it “pants”, as the word^{f19} signifies; the same figure is used by other writers^{f20}; like a man out

of breath with running; so this glorious body, which rejoiceth as a strong man to run his race, and whose circuit is from one end of the heavens to the other, (¹⁹¹⁶Psalm 19:5,6); is in haste to get to the place where he rose in the morning, and there he makes no stop, but pursues his course in the same track again. By this instance is exemplified the succession of the generations of men one after another, as the rising and setting of the sun continually follows each other; and also sets forth the restless state of things in the world, which, like the sun, are never at a stand, but always moving, and swiftly taking their course; and likewise the changeable state of man, who, like the rising sun, and when at noon day, is in flourishing circumstances, and in the height of prosperity, but as this declines and sets, so he has his declining times and days of adversity. Moreover, like the rising sun, he comes into this world and appears for a while, and then, like the setting sun, he dies; only with this difference, in which the sun has the preference to him, as the earth before had; the sun hastens and comes to its place from whence it arose, but man lies down and rises not again till the heavens be no more, and never returns to his place in this world, that knows him no more, (¹⁸⁷⁰Job 7:10 14:12). The Jews^{f21} say, before the sun of one righteous, man sets, the sun of another righteous man rises.

Ver. 6. *The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north*, etc.] The word “wind” is not in this clause in the original text, but is taken from the next, and so may be rendered, “it goeth towards the south”, etc. that is, the sun^{f22} before mentioned, which as to its diurnal and nocturnal course in the daytime goes towards the south, and in the night towards the north; and as to its annual course before the winter solstice it goes to the south, and before the summer solstice to the north, as interpreters observe. And the Targum not only interprets this clause, but even the whole verse, of the sun, paraphrasing the whole thus,

“it goes all the side of the south in the daytime, and goes round to the side of the north in the night, by the way of the abyss; it goes its circuit, and comes to the wind of the south corner in the revolution of Nisan and Tammuz; and by its circuit it returns to the wind of the north corner in the revolution of Tisri and Tebet; it goes out of the confines of the east in the morning, and goes into the confines of the west in the evening.”

But Aben Ezra understands the whole of the wind, as our version and others do, which is sometimes in the south point of the heavens, and is presently in the north;

it whirleth about continually; and the wind returneth again according to his circuits; which may be meant of the circuits of the sun, which has a great influence on the wind, often raising it in a morning and laying it at night; but it is the wind itself which whirls and shifts about all the points of the compass, and returns from whence it came, where the treasures of it are. Agreeably to Solomon's account of the wind is Plato's definition of it,

“the wind is the motion of the air round about the earth^{f23}.”

This also exemplifies the rotation of men and things, the instability, inconstancy, and restless state of all sublunary enjoyments; the unprofitableness of men's labours, who, while they labour for riches and honour, and natural knowledge, labour for the wind, and fill their belly with east wind, which cannot satisfy, (^{<20516>}Ecclesiastes 5:16 ^{<18512>}Job 15:2); as well as the frailty of human life, which is like the wind that passes away and comes not again; and in this respect, like the rest of the instances, exceed man, which returns to its place, but man does not, (^{<18007>}Job 7:7 ^{<19889>}Psalms 78:39).

Ver. 7. *All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea [is] not full*, etc.] Which flow from fountains or are formed by hasty rains; these make their way to the sea, yet the sea is not filled therewith, and made to abound and overflow the earth, as it might be expected it would. So Seneca says^{f24} we wonder that the accession of rivers is not perceived in the sea; and Lucretius^{f25} observes the same, that it is wondered at that the sea should not increase, when there is such a flow of waters to it from all quarters; besides the wandering showers and flying storms that fall into it, and yet scarce increased a drop; which he accounts for by the exhalations of the sun, by sweeping and drying winds, and by what the clouds take up. Homer^{f26} makes every sea, all the rivers, fountains, and wells, flow, from the main ocean. Hence Pindar^{f27} calls the lake or fountain Camarina the daughter of the ocean. But Virgil^{f28} makes the rivers to flow into it, as the wise man here; with which Aristotle^{f29} agrees. So Lactantius^{f30} says, “mare quod ex fluminibus constat”, the sea consists of rivers. Both may be true, for, through secret passages under ground, the waters of it are caused to pass back again to their respective places from whence they flowed, as follows;

unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again; this also illustrates the succession of men, age after age, and the revolution of things in the world, their unquiet and unsettled state; and the unsatisfying nature of all things; as the sea is never full with what comes into it, so the mind of man is never satisfied with all the riches and honour he gains, or the knowledge of natural things he acquires; and it suggests that even water, as fluctuating a body as it is, yet has the advantage of men; that though it is always flowing and reflowing, yet it returns to its original place, which man does not. And from all these instances it appears that all things are vanity, and man has no profit of all his labour under the sun.

Ver. 8. *All things [are] full of labour*, etc.] Or “are laborious”^{f31}; gotten by labour, and attended with fatigue and weariness; riches are got by labour, and those who load themselves with thick clay, as gold and silver be, weary themselves with it; honour and glory, crowns and kingdoms, are weighty cares, and very fatiguing to those that have them; much study to acquire knowledge is a weariness to the flesh; and as men even weary themselves to commit iniquity, it is no wonder that religious exercises should be a weariness to a natural man, and a carnal professor;

man cannot utter [it]; or declare all the things that are laborious and fatiguing, nor all the labour they are full of; time would fail, and words be wanting to express the whole; all the vanity, unprofitableness, and unsatisfying nature of all things below the sun; particularly

the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing; both one and the other require new objects continually; the pleasure of these senses is blunted by the same objects constantly presented; men are always seeking new ones, and when they have got them they want others; whatever curious thing is to be seen the eye craves it; and, after it has dwelt on it a while, it grows tired of it, and wants something else to divert it; and so the ear is delighted with musical sounds, but in time loses the taste of them, and seeks for others; and in discourse and conversation never easy, unless, like the Athenians, it hears some new things, and which quickly grow stale, and then wants fresh ones still: and indeed the spiritual eye and ear will never be satisfied in this life, until the soul comes into the perfect state of blessedness, and beholds the face of God, and sees him as he is; and sees and hears what eye hath not seen, nor ear heard below. The Targum is,

“all the words that shall be in the world, the ancient prophets were weary in them, and they could not find out the ends of them; yea, a man has no power to say what shall be after him; and the eye cannot see all that shall be in the world, and the ear cannot be filled with hearing all the words of all the inhabitants of the world.”

Ver. 9. *The thing that hath been, it [is that] which shall be*, etc.] The thing that has been seen and heard is no other than what shall be seen and heard again; so that what is now seen and heard is only what has been seen and heard before; it is but the same thing over again; and that is the reason why the eye and ear are never satisfied; the same objects, as the visible heavens and earth, and all therein, which have been from the beginning, these are they which shall be, and there is nothing else to be seen and heard, and enjoyed;

and that which is done, [is] that which shall be done; what is done in the present age, nay, in this year, month, or day, shall be done over again in the next;

and [there is] no new [thing] under the sun; which is to be understood of things natural, as the works of creation, which were finished from the beginning of the world, and continue as they were ever since, (^{804B}Hebrews 4:3 ^{604A}2 Peter 3:4); the various seasons of day and night, of summer and winter, of spring and autumn, of heat and cold, of seed time and harvest, come in course, as they always did; these ordinances never fail, (⁰⁰⁴²Genesis 8:22 ^{241B}Jeremiah 31:35,36 33:20,21). The things before mentioned, the constant succession of men on earth, who are born into the world and die out of it, just as they always did; the sun rises and sets at its appointed time, as it did almost six thousand years ago; the winds whirl about all the points of the compass now as formerly; the rivers have the same course and recourse, and the sea its ebbing and flowing, they ever had; the same arts and sciences, trades and manufactures, obtained formerly as now, though in some circumstances there may be an improvement, and in others they grow worse; (see ⁰⁰⁴²Genesis 4:2,20-22) (^{0230B}Exodus 31:3-5); and even such things as are thought of new invention, it may be only owing to the ignorance of former times, history failing to give us an account of them; thus the art of printing, the making of gunpowder, and the use of guns and bombs, and of the lodestone and mariner’s compass, were thought to be of no long standing; and yet, according to the Chinese histories, that people were in possession of these

things hundreds of years before; the circulation of the blood, supposed to be first found out by a countryman of ours in the last century, was known by Solomon, and is thought to be designed by him in (⁻²¹¹⁶Ecclesiastes 12:6); and the like may be observed of other things. The emperor Mark Antonine^{f32} has the very phrase *οὐδεν καινον*, “nothing new”: so Seneca^{f33},

“nothing new I see, nothing new I do.”

This will likewise hold good in moral things; the same vices and virtues are now as ever, and ever were as they are; men in every age were born in sin, and were transgressors from the womb; from their infancy corrupt, and in all the stages of life; there were the same luxury and intemperance, and unnatural lusts, rapine and violence, in the days of Noah and Lot, as now; in Sodom and Gomorrah, and in the old world, as in the present age; and there were some few then, as now, that were men of sobriety, honesty, truth, and righteousness. There is nothing to be excepted but preternatural things, miraculous events, which may be called new, unheard of, and wonderful ones; such as the earth’s opening and swallowing men alive at once; the standing still of the sun and moon for a considerable time; the miracles wrought by the prophets of the Old and the apostles of the New Testament, and especially by Christ; and particularly the incarnation of Christ, or his birth of a virgin, that new thing made in the earth; these and such like things are made by the power of, he divine Being, who dwells above the sun, and is not bound by the laws of nature. Spiritual things may also be excepted, which are the effects of divine favour, or the produce of efficacious grace; and yet these things, though in some sense new, are also old; or there have been the same things for substance in former ages, and from the beginning, as now; such as the new covenant of grace; the new and living way to God; new creatures in Christ; a new name; the New Testament, and the doctrines of it; new ordinances, and the new commandment of love; and yet these, in some sense, are all old things, and indeed are the same in substance: there is nothing new but what is above the sun, and to be enjoyed in the realms of bliss to all eternity; and there are some things new^{f34}, new wine in Christ’s Father’s kingdom, new glories, joys, and pleasures, that will never end.

Ver. 10. *Is there [any] thing whereof it may be said, see, this [is] new?* etc.] This is an appeal to all men for the truth of the above observation, and carries in it a strong denial that there is anything new under the sun; and is

an address to men to inquire into the truth of it, and thoroughly examine it, and see if they can produce any material objection to it; look into the natural world, and the same natural causes will be seen producing the same effects; or into the moral world, and there are the same virtues, and their contrary; or into the political world, and the same schemes are forming and pursuing, and which issue in the same things, peace or war; or into the learned world, and the same languages, arts, and sciences, are taught and learned; and the same things said over again^{f35}: or into the mechanic world, and the same trades and businesses are carrying on: or the words may be considered as a concession, and carry in them the form of an objection, “there is a thing^{f36} whereof it may be said”, or a man may say, “see, this is new”; so the Targum; there were some things in Solomon’s time it is allowed that might be objected, as there are in ours, to which the answer is,

it hath been already of old time which was before us; what things are reckoned new are not so; they were known and in use in ages past, long before we had a being. R. Alshech takes the words to be an assertion, and not an interrogation, and interprets it of a spiritual temple in time to come, which yet was created before the world was.

Ver. 11. [*There is no remembrance of former [things]*, etc.] Which is the reason why some things that are really old are thought to be new; because either the memories of men fail them, they do not remember the customs and usages which were in the former part of their own lives, now grown old; or they are ignorant of what were in ages past, through want of history, or defect in it; either they have no history at all, or what they have is false; or if true, as there is very little that is so, it is very deficient; and, among the many things that have been, very few are transmitted to posterity, so that the memory of things is lost; therefore who can say with certainty of anything, this is new, and was never known in the world before? and the same for the future will be the case of present things; (see ²⁰²⁶Ecclesiastes 2:16);

neither shall there be any remembrance of [things] that are to come with [those] that shall come after; this will be the case of things present and future, that they will be buried in oblivion, and lie unknown to posterity that shall come after the things that are done; and if any person or persons should rise up and do the same things, they may be called new, though they are in fact old, for want of knowing that they were before. The Targum is,

“there is no remembrance of former generations; and even of later ones, that shall be, there will be no remembrance of them, with the generations of them that shall be in the days of the King Messiah.”

R. Alshech interprets it of the resurrection of the dead.

Ver. 12. *I the preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem.*] Solomon having given a general proof of the vanity of all things here below, and of the insufficiency of them to make men happy, proceeds to particular instances, and begins with human wisdom and knowledge, which of all things might be thought to be most conducive to true happiness; and yet it falls short of it: he instances in himself for proof of it; and he could not have pitched on anyone more proper and pertinent to the purpose, who had all the advantages of obtaining wisdom, was assiduous in his pursuit of it, and made a proficiency in it above all mankind; wherefore he must be owned to be a proper judge, and whatever is concluded by him may be taken for granted as certain; and this is the sum of the following verses to the end of the chapter. Now let it be observed, that he was a “preacher”, not a private person, and must have a good share of knowledge to qualify him for teaching and instructing others; and, more than this, he was a king, and did not want money to purchase books, and procure masters to instruct him in all the branches of literature; and when he entered upon the more profound study of wisdom, and especially when he said this, it was not in his infancy or childhood, or before he came to the throne, but after; even after he had asked, wisdom of God to govern, and it had been given him; yea, after he had been a long time king, as he now was; though the Jewish writers, as the Targum, Jarchi, and others, conclude from hence that he was not now a king, but become a private person, deposed or driven from his throne, which does not appear: moreover, he was king of Israel, not over a barbarous people, where darkness and ignorance reigned, but over a “wise and understanding people”, as they are called (^(Deuteronomy 4:6)); and he was king over them in Jerusalem too, the metropolis of the nation; there he had his royal palace, where were not only the temple, the place of divine worship, but a college of prophets, and a multitude of priests, and an abundance of wise and knowing men, whom he had opportunity of conversing with frequently; to which may be added, his large correspondence abroad; persons from all kings and kingdoms came to hear his wisdom, as the queen of Sheba; and by putting questions to him, and so exercising his talents, not a little contributed to the improvement of them. Now a person so qualified must be a judge of wisdom, and what he

says deserves attention; and it may be observed, that what he says, as follows, is “in verbo regis et sacerdotis”, on the word of a king and preacher, who would never risk his honour, or forfeit his character, by saying an untruth.

Ver. 13. *And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom,* etc.] As he had all advantages and opportunities, so he did not want for industry and application to obtain knowledge; he gave his mind to it; he took up a resolution not to be discouraged by any difficulties, but to break through them, if possible; he set about the work with great readiness and cheerfulness; he had a price in his hand to get wisdom, and he had a heart unto it; (see ^{<076>}Proverbs 17:16); and he pursued it with all diligence, with all his might and main: nor did he content himself with a superficial knowledge of things; but “searched” after the most recondite and abstruse learning, and penetrated into the utmost recesses of it, to find out all that was to be known; and this he did “by” using all the “wisdom” and sagacity, the light and strength of reason, and all those bright natural parts, which God had given him in a very extraordinary manner. And his inquiry was very extensive; it was

concerning all [things] that are done under heaven; into the nature of all things, animate and inanimate; trees, herbs, plants, fossils, minerals, and metals; beasts, birds, fish, and all creeping things; see (^{<103>}1 Kings 4:33); with everything else in nature: he sought to make himself master of all arts and sciences; to get knowledge of all trades and manufactures; to understand everything in politics, relating to kingdoms and states, and the government of them; to observe all the actions of men, wise and foolish, that he might know the difference, and be a judge of what was right and wrong. And his observation upon the whole is,

this sore travail hath God given to the sons of men, to be exercised therewith: he found by experience it was a heavy task, which God had put upon the children of men, to get wisdom and knowledge in the way it was to be gotten; which was very burdensome and wearisome to the flesh; nay, he found it was an ^{f37}“evil business”, as it may be rendered; or there was something sinful and criminal, which God suffered men in their pursuit after knowledge to fall into, and which their studies exposed them to; as to indulge a vain and sinful curiosity, to pry into things unlawful, and to be wise above what is written; or to be too anxious in attaining natural knowledge, to the neglect of things of great importance; or to abuse or

trust in knowledge attained unto, or be vainly elated and puffed up with it. Or this may be understood of the evil of punishment, which God inflicts on men for the sin of eating of the tree of knowledge; and that as he is doomed to get his bread, so his knowledge, with the sweat of his brow, that is, with great pains and labour; which otherwise would have been more easily obtained: but this God has done to “afflict” or “humble”^{f38} men, as the word may be rendered; to afflict or punish them for sin; and to humble them by showing them how weak are the powers and faculties of their minds, that so much pains must be taken to get a small share of knowledge. The Targum is,

“and I saw all the works of the children of men obnoxious to an evil business; the Lord gave to the children of men, to be afflicted with it.”

Ver. 14. *I have seen all the works that are done under the sun*, etc.] All things done by the Lord, that were on the earth, and in it, and in the sea; he considered them, and endeavoured to search into the nature of them; and did attain to a very great knowledge of them, so that he could speak of them to the instruction of others; (see ^{<100B>}1 Kings 4:33); and all that were done by men, by their head, or by their hands; all that were written or wrought by them; all their philosophical works and experiments, and all their mechanic operations; as well as all their good and bad works, in a moral sense; so the Targum,

“I saw all the deeds of the children of men, which are done under the sun in this world;”

and, behold, all [is] vanity and vexation of spirit; not only the things known, but the knowledge of them; it is mere vanity, there is nothing solid and substantial in it, or that can make a man happy; yea, on the contrary, it is vexatious and distressing; it is not only a weariness to the flesh to obtain it, but, in the reflection of it, gives pain and uneasiness to the mind: it is a “breaking of the spirit”^{f39} of the man, as the Targum, Jarchi, and Alshech, interpret the phrase; it wastes and consumes his spirit, as well as his time, and all to no purpose; it is, as some ancient Greek versions and others render it, and not amiss, a “feeding on wind”^{f40}; what is useless and unprofitable, and like labouring for that; (see ^{<2156>}Hosea 12:1 ^{<817D>}Job 15:2) (^{<2156>}Ecclesiastes 5:16); and so Aben Ezra.

Ver. 15. [*That which is] crooked cannot be made straight*, etc.] By all the art and cunning, wisdom and knowledge of man, that he can attain unto; whatever he, in the vanity of his mind, may find fault with in the works of God, either of nature of providence, and which he may call crooked, it is not in his power to make them straight, or to mend them; (see ^{<2073>}Ecclesiastes 7:13). There is something which, through sin, is crooked, in the hearts, in the nature, in the principles, ways and works, of men; which can never be made straight, corrected or amended, by all the natural wisdom and knowledge of men, which shows the insufficiency of it: the wisest philosophers among men, with all their parade of wit and learning, could never effect anything of this kind; this only is done by the Spirit and grace of God; (see ^{<23216>}Isaiah 42:16);

and that which is wanting cannot be numbered; the deficiencies in human science are so many, that they cannot be reckoned up; and the defects in human nature can never be supplied or made up by natural knowledge and wisdom; and which are so numerous, as that they cannot be understood and counted. The Targum is,

“a man whose ways are perverse in this world, and dies in them, and does not return by repentance, he has no power of correcting himself after his death; and a man that fails from the law and the precepts in his life, after his death hath no power to be numbered with the righteous in paradise:”

to the same sense Jarchi’s note and the Midrash.

Ver. 16. *I communed with my own heart*, etc.] That is, looked into it, examined it, and considered what a stock and fund of knowledge he had in it, after all his researches into it; what happiness accrued to him by it, and what judgment upon the whole was to be formed upon it; and he spoke within himself after this manner:

saying, lo, I am come to great estate; or become a great man; famous for wisdom, arrived to a very great pitch of it; greatly increased in it, through a diligent application to it;

and have gotten more wisdom than all [they] that have been before me in Jerusalem; or, “that before me were over Jerusalem”^{f41}; governors of it, or in it; not only than the Jebusites, but than Saul, the first king of Israel, or than even his father David; or, as Gussetius^{f42}, than any princes, rulers, and civil magistrates in Jerusalem, in his own days or in the days of his father;

and also than all the priests and prophets, as well as princes, that ever had been there: and indeed he was wiser than all men, (<1000>1 Kings 4:30-32); and even than any that had been in Jerusalem, or any where else, or that should be hereafter, excepting the Messiah; (see <1000>1 Kings 3:12 10:27 <1000>Matthew 12:42). And seeing this is said of him by others, and even by the Lord himself, it might not only be said with truth by himself, but without ostentation; seeing it was necessary it should be said to answer his purpose, which was to show the vanity of human wisdom in its highest pitch; and it was nowhere to be found higher than in himself;

yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge; or, “saw much wisdom and knowledge”^{f43}; he thoroughly understood it, he was a complete master of it; it was not a superficial knowledge he had attained unto, or a few lessons of it he had committed to memory; some slight notions in his head, or scraps of things he had collected together, in an undigested manner; but he had made himself thoroughly acquainted with everything worthy to be known, and had digested it in his mind.

Ver. 17. *And I gave my heart to know wisdom*, etc.] Which is repeated, for the confirmation of it, from (<2000>Ecclesiastes 1:13), and that it might be taken notice of how assiduous and diligent he had been in acquiring it; a circumstance not to be overlooked;

and to know madness and folly: that he might the better know wisdom, and learn the difference between the one and the other, since opposites illustrate each other; and that he might shun madness and folly, and the ways thereof, and expose the actions of mad and foolish men: so Plato^{f44} says, ignorance is a disease, of which there are two kinds, madness and folly. The Targum, Septuagint, and all the Oriental versions, interpret the last word, translated “folly”, by understanding, knowledge, and prudence; which seems to be right, since Solomon speaks of nothing afterwards, as vexation and grief to him, but wisdom and knowledge: and I would therefore read the clause in connection with the preceding, thus, “and the knowledge of things boasted of”, vain glorious knowledge; “and prudence”, or what may be called craftiness and cunning; or what the apostle calls “science falsely so called”, (<5000>1 Timothy 6:20); (see <2000>Proverbs 12:8 <2000>Daniel 8:25);

I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit; (see Gill on “<2000>Ecclesiastes 1:14”); the reason follows.

Ver. 18. *For in much wisdom [is] much grief*, etc.] In getting it, and losing it when it is gotten: or “indignation”^{f45}, at himself and others; being more sensible of the follies and weakness of human nature;

and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow: for, the more he knows, the more he would know, and is more eager after it, and puts himself to more pains and trouble to acquire it; and hereby becomes more and more sensible of his own ignorance; and of the difficulty of attaining the knowledge he would come at; and of the insufficiency of it to make him easy and happy: and besides, the more knowledge he has, the more envy it draws upon him from others, who set themselves to oppose him, and detract from his character; in short, this is the sum of all human knowledge and wisdom, attained to in the highest degree; instead of making men comfortable and happy, it is found to be mere vanity, to cause vexation and disquietude of mind, and to promote grief and sorrow. There is indeed wisdom and knowledge opposite to this, and infinitely more excellent, and which, the more it is increased, the more joy and comfort it brings; and this is wisdom in the hidden part; a spiritual and experimental knowledge of Christ, and of God in Christ, and of divine and evangelical truths; but short of this knowledge there is no true peace, comfort, and happiness. The Targum is,

“for a man who multiplies wisdom, when he sins and does not turn by repentance, he multiplies indignation from the Lord; and he who increases knowledge, and dies in his youth, increases grief of heart to those who are near akin to him.”

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION TO ECCLESIASTES 2

Solomon, having made trial of natural wisdom and knowledge in its utmost extent, and found it to be vanity, proceeds to the experiment of pleasure, and tries whether any happiness was in that, (²⁰¹⁸Ecclesiastes 2:1). As for that which at first sight was vain, frothy, and frolicsome, he dispatches at once, and condemns it as mad and unprofitable, (²⁰¹⁸Ecclesiastes 2:2); but as for those pleasures which were more manly, rational, and lawful, he dwells upon them, and gives a particular enumeration of them, as what he had made full trial of; as good eating and drinking, in a moderate way, without abuse; fine and spacious buildings; delightful vineyards, gardens, and orchards; parks, forests, and enclosures; fish pools, and fountains of water; a large retinue, and equipage of servants; great possessions, immense riches and treasure; a collection of the greatest rarities, and curiosities in nature; all kinds of music, vocal and instrumental, (²⁰¹⁸Ecclesiastes 2:3-8); in all which he exceeded any that went before him; nor did he deny himself of any pleasure, in a lawful way, that could possibly be enjoyed, (²⁰¹⁸Ecclesiastes 2:9,10). And yet on a survey of the whole, and after a thorough experience of what could be found herein, he pronounces all vanity and vexation of spirit, (²⁰¹⁸Ecclesiastes 2:11); and returns again to his former subject, wisdom; and looks that over again, to see if he could find real happiness in it, being sadly disappointed in that of pleasure, (²⁰¹²Ecclesiastes 2:12). He indeed commends wisdom, and prefers it to folly, and a wise man to a fool; (²⁰¹³Ecclesiastes 2:13,14); and yet observes some things which lessen its value; and shows there is no happiness in it, the same events befalling a wise man and a fool; both alike forgotten, and die in like manner, (²⁰¹⁵Ecclesiastes 2:15,16). And then he takes into consideration business of life, and a laborious industry to obtain wealth; and this he condemns as grievous, hateful, and vexatious, because, after all a man's acquisitions, he knows not to whom he shall leave them, whether to a wise man or a fool, (²⁰¹⁷Ecclesiastes 2:17-21). And because a man himself has no rest all his days, nothing but sorrow and grief, (²⁰²²Ecclesiastes 2:22,23); wherefore he concludes it is best for a man to enjoy the good things of this life himself; which he confirms by his own

experience, and by an, antithesis between a good man and a wicked one, (^{2X124}Ecclesiastes 2:24-26).

Ver. 1. *I said in mine heart*, etc.] He communed with his heart, he thought and reasoned within himself, and came to this resolution in his own mind; that since he could not find happiness in natural wisdom and knowledge, he would seek for it elsewhere, even in pleasure; in which, he observed, some men placed their happiness; or, however, sought for it there: or, “I said to my heart”, as the Syriac version;

Go to now; or, “go, I pray thee”,^{f46} listen to what I am about to say, and pursue the track I shall now point out to thee;

I will prove thee with mirth; with those things which will cause mirth, joy, and pleasure; and try whether any happiness can be enjoyed this way, since it could not be had in wisdom and knowledge. Jarchi and Aben Ezra render it, “I will mingle”, wine with water, or with spices; or, “I will pour out”, wine in plenty to drink of, “with joy”, and to promote mirth: but the Targum, Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic versions, interpret it as we do, and which sense Aben Ezra makes mention of;

therefore enjoy pleasure; which man is naturally a lover of; he was so in his state of innocency, and this was the bait that was laid for him, and by which he was drawn into sin; and now he loves, lives in, and serves sinful pleasures; which are rather imaginary than real, and last but for a season, and end in bitterness: but such sordid lusts and pleasures are not here meant; Solomon was too wise and good a man to give into these, as the “summum bonum”; or ever to think there could be any happiness in them, or even to make a trial of them for that purpose: not criminal pleasures, or an impure, sottish, and epicurean life, are here intended; but manly, rational, and lawful pleasures, for no other are mentioned in the detail of particulars following; and, in the pursuit of the whole, he was guided and governed by his wisdom, and that remained in him, (^{2X125}Ecclesiastes 2:3,9). It may be rendered, “therefore see good”,^{f47}; look upon all the good, pleasant, and delectable things of life; and enjoy them in such a manner as, if possible, happiness may be attained in them;

and, behold, this also [is] vanity; it will be found, by making the experiment, that there is no solid and substantial happiness in it, as it was by himself.

Ver. 2. *I said of laughter, [it is] mad,* etc.] The risible faculty in man is given him for some usefulness; and when used in a moderate way, and kept within due bounds, is of service to him, and conduces to the health of his body, and the pleasure of his mind; but when used on every trivial occasion, and at every foolish thing that is said or done, and indulged to excess, it is mere madness, and makes a man look more like a madman and a fool than a wise man; it lasts but for a while, and the end of it is heaviness, (²⁰⁷⁶Ecclesiastes 7:6 ²⁰⁴³Proverbs 14:13). Or, “I said to laughter, [thou art] mad”^{f48}; and therefore will have nothing to do with thee in the excessive and criminal way, but shun thee, as one would do a mad man: this therefore is not to be reckoned into the pleasure he bid his soul go to and enjoy;

and of mirth, what doth it? what good does do? of what profit and advantage is it to man? If the question is concerning innocent mirth, the answer may be given out of (²¹⁵³Proverbs 15:13 17:22); but if of carnal sinful mirth, there is no good arises from that to the body or mind; or any kind of happiness to be enjoyed that way, and therefore no trial is to be made of it. What the wise man proposed to make trial of, and did, follows in the next verses.

Ver. 3. *I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine,* etc.] Not in an immoderate way, so as to intoxicate himself with it, in which there can be no pleasure, nor any show of happiness; but in a moderate, yet liberal way, so as to be innocently cheerful and pleasant, and hereby try what good and happiness were to be possessed in this way. By “wine” is meant, not that only, but everything eatable and drinkable that is good; it signifies what is called good living, good eating and drinking: Solomon always lived well; was brought up as a prince, and, when he came to the throne, lived like a king; but being increased in riches, and willing to make trial of the good that was in all the creatures of God, to see if any happiness was in them; determines to keep a better table still, and resolved to have everything to eat or drink that could be had, cost what it will; of Solomon’s daily provision for his household, (see ¹⁰⁰²1 Kings 4:22,23); the Midrash interprets it, of the wine of the law. It may be rendered, “I sought in mine heart to draw out my flesh with wine”, or “my body”^{f49}; to extend it, and make it fat and plump; which might be reduced to skin and bones, to a mere skeleton, through severe studies after wisdom and knowledge. The Targum is,

“I sought in my heart to draw my flesh into the house of the feast of wine;”

as if there was a reluctance in him to such a conduct; and that he as it were put a force upon himself, in order to make the experiment;

(*yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom*); or, “yet my heart led [me] in wisdom”^{f50}: he was guided and governed by wisdom in this research of happiness; he was upon his guard, that he did not go into any sinful extravagancies, or criminal excesses in eating and drinking;

and to lay hold on folly; that he might better know what folly was, and what was the folly of the sons of men to place their happiness in such things; or rather, he studiously sought to lay hold on folly, to restrain it, and himself from it, that it might not have the ascendant over him; so that he would not be able to form a right judgment whether there is any real happiness in this sort of pleasure, or not, he is, speaking of; for the epicure, the voluptuous person, is no judge of it;

till I might see what [was] that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life; where the “summum bonum”, or chief happiness of man lies; and which he should endeavour to seek after and pursue, that he might enjoy it throughout the whole of his life, while in this world: and that he might still more fully know it, if possible, he did the following things.

Ver. 4. *I made me great works*, etc.] He did not spend his time in trifling things, as Domitian^{f51}, in catching and killing flies; but in devising, designing, directing, and superintending great works of art and skill, becoming the grandeur of his state, and the greatness of his mind: the Midrash restrains it to his great throne of ivory, overlaid with gold, (~~1108~~1 Kings 10:18), but it is a general expression, including all the great things he did, of which the following is a particular enumeration;

I builded me houses; among which must not be reckoned the house of God, though that was built by him, and in the first place; yet this was built, not for his own pleasure and grandeur, but for the worship and glory of God: but his own house and palace is chiefly meant, which was thirteen years in building; and the house of the forest in Lebanon, which perhaps was his country seat; with all other houses and offices, for his stores, for his servants, his horsemen, and chariots; see (~~1000~~1 Kings 7:1,2 9:1,19); and in fine spacious buildings men take a great deal of pleasure, and promise

themselves much happiness in dwelling in them, and in perpetuating their names to posterity by them; see (^{<1901>}Psalm 49:11 ^{<1821>}Job 21:21). The Targum is,

“I multiplied good works in Jerusalem; I builded me houses; the house of the sanctuary, to make atonement for Israel; the king’s house of refreshment, and the conclave and porch; and the house of judgment, of hewn stones, where the wise men sit and do judgment; I made a throne of ivory for the royal seat;”

I planted me vineyards; perhaps those at Engedi were of his planting; however, he had one at Baalhamon, and no doubt in other places, (^{<2114>}Song of Solomon 1:14 8:11); the Targum makes mention of one at Jabne, planted by him; these also add to the pleasure of human life; it is delightful to walk in them, to gather the fruit and drink of the wine of them; see (^{<2172>}Song of Solomon 7:12).

Ver. 5. *I made me gardens and orchards*, etc.] Of the king’s garden, we read (^{<2304>}Jeremiah 39:4). Adrichomius^{f52} makes mention of a royal garden in the suburbs of Jerusalem, fenced with walls; and was a paradise of fruit trees, herbs, spices, and flowers; abounded with all kind of fruit, exceeding pleasant and delightful to the senses: and, as Solomon was so great a botanist, and knew the nature and use of all kinds of trees and herbs, (^{<1003>}1 Kings 4:33); no doubt but he has a herbal garden, well stocked with everything of that kind, curious and useful; (see ^{<1121>}1 Kings 21:2). Gardens are made for pleasure as well as profit; Adam, as soon as created, was put into a garden, to add to his natural pleasure and felicity, as well as for his employment, (^{<0008>}Genesis 2:8); and the pleasure of walking in a garden, and partaking of the fruits of it, are alluded to by Solomon, (^{<2142>}Song of Solomon 4:12,13,16 5:1 6:9);

and I planted trees in them of all [kind of] fruits; which, as before observed, he had thorough knowledge of, and many of which were brought him from foreign parts; and all served to make his gardens, orchards, parks, forests, and enclosures, very pleasant and delectable. The Targum adds,

“some for food, others for drink, and others for medicine.”

Ver. 6. *I made me pools of water*, etc.] For cascades and water works to play in, as well as to keep and produce fish of all kinds: mention is made of the king’s pools, (^{<1024>}Nehemiah 2:14); the fish pools at Heshbon, by the gate of Bathrabbim, perhaps belonged to Solomon, (^{<2104>}Song of Solomon

7:4); Little more than a league from Bethlehem are pools of water, which at this day are called the fish pools of Solomon; they are great reservoirs cut in the rock, the one at the end of the other; the second being a little lower than the first, and the third than the second, and so communicate the water from one to another when they are full^{f53}; and of which Mr. Maundrell^{f54} gives the following account:

“They are about an hour and a quarter distant from Bethlehem, southward; they are three in number, lying in a row above each other, being so disposed, that the waters of the uppermost may descend into the second, and those of the second into the third; their figure is quadrangular; the breadth is the same in all, amounting to above ninety paces; in their length there is some difference between them, the first being about an hundred sixty paces long; the second, two hundred; the third, two hundred twenty; they are all lined with a wall, and plastered, and contain a great depth of water.”

And to these, he observes, together with the gardens adjoining, Solomon is supposed to allude, (^{2III5}Ecclesiastes 2:5,6). There are to be seen, he says^{f55}, some remains of an old aqueduct, which anciently conveyed the waters from Solomon’s pools to Jerusalem; this is said to be the genuine work of Solomon, and may well be allowed to be in reality what it is pretended for. So Rauwolff^{f56} says,

“beyond the tower of Ader, in another valley, not far from Bethlehem, they show still to this day a large orchard, full of citron, lemon, orange, pomegranate, and fig trees, and many others, which King Solomon did plant in his days; with ponds, canals, and other water works, very pleasantly prepared, as he saith himself, (^{2III5}Ecclesiastes 2:5); this is still in our time full of good and fruitful trees, worthy to be seen for their sakes, and ditches there: wherefore I really believe it to be the same Josephus^{f57} makes mention of, called Ethan, about twelve mile from Jerusalem; where Solomon had pleasant gardens and water pools, to which he used to ride early in a morning.”

Mr. Maundrell^{f58} also makes mention of some cisterns, called Solomon’s cisterns, at Roselayn, about an hour from the ruins of Tyre; of which there are three entire at this day; one about three hundred yards distant from the sea, the other two a little further up; and, according to tradition, they were

made by that great king, in recompence to King Hiram, for supplying materials towards building the temple: but, as he observes, these, though ancient, could not be built before the time of Alexander; since the aqueduct, which conveys the water from hence to Tyre, is carried over the neck of land, by which he joined the city to the continent. Jarchi interprets these pools in this text of places to keep fish alive in, and so the Midrash understands by them fish pools; though they seem to be canals made in the gardens, orchards, and parks;

to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees; the young nurseries, which in time grew up to large fruit bearing trees; which, being numerous and thick, looked like a wood or forest, as the word is; and which canals and nurseries both added greatly to the delight and pleasure of those places. In this manner the Indians water their gardens; who commonly have in them a great pit, or kind of fish pool, which is full of rain water; and just by it there is a basin of brick, raised about two feet higher than the ground: when therefore they have a mind to water the garden, it is filled with water from the fish pool, or pit; which, through a hole that is at the bottom, falls into a canal, that is divided into many branches, proportionable in size to their distance from the basin, and carries the water to the foot of each tree, and to each plot of herbs; and when the gardeners think they are watered enough, they stop up, or turn aside, the canals with clods of earth^{f59}. The beauty of a plant, or tree, is thus described by Aelianus^{f60};

“branches generous, leaves thick, stem or trunk firm and stable, roots deep; winds shaking it; a large shadow cast from it; changing with the seasons of the year; and water, partly brought through canals, and partly coming from heaven, to water and nourish it; and such beautiful, well watered, and flourishing trees, contribute much to the pleasure of gardens.”

Ver. 7. *I got [me] servants and maidens*, etc.] Menservants, and maidservants; the Targum adds,

“of the children of Ham, and of the rest of the strange people;”

these were such as he hired, or bought with his money;

and had servants born in my house; and these were all employed by him; either as his retinue and equipage, his attendants and bodyguards; or to take care of his household, his gardens, and pools; or for his horses and chariots, and for various offices; (see ^{<1085>}1 Kings 4:26,27) (^{<1128>}Ezra 2:58).

Villalpandus computes the number of his servants to be forty eight thousand; if there were any pleasure and happiness in such a numerous attendance, Solomon had it;

also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me; oxen, cows, horses, asses, camels, mules, etc. also sheep and goats; which, as they were profitable, so it was pleasant to see them grazing on the hills and valleys, in the fields, mountains, and meadows.

Ver. 8. *I gathered me also silver and gold*, etc.] In great quantities: the weight of gold which came to him in one year was six hundred threescore and six talents; (see ^{<1094>}1 Kings 9:14,28 10:14,22, 27);

and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces; whatsoever was valuable and precious, such as is laid up in the cabinets of kings, as jewels and precious stones; and everything rare and curious, to be found in all provinces of the earth, or which were brought from thence as presents to him; the Targum is,

“and the treasures of kings and provinces, given to me for tribute:”

wherefore, if any pleasure arises from these things, as do to the virtuosi, Solomon enjoyed it. Moreover, among the treasures of kings were precious garments of various sorts, as were in the treasury of Ahasuerus ^{f61}; and when Alexander took Shushan, he found in the king’s treasures, of Hermionic purple, to the value of five thousand talents, which had been laid up there almost two hundred years ^{f62}; and to such treasure Christ alludes, (^{<1069>}Matthew 6:19);

I got me men singers and women singers; the harmony and music of whose voices greatly delight; (see ^{<1065>}2 Samuel 19:35); the Targum interprets it both of instruments of music for the Levites to use in the temple, and of singing men and women at a feast: and such persons were employed among other nations ^{f63}, on such occasions, to entertain their guests; and are called the ornaments of feasts ^{f64}; as were also “choraules”, or pipers ^{f65};

and the delights of the sons of men; [as] musical instruments, and that of all sorts; such as David his father invented; and to which he might add more, and indeed got all that were to be obtained; see (^{<1065>}Amos 6:5). The two last words, rendered “musical instruments, of all sorts”, are differently interpreted; the Targum interprets them of hot waters and baths, having

pipes to let out hot water and cold; Aben Ezra, of women taken captive; Jarchi, of chariots and covered wagons; the Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic versions, of cup bearers, men, and women, that pour out wine and serve it; and the Vulgate Latin version, of cups and pots, to pour out wine. It seems best to understand it of musical instruments, or of musical compositions^{f66}; sung either with a single voice, or in concert; which, according to Bochart^{f67}, were called “sidoth”, from Sido, a Phoenician woman of great note, the inventor of them or rather from giving unequal sounds, which, by their grateful mixture and temperament, broke and destroyed^{f68} one another.

Ver. 9. *So I was great*, etc.] Became famous for the great works wrought by him before mentioned;

and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem; the Targum adds, “in riches”; but it seems rather to respect his fame and glory among men; though in general it may include his increase of wealth, power, and honour, and everything that contributed to his external happiness;

also my wisdom remained with me; the Targum adds, “and it helped me”; which he exercised and showed in the government of his kingdom, in the conduct of his family, in his personal deportment and behaviour; amidst all his pleasures, he did not neglect the study of natural knowledge, nor give himself up to sordid and sinful lusts; and so was a better judge of pleasure, whether true happiness consisted in it or not.

Ver. 10. *And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them*, etc.] Though this sense is only mentioned, all are designed; he denied himself of nothing that was agreeable to him, that was pleasing to the eye, to the ear, to the taste, or any other sense; he indulged himself in everything, observing a proper decorum, and keeping himself within the due bounds of sobriety and good sense;

I withheld not my heart from any joy: the Targum says, “from all joy of the law”; but it is to be understood of natural pleasure, and of the gratifications of the senses in a wise and moderate manner;

for my heart rejoiced in all my labours; he took all the pleasure that could be taken in the works he wrought for that purpose before enumerated;

and this was my portion of all my labour; pleasure was what he aimed at, and that he enjoyed; this was the fruit and issue of all his laborious works;

the part allotted him, the inheritance he possessed, and the thing he sought after.

Ver. 11. *Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do,* etc.] He had looked at them, and on them, over and over again, and had taken pleasure therein; but now he sits down and enters into a serious consideration of them, what prodigious expenses he had been at; what care and thought, what toil and labour of mind, he had taken in contriving, designing, and bringing these works to perfection; what pleasure and delight he had found in them, and what happiness upon the whole arose from them: he now passes his judgment, and gives his sentiments concerning these things, having had it in his power to make himself master of everything delightful, which he did; was a competent judge, and thoroughly qualified to give a just estimate of matters; and it is as follows;

and, behold, all [was] vanity and vexation of spirit; nothing solid and substantial in the whole; no true pleasure and real joy, and no satisfaction or happiness in that pleasure; these pleasing things perished with the using, and the pleasure of them faded and died in the enjoyment of them; and instead of yielding solid delight, only proved vexations, because the pleasure was so soon over, and left a thirst for more, and what was not to be had; at most and best, only the outward senses were fed, the mind not at all improved, nor the heart made better, and much less contented; it was only pleasing the fancy and imagination, and feeding on wind;

and [there was] no profit under the sun; by those things; to improve and satisfy the mind of man, to raise him to true happiness, to be of any service to him in the hour of death, or fit him for an eternal world. Alshech interprets the labour mentioned in this text of the labour of the law, which brings no reward to a man in this world.

Ver. 12. *And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly,* etc.] Being disappointed in his pursuit of pleasure, and not finding satisfaction and happiness in that, he turns from it, and reassumes his study of natural wisdom and knowledge, to make a fresh trial, and see whether there might be some things he had overlooked in his former inquiries; and whether upon a revise of what he had looked into he might not find more satisfaction than before; being convinced however that the pursuit of pleasure was less satisfying than the study of wisdom, and therefore relinquished the one for the sake of the other: and in order, if possible, to

gain more satisfaction in this point, he determined to look more narrowly, and penetrate into the secrets of wisdom, and find out the nature of it, and examine its contraries; that by setting them in a contrast, and comparing them together, he might be the better able to form a judgment of them. Jarchi interprets “wisdom” of the law, and “madness” and “folly” of the punishment of transgression. Alshech also by “wisdom” understands the wisdom of the law, and by madness external wisdom, or the knowledge of outward things. But Aben Ezra understands by “madness” wine, with which men being intoxicated become mad; and by “folly” building houses, and getting riches;

for what [can] the man [do] that cometh after the king? meaning himself; what can a man do that comes after such a king as he was, who had such natural parts to search into and acquire all sorts of knowledge; who was possessed of such immense riches, that he could procure everything that was necessary to assist him in his pursuit of knowledge; and who wanted not industry, diligence, and application, and who succeeded above any before or after him? wherefore what can any common man do, or anyone that comes after such a person, and succeeds him in his studies, and treads in his steps, and follows his example and plan, what can he do more than is done already? or can he expect to outdo such a prince, or find out that which he could not? nay, it is as if he should say, it is not only a vain thing for another man to come after me in the search of knowledge, in hopes of finding more than I have done; but it is a fruitless attempt in me to take up this affair again; for, after all that I have done, what can I do more? so that these words are not a reason for his pursuit of wisdom, but a correction of himself for it; I think the words may be rendered, “but what [can] that man do [that] comes after the king?” so the particle is sometimes used^{f69}; meaning himself, or his successor, or any other person; since it was only going over the same thing again, running round the circle of knowledge again, without any new improvement, or fresh satisfaction, according to the following answer;

[even] that which hath been already done; it is only doing the same thing over again. The Targum and Jarchi interpret it of the vain attempt of a man to supplicate a king after a decree is passed and executed. The Midrash by the king understands God himself, and interprets it of the folly of men not being content with their condition, or as made by him. So Gussetius renders it, “who made him”^{f70}; that is, the king; even God, the three divine Persons, Father, Son, and Spirit; the word being plural.

Ver. 13. *Then I sat that wisdom excelleth folly*, etc.] However, this upon a review of things he could not but own, that natural wisdom and knowledge, though there was no true happiness and satisfaction in them, yet they greatly exceeded folly and madness;

as far as light excelleth darkness; as the light of the day the darkness of the night; the one is pleasant and delightful, the other very uncomfortable; the one useful to direct in walking, the other very unsafe to walk in: light sometimes signifies joy and prosperity, and darkness adversity; the one is used to express the light of grace, and the other the darkness of sin and ignorance; now as the natural light exceeds darkness, and prosperity exceeds adversity and calamities, and a state of grace exceeds a state of sin and wickedness, so wisdom exceeds folly.

Ver. 14. *The wise man's eyes [are] in his head*, etc.] And so are the eyes of every man; but the sense is, he makes use of them, he looks about him, and walks circumspectly; he takes heed to his goings, he foresees the evil, and avoids it; or the danger he is exposed unto, and guards against it. Some understand it, in a more spiritual and evangelical sense, of Christ, who is the head of the body the church, and of every true believer; of everyone that is wise unto salvation, whose eyes are on him alone for righteousness, salvation, and eternal life; or on whom Christ's eyes are; who is said to have seven eyes, with which he guides, guards, and protects his people;

but the fool walketh in darkness; his eyes are to the ends of the earth; he walks incautiously, without any circumspection or guard; he knows not where he is, nor where he is going, nor where he shall set his foot next, nor at what he may stumble; wherefore a wise man is to be preferred to a fool, as wisdom is to folly. The Midrash interprets the wise man of Abraham, and the fool of Nimrod;

and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all; the wise man and the fool; or, "but I myself perceived"^{f71}, etc. though it is allowed that a wise man is better than a fool; yet this also must be owned, which Solomon's experience proved, and every man's does, that the same things befall wise men and fools; they are liable to the same diseases of body, and disasters of life; to poverty and distress, to loss of estate, children, and friends, and to death itself.

Ver. 15. *Then said I in my heart, as it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me,* etc.] The wisest of kings, and the wisest of men; that is, he looked over things in his mind, and considered what had befallen him, or what were his present circumstances, or what would be his case, especially at death; and said within himself, the same things happen to me, who have attained to the highest pitch of wisdom, as to the most errant fool; and therefore no true happiness can be in this sort of wisdom. The Targum paraphrases it thus,

“as it happened to Saul the son of Kish, the king who turned aside perversely, and kept not the commandment he received concerning Amalek, and his kingdom was taken from him; so shall it happen to me;”

and why was I then more wise? the Targum adds, than he, or than any other man, or even than a fool; why have I took so much pains to get wisdom? what am I the better for it? what happiness is there in it, seeing it gives me no advantage, preference, and excellency to a fool; or secures me from the events that befall me?

Then I said in my heart, that this also [is] vanity; this worldly wisdom has nothing solid and substantial in it, as well as pleasure; and it is a vain thing to seek happiness in it, since this is the case, that the events are the same to men that have it, as to one that has it not.

Ver. 16. *For [there is] no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever,* etc.] The Targum interprets it, in the world to come; but even in this world the remembrance of a wise man, any more than of a fool, does not always last; a wise man may not only be caressed in life, but may be remembered after death for a while; the fame of him may continue for a little time, and his works and writings may be applauded; but by and by rises up another genius brighter than he, or at least is so thought, and outshines him; and then his fame is obscured, his writings are neglected and despised, and he and his works buried in oblivion; and this is the common course of things. This shows that Solomon is speaking of natural wisdom, and of man’s being wise with respect to that; and his remembrance on that account; otherwise such who are truly good and wise, their memory is blessed; they are had in everlasting remembrance, and shall never be forgotten in this world, nor in that to come, when the memory of the wicked shall rot; whose names are only written in the dust (^{247B}Jeremiah 17:13 ^{248B}John 8:6), and not in the Lamb’s book of life;

seeing that which now [is], in the days to come shall all be forgotten:

what now is in the esteem of men, and highly applauded by them; what is in the mouths of men, and in their minds and memories, before long, future time, after the death of a man, as the Targum, or in some time after, will be thought of no more, and be as if it never had been, or as if there never had been such men in the world. Many wise men have been in the world, whose names are now unknown, and some their names only are known, and their works are lost; and others whose works remain, yet in no esteem: this is to be understood in general, and for the most part; otherwise there may be some few exceptions to this general observation.

And how dieth the wise [man]? as the fool; they are both liable to death; it is appointed for men, wise or unwise, learned or unlearned, to die, and both do die; wisdom cannot secure a man from dying; and then wise and fools are reduced to the same condition and circumstances; all a man's learning, knowledge, and wisdom, cease when he dies, and he is just as another man is; in that day all his learned thoughts perish, and he is upon a level with the fool. Solomon, the wisest of men, died as others; a full proof of his own observation, and which his father made before him, (~~19410~~ Psalm 49:10). But this is not true of one that is spiritually wise, or wise unto salvation; the death of a righteous man is different from the death of a wicked man; both die, yet not alike, not in like manner; the good man dies in Christ, he dies in faith, has hope in his death, and rises again to eternal life. The Targum is,

“and how shall the children of men say, that the end of the righteous is as the end of the wicked?”

Ver. 17. *Therefore I hated life*, etc.] Not strictly and simply understood, since life is the gift of God; and a great blessing it is, more than raiment, and so dear to a man, that he will give all he has for it: but comparatively, in comparison of the lovingkindness of God, which is better than life; or in comparison of eternal life, which a good man desires to depart from this world, for the sake of enjoying it. The sense seems to be this, that since the case of wise men and fools was equal, he had the less love for life, the less regard to it, the less desire to continue in it; no solid happiness being to be enjoyed in anything under the sun: though some think that he was even weary of life, impatient of it, as Job, Jonah, and others have been. The Targum is,

“I hate all evil life:”

Alshech interprets it of the good things of this world, which were the cause of hurt unto him; and Aben Ezra understands, by life, living persons;

because the work that is wrought under the sun [is] grievous unto me; which was either wrought by himself; particularly his hard studies, and eager pursuits after knowledge and wisdom, which were a weariness to his flesh; or which were done by others, especially evil ones: so the Targum,

“for evil to me is an evil work, which is done by the children of men under the sun in this world;”

for all [is] vanity and vexation of spirit; (see Gill on “²⁰¹⁴Ecclesiastes 1:14”).

Ver. 18. *Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun,* etc.] The great works he made, the houses he built; the vineyards, gardens, and orchards he planted, etc. what he got by his labour, his riches and wealth; and what he also got, not by the labour of his hands, but of his mind. Some understand this of the books he wrote; which were a weariness to his body, and fatigue to his mind; and which he might fear some persons would make an ill use of: Aben Ezra interprets it of his labour in this book. All which he had no great regard unto, since it was to be left to another;

because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me; because he could not enjoy the fruits of his labour himself, at least but a very short time: but must be obliged to leave all to another, his possessions, estates, riches, and treasure; which a man cannot carry with him when he dies, but must leave all behind him, to his heirs and successors¹⁷². The Targum is,

“because I shall leave it to Rehoboam my son, who shall come after me; and Jeroboam his servant shall come and take ten tribes out of his hands, and possess half the kingdom.”

Ver. 19. *And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise [man] or a fool?* etc.] The king that should be after him, as the Targum, that should be his successor and heir; and so whether he would make a good or bad use of what was left; whether he would keep and improve it, or squander it away; suggesting, that could he be sure he would be a wise man that should come into his labours, it would be some satisfaction to him that he had laboured, and such a man should have the benefit of it; but as it was a precarious thing what he would be, he could take no pleasure in reviewing his labours he was about to leave. Some think that Solomon here gives a hint of the

suspicion he had, that his son Rehoboam, his successor and heir, would turn out a foolish man, as he did;

yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have showed myself wise, under the sun; be he what he will, all will come into his hands; and he will have the power of disposing of all at his pleasure; not only of enjoying it, but of changing and altering things; and perhaps greatly for the worse, if he does not entirely destroy what has been wrought with so much care and industry, toil and labour, wisdom and prudence; the thought of all which was afflicting and distressing: and therefore he adds,

This [is] also vanity; and shows there is no happiness in all that a man does, has, or enjoys; and this circumstance, before related, adds to his vexation and unhappiness.

Ver. 20. *Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair,* etc.] Of ever finding happiness in anything here below. He “turned about”¹⁷³, as the word signifies dropped his severe studies of wisdom, and his eager pursuits of pleasure; and desisted from those toilsome works, in which he had employed himself; and went from one thing to another, and settled and stuck at nothing, on purpose to relax his mind, as the Syriac version renders it; to divest it of all anxious thought and care, and call it off from its vain and fruitless undertakings; and be no more concerned about or thoughtful

of all the labour which I took under the sun; and what will be the consequence and issue of it; but quietly leave all to an all wise disposing Providence; and not seek for happiness in anything under the sun, but in those things that are above it; not in this world, but in the world to come.

Ver. 21. *For there is a man whose labour [is] in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity,* etc.] Who does all he does, in natural, civil, and religious things, in the state, in his family, and the world, and whatsoever business he is engaged, in the wisest and best manner, with the utmost honesty and integrity, according to all the rules of wisdom and knowledge, and of justice and equity; meaning himself; the Midrash interprets this of God;

yet to a man that hath not laboured therein shall he leave it [for] his portion; to his son, heir, and successor; who never took any pains, or joined with him, in acquiring the least part of it; and yet all comes into his

hands, as his possession and inheritance: the Targum interprets this of a man that dies without children; and so others^{f74} understand it of his leaving his substance to strangers, and not to his children.

This also [is] vanity, and a great evil; not anything sinful and criminal, but vexatious and distressing.

Ver. 22. *For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart?* etc.] What profit has he by it, when there is so much vexation in it, both in getting it, and in the thought of leaving it to others? What advantage is it to him, when it is all acquired for and possessed by another; and especially of what use is it to him after his death? Even of all

wherein he hath laboured under the sun? the Targum adds, “in this world”; though he has been labouring all his days, yet there is not one thing he has got by his labour that is of any real advantage to him, or can yield him any solid comfort and satisfaction, or bring him true happiness, or lead him to it.

Ver. 23. *For all his days [are] sorrows, and his travail grief,* etc.] All his days are full of sorrows, of a variety of them; and all his affairs and transactions of life are attended with grief and trouble; not only the days of old age are evil ones, in which he can take no pleasure; or those times which exceed the common age of man, when he is got to fourscore years or more, and when his strength is labour and sorrow; but even all his days, be they fewer or more, from his youth upward, are all evil and full of trouble, (^{<0470>}Genesis 47:9 ^{<1840>}Job 14:1);

yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night; which is appointed for rest and ease; and when laid down on his bed for it, as the word signifies; yet, either through an eager desire of getting wealth, or through anxious and distressing cares for the keeping it when gotten, he cannot sleep quietly and comfortably, his carking cares and anxious thoughts keep him waking; or, if he sleeps, his mind is distressed with dreams and frightful apprehensions of things, so that his sleep is not sweet and refreshing to him.

This is also vanity; or one of the vanities which belong to human life.

Ver. 24. *[There is] nothing better for a man [than] that he should eat and drink,* etc.] Not in an immoderate and voluptuous manner, like the epicure and the atheist, that disbelieve a future state and the resurrection of the

dead, and give up themselves to all sinful and sensual gratifications; but in a moderate way, enjoying in a cheerful and comfortable manner the good creatures of God, which he has given; being contented with them, thankful for them, and looking upon them as the blessings of divine goodness, and as flowing from the love of God to him; and thus freely using, and yet not abusing them. Some render it, “it is not good for a man to eat”^{f75}, etc. immoderately and to excess, and to place his happiness in it: or, “there is no good with man”^{f76}; it is not in the power of man to use the creatures aright. Jarchi renders it by way of interrogation, “is it not good?” which comes to the same sense with ours, and so the Vulgate Latin version;

and [that] he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour; not leave off labouring; nor eat and drink what he has not laboured for, or what is the fruit of other men’s labour; but what is the effect of his own, and in which he continues; and this is the way to go on in it with cheerfulness, when he enjoys the good, and reaps the benefit and advantage of it; which is certainly preferable to a laying up his substance, and leaving it to he knows not who.

This also I saw, that it [was] from the hand of God; not only the riches a man possesses, but the enjoyment of them, or a heart to make use of them; (see ²⁰⁵⁸Ecclesiastes 5:18,19). The Midrash interprets this eating and drinking, of the law and good works: and the Targum explains it, causing the soul to enjoy the good of doing the commandments, and walking in right ways; and observes, that a man that prospers in this world, it is from the hand of the Lord, and is what is decreed to be concerning him.

Ver. 25. *For who can eat?* etc.] Who should eat, but such a man that has laboured for it? or, who has a power to eat, that is, cheerfully, comfortably, and freely to enjoy the good things of life he is possessed of, unless it be given him of God? (see ²⁰⁰⁸Ecclesiastes 6:1,2);

or who else can hasten [hereunto] more than I? the word “chush”, in Rabbinical language, is used of the five senses, seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling, and tasting: and R. Elias says^{f77}, there are some that so interpret it here, “who has [his] sense better than I?” a quicker sense, particularly of smelling and tasting what he eats, in which lies much of the pleasure of eating; and this is of God; which interpretation is not to be despised. Or, “who can prepare?” according to the Arabic sense of the word^{f78}; that is, a better table than I? No man had a greater affluence of good things than Solomon, or had a greater variety of eatables and drinkables; or had it in

the power of his hands to live well, and cause his soul to enjoy good; or was more desirous to partake of pleasure, and hasten more to make the experiment of it in a proper manner; and yet he found, that a heart to do this was from the Lord; that this was a gift of his; and that though he abounded in the blessings of life, yet if God had not given him a heart to use them, he never should have really enjoyed them.

Ver. 26. *For [God] giveth to a man that [is] good in his sight,* etc.] No man is of himself good, or naturally so, but evil, very evil, as all the descendants of Adam are; there are some that are good in their own eyes, and in the sight of others, and yet not truly good; they are only really good, who are so in the sight of God, who sees the heart, and knows what is in man; they are such who are made good by his efficacious grace; who are inwardly, and not merely outwardly so; who are good at heart, or who have good hearts, clean hearts, new and right spirits created in them; who have a good work of grace upon their hearts, and the several graces of the Spirit implanted there; who have the good Spirit of God in them, in whose heart Christ dwells by faith; and who have the good word of Christ dwelling in them, and have a good treasure of rich experience of the grace of God; and who, in one word, are born again, renewed in the spirit of their minds, and live by faith on Jesus Christ. The phrase is rendered, “whoso pleaseth God”, (²⁰⁷⁶Ecclesiastes 7:26); and he is one that is accepted with God in Christ, his beloved Son, in whom he is well pleased; who is clothed with his righteousness, made comely through his comeliness, and so is irreprovable in his sight; and who by faith looks to and lays hold on this righteousness, and does all he does in the exercise of faith, without which it is impossible to please God. To such a man God gives

wisdom, and knowledge, and joy; wisdom to acquire knowledge, to keep, use, and improve it; and joy, to be cheerful and thankful for the good things of life: or rather this may design, not natural wisdom, but spiritual wisdom, wisdom in the hidden part, so as to be wise unto salvation, and to walk wisely and circumspectly, a good man’s steps being ordered by the Lord; and knowledge of God in Christ, and of Christ, and of the things of the Gospel, and which relate to eternal life; and so spiritual joy, joy and peace in believing, in the presence of God, and communion with him; joy in Christ, and in hope of the glory of God, even joy unspeakable, and full of glory; all which, more or less, at one time or another, God gives to those who are truly good; and which is not to be found in worldly wisdom, pleasure, riches, power, and authority: the Targum is,

“to the man, whose works are right before God, he gives wisdom and knowledge in this world, and joy with the righteous in the world to come;”

but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up; to gather mammon, and to heap up a large possession, as the Targum; to gather together a great deal of riches, but without wisdom and knowledge to use them, without any proper enjoyment of them, or pleasure in them; all he has is a deal of trouble and care to get riches, without any comfort in them, and he has them not for his own use: the Midrash illustrates this of the good man and sinner, by the instances of Abraham and Nimrod, of Isaac and Abimelech, of Jacob and Laban, of the Israelites and Canaanites, of Hezekiah and Sennacherib, and of Mordecai and Haman. But

that he may give to [him that is] good before God; so it is ordered by divine Providence sometimes, that all that a wicked man has been labouring for all his days should come into the hands of such who are truly good men, and will make a right use of what is communicated to them.

This also [is] vanity, and vexation of spirit; not to the good man, but to the wicked man: so the Targum,

“it is vanity to the sinner, a breaking of spirit;”

it grieves him that such a man should have what he has been labouring for; or it would, if he knew it.

CHAPTER 3

INTRODUCTION TO ECCLESIASTES 3

The general design of this chapter is to confirm what is before observed, the vanity and inconstancy of all things; the frailty of man, and changes respecting him; his fruitless toil and labour in all his works; that it is best to be content with present things, and cheerful in them, and thankful for them; that all comes from the hand of God; that such good men, who have not at present that joy that others have, may have it, since there is a time for it; and that sinners should not please themselves with riches gathered by them, since they may be soon taken from them, for there is a time for everything, (~~2KR1~~Ecclesiastes 3:1); of which there is an induction of particulars, (~~2KR2~~Ecclesiastes 3:2-8); so that though every thing is certain with God, nothing is certain with men, nor to be depended on, nor can happiness be placed therein; there is no striving against the providence of God, nor altering the course of things; the labour of man is unprofitable, and his travail affliction and vexation, (~~2KR9~~Ecclesiastes 3:9,10); and though all God's works are beautiful in their season, they are unsearchable to man, (~~2KR11~~Ecclesiastes 3:11); wherefore it is best cheerfully to enjoy the present good things of life, (~~2KR12~~Ecclesiastes 3:12,13); and be content; for the will and ways and works of God are unalterable, permanent, and perfect, (~~2KR14~~Ecclesiastes 3:14,15); and though wicked men may abuse the power reposed in them, and pervert public justice, they will be called to an account for it in the general judgment, for which there is a time set, (~~2KR16~~Ecclesiastes 3:16,17); and yet, such is the stupidity of the generality of men, that they have no more sense of death and judgment than the brutes, and live and die like them, (~~2KR18~~Ecclesiastes 3:18-21); wherefore it is best of all to make a right use of power and riches, or what God has given to men, for their own good and that of others, since they know not what shall be after them, (~~2KR2~~Ecclesiastes 3:22).

Ver. 1. *To every [thing there is] a season*, etc.] A set determined time, when everything shall come into being, how long it shall continue, and in what circumstances; all things that have been, are, or shall be, were foreordained by God, and he has determined the times before appointed for

their being, duration, and end; which times and seasons he has in his own power: there was a determined time for the whole universe, and for all persons and things in it; a settled fixed moment for the world to come into being; for it did not exist from everlasting, nor of itself, nor was formed by the fortuitous concourse of atoms, but by the wisdom and power of God; nor could it exist sooner or later than it did; it appeared when it was the will of God it should; in the beginning he created it, and he has fixed the time of its duration and end; for it shall not continue always, but have an end, which when it will be, he only knows: so there is a determined time for the rise, height, and declension of states and kingdoms in it; as of lesser ones, so of the four great monarchies; and for all the distinct periods and ages of the world; and for each of the seasons of the year throughout all ages; for the state of the church in it, whether in suffering or flourishing circumstances; for the treading down of the holy city; for the prophesying, slaying, and rising of the witnesses; for the reign and ruin of antichrist; for the reign of Christ on earth, and for his second coming to judgment, though of that day and hour knows no man: and as there is a set time in the counsels and providence of God for these more important events, so for every thing of a lesser nature;

and a time to every purpose under the heaven; to every purpose of man that is carried into execution; for some are not, they are superseded by the counsel of God; some obstruction or another is thrown in the way of them, so that they cannot take place; God withdraws men from them by affliction or death, when their purposes are broken; or by some other way; and what are executed he appoints a time for them, and overrules them to answer some ends of his own; for things the most contingent, free, and voluntary, fall under the direction and providence of God. And there is a time for every purpose of his own; all things done in the world are according to his purposes, which are within himself wisely formed, and are eternal and unfrustrable; and there is a time fixed for the execution of them, for every purpose respecting all natural and civil things in providence; and for every purpose of his grace, relating to the redemption of his people, the effectual calling of them, and the bringing them to eternal glory; which are the things that God wills, that he takes delight and pleasure in, as the word^{f79} signifies. The Septuagint and Vulgate Latin versions render it, “to everything under the heaven there is a time”; and Jarchi observes that in the Misnic language the word used so signifies. The Targum is,

“to every man a time shall come, and a season to every business under heaven.”

Ver. 2. *A time to be born*, etc.] The Targum is,

“to beget sons and daughters;”

but rather it is to bear them, there being a time in nature fixed for that, called the hour of a woman, (^{<3840>}Job 14:1);

and a time to die; the time of a man’s coming into the world and going out of it, both being fixed by the Lord^{f80}: this is true of all men in general, of all men that come into the world, for whom it is appointed that they shall die; and particularly of Christ, whose birth was at the time appointed by the Father, in the fulness of time; and whose death was in due time, nor could his life be taken away before his hour was come, (^{<4070>}John 7:30 8:20 13:1); and this holds good of every individual man; his birth is at the time God has fixed it; that any man is born into the world, is of God; no man comes into it at his own pleasure or another’s, but at the will of God, and when he pleases, not sooner nor later; and the time of his going out of the world is settled by him, beyond which time he cannot live, and sooner he cannot die, (^{<3845>}Job 14:5); and though no mention is made of the interval of life between a man’s birth and death, yet all events intervening are appointed by God; as the place of his abode; his calling and station of life; all circumstances of prosperity and adversity; all diseases of body, and what lead on to death, and issue in it: the reason why these two are put so close together is, to show the certainty of death; that as sure as a man is born, so sure shall he die; and the frailty and shortness of life, which is but an hand’s breadth, passes away like a tale that is told, yea, is as nothing; so that no account is made of it, as if there was no time allotted it, or that it deserved no mention; and also to observe that the seeds of mortality and death are in men as soon as they are born; as soon as they begin to live they begin to die, death is working in them;

a time to plant; a tree, as the Targum, or any herb;

and a time to pluck up [that which is] planted; a tree or herb, as before, when grown to its ripeness, and fit for use; or when grown old, barren, and unfruitful; there are particular seasons for planting plants, and some for one and some for another. This may be applied in a civil sense to planting and plucking up kingdoms and states; see (^{<4010>}Jeremiah 1:10 18:7-10); as it is by the Jews, particularly to the planting and plucking up of the kingdom of

Israel; the people of Israel were a vine brought out of Egypt and planted in the land of Canaan, and afterwards plucked up and carried captive into Babylon; and afterwards planted again, and then again plucked up by the Romans; and will be assuredly planted in their own land again; (see ^{<480B>}Psalm 80:8) (^{<2480A>}Jeremiah 45:4 31:28 32:41); It may be illustrated in a spiritual sense by the planting of the Jewish church, sometimes compared to a vineyard; and the plucking it up, abolishing their church state and ordinances; and by planting Gospel churches in the Gentile world, and plucking them up again, as in the seven cities of Asia; or removing the candlestick out of its place; and by planting particular persons in churches, and removing them again: some indeed that are planted in the house of the Lord are planted in Christ, and rooted and grounded in the love of God; are plants which Christ's Father has planted, and will never be rooted up; but there are others who are planted through the external ministry of the word, or are plants only by profession, and these become twice dead, plucked up by the roots; and there are times for these things, (^{<4924A>}Psalm 92:14 ^{<4053B>}Matthew 15:13 ^{<4186B>}1 Corinthians 3:6-8 ^{<4112B>}Jude 1:12).

Ver. 3. *A time to kill, and a time to heal*, etc.] A time to kill may be meant of a violent death, as a time to die is of a natural one; so the Targum,

“a time to kill in war;”

or else, by the hand of the civil magistrate, such who deserve death. Aben Ezra interprets it “to wound”, because of the opposite “to heal”; and so there is a time when wounds and diseases are incurable, and baffle all the skill of the physician, being designed unto death; and there is a time when, by the blessing of God on means, they are healed; the wound or sickness not being unto death: so the Targum paraphrases the last clause,

“to heal one that lies sick.”

This may be applied in a civil sense to calamities in kingdoms, and a restoration of peace and plenty to them; which is the property of God alone, who in this sense kills and makes alive in his own time, (^{<4623B>}Deuteronomy 32:39 ^{<4088B>}1 Samuel 2:9 ^{<3801B>}Hosea 6:1); And in a spiritual sense to the ministers of the word, who are instruments of slaying souls by the law, which is the killing letter, and of healing them by the Gospel, which pours in the oil and wine of peace and pardon through the blood of Christ, and so binds up and heals the broken hearted; and there is a time for both;

a time to break down, and a time to build up; to break down a building, and build a waste, as the Targum; to break down cities and the walls of them, as the of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar; and to build them up: as in the times of Nehemiah and Zerubbabel: and so in a spiritual sense to break down the church of God, the tabernacle of David, and to raise up and repair the breaches of it; to build up Zion, and the walls of Jerusalem, or to restore the Gospel church state to its glory, for which there is a set time; (see ^{<4091>}Amos 9:11 ^{<4923>}Psalms 102:13, 16).

Ver. 4. *A time to weep, and a time to laugh*, etc.] There is a time for these things, as it goes ill or well with persons, as to their health, estate, or friends; and as it goes ill or well with kingdoms and states. The Jews wept when they were in Babylon, and their mouths were filled with laughter when their captivity was returned, (^{<4970>}Psalms 137:1 126:1,2); and as it goes ill or well with the church of Christ, when there are corruptions in doctrine and worship, a neglect of ordinances, declensions in faith and practice, few instances of conversion, and there are divisions and contentions, it is a time for the mourners in Zion to weep but when God creates Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy, or makes her an eternal excellency, and the praise of the whole earth, then it is a time to rejoice and be glad, (^{<2303>}Isaiah 61:3 65:18); and as it is, with believers, when Christ is withdrawn from them, it is a time to lament, but, when the bridegroom is with them, it is a time of joy; when it is a night of darkness and desertion, weeping endures, but when the morning comes, the day breaks, and the sun of righteousness arises, joy comes with it, (^{<4095>}Matthew 9:15) (^{<4169>}John 16:19,20 ^{<4305>}Psalms 30:5). Now in the present state is the saints' weeping time; in the time to come they will laugh, or be filled with joy unspeakable and full of glory, (^{<4062>}Luke 6:21);

a time to mourn, and a time to dance; to mourn at funerals, and to dance at festivals; in a spiritual sense, God sometimes turns the mourning of his people into dancing, or joy, which that is expressive of; (see ^{<4301>}Psalms 30:11).

Ver. 5. *A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together*, etc.] To cast stones out of a field or vineyard where they are hurtful, and to gather them together to make walls and fences of, or build houses with; and may be understood both of throwing down buildings, as the temple of Jerusalem, so that not one stone was left upon another; of pouring out the stones of the sanctuary, and of gathering them again and laying them on

one another; which was done when the servants of the Lord took pleasure in the stones of Zion, and favoured the dust thereof. Some understand this of precious stones, and of casting them away through luxury, wantonness, or contempt, and gathering them again: and it may be applied, as to the neglect of the Gentiles for a long time, and the gathering of those stones of which children were raised to Abraham; so of the casting away of the Jews for their rejection of the Messiah, and of the gathering of them again by conversion, when they shall be as the stones of a crown, lifted up as an ensign on his land, (^{<3096>}Zechariah 9:16);

a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing: or “to be far from”^{f81} it; it may not only design conjugal embraces^{f82}, but parents embracing their children, as Jacob did his; and one brother embracing another, as Esau Jacob, and one friend embracing another; all which is very proper and agreeable at times: but there are some seasons so very calamitous and distressing, in which persons are obliged to drop such fondnesses: it is true, in a spiritual sense, of the embraces of Christ and believers, which sometimes are, and sometimes are not, enjoyed, (^{<3048>}Proverbs 4:8 ^{<3086>}Song of Solomon 2:6,9 3:1-3).

Ver. 6. *A time to get, and a time to lose,* etc.] To get substance, as the Targum, and to lose it; wealth and riches, honour and glory, wisdom and knowledge: or, “to seek, and to lose”^{f83}; a time when the sheep of the house of Israel, or God’s elect, were lost, and a time to seek them again; which was, lone by Christ in redemption, and by the Spirit of God, in effectual calling;

a time to keep, and a time to cast away; to keep a thing, and to cast it away, into the sea, in the time of a great tempest, as the Targum; as did the mariners in the ship in which Jonah was, and those in which the Apostle Paul was, (Jon 1:5 ^{<4278>}Acts 27:38); It may be interpreted of keeping riches, and which are sometimes kept too close, and to the harm of the owners of them; and of scattering them among the poor, or casting them upon the waters; (see ^{<2063>}Ecclesiastes 5:13 11:1 ^{<1124>}Proverbs 11:24).

Ver. 7. *A time to rend, and a time to sew,* etc.] To rend garments, in case of blasphemy, and in times of mourning and fasting, and then to sew them up when they are over; (see ^{<2350>}Isaiah 37:1 ^{<4013>}Joel 2:13); This the Jews apply to the rending of the ten tribes from Rehoboam, signified by the rending of Jeroboam’s garment, (^{<1110>}1 Kings 11:30,31); the sewing up or uniting of which is foretold, (^{<3572>}Ezekiel 37:22). Some interpret it of the

rending of the Jewish church state, signified by the rending of the vail, at the death of Christ; and of the constituting the Gospel church state among the Gentiles;

*a time to keep silence, and a time to speak*¹⁸⁴; when it is an evil time, a time of calamity in a nation, it is not a time to be loquacious and talkative, especially in a vain and ludicrous way, (³¹⁵³Amos 5:13); or when a particular friend or relation is in distress, as in the case of Job and his friends, (⁸⁰²³Job 2:13); or when in the presence of wicked men, who make a jest of everything serious and religious, (⁴⁹⁰⁴Psalm 39:1); and so when under afflictive dispensations of Providence, it is a time to be still and dumb, and not open the mouth in a murmuring and complaining way, (⁸¹⁰³Leviticus 10:3 ⁴⁹⁰⁹Psalm 39:9 46:10). And, on the other hand, there is a time to speak, either publicly, of the truths of the Gospel, in the ministry of it, and in vindication of them; or privately, of Christian experience: there is a time when an open profession should be made of Christ, his word and ordinances, and when believers should speak to God in prayer and praise; which, should they not, the stones in the wall would cry out.

Ver. 8. *A time to love, and a time to hate*, etc.] For one to love his friend, and to hate a man, a sinner, as the Targum; to love a friend while he continues such, and hate him, or less love him, when he proves treacherous and unfaithful; an instance of a change of love into hatred may be seen in the case of Amnon, (⁴⁰³⁵2 Samuel 13:15). A time of unregeneracy is a time of loving worldly lusts and sinful pleasures, the company of wicked men, and all carnal delights and recreations; and a time of conversion is a time to hate what was before loved, sin, and the conversion of sinners, the garment spotted with the flesh, the principles and practices, though not the persons, of ungodly men; and even to hate, that is, less love, the dearest friends and relations, in comparison of, or when in competition with, Christ;

a time of war, and a time of peace; for nations to be engaged in war with each other, or to be at peace, which are continually revolving; and there is a time when there will be no more war. In a spiritual sense, the present time, or state of things, is a time of war; the Christian's life is a warfare state, though it will be soon accomplished, in which he is engaging in fighting with spiritual enemies, sin, Satan, and the world: the time to come, or future state, is a time of peace, when saints shall enter into peace, and be no more disturbed by enemies from within or from without. In the Midrash,

all the above times and seasons are interpreted of Israel, and applied to them.

Ver. 9. *What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth?*] That is, he has none. This is an inference drawn from the above premises, and confirms what has been before observed, (²⁰⁰³Ecclesiastes 1:3 2:11); Man has no profit of his labour, since his time is so short to enjoy it, and he leaves it to another, he knows not who; and, while he lives, is attended with continual vicissitudes and changes; sometimes it is a time for one thing, and sometimes for its contrary, so that there is nothing certain, and to be depended on; and a man can promise himself nothing in this world pleasant or profitable to him, and much less that will be of any advantage to him hereafter. The Targum adds,

“to make treasures and gather mammon, unless he is helped by Providence above;”

though it is man’s duty to labour, yet all his toil and labour will be fruitless without a divine blessing; there is a time and season for everything in providence, and there is no striving against that.

Ver. 10. *I have seen the travail which God hath given to the sons of men,* etc.] The pains and trouble they are at to get a little wisdom and knowledge, (²⁰¹³Ecclesiastes 1:13); and so to obtain riches and honour, peace and plenty, which sometimes they do obtain, and sometimes not; and when they do, do not keep them long, for there is a time for everything. This the wise man had observed, in a variety of instances; and he considered the end of God in it, which was for men

to be exercised in it, or “by it”; or “to afflict” or “humble [them] by it”^{f85}; to let them see that all their toil and labour signified little; all depended on a divine blessing, and no happiness was to be had in the creatures; all was vanity and vexation of spirit; (see Gill on “²⁰¹³Ecclesiastes 1:13”).

Ver. 11. *He hath made every [thing] beautiful in his time*, etc.] That is, God has made everything; as all things in creation are made by him, for his pleasure and glory, and all well and wisely, there is a beauty in them all: so all things in providence; he upholds all things; he governs and orders all things according to the counsel of his will; some things are done immediately by him, others by instruments, and some are only permitted by him; some he does himself, some he wills to be done by others, and some he suffers to be done; but in all there is a beauty and harmony; and all are

ordered, disposed, and overruled, to answer the wisest and greatest purposes; everything is done in the time in which he wills it shall; be done, and done in the time most fit and suitable for it to be done; all things before mentioned, for which there is a time, and all others: all natural things are beautiful in their season; things in summer, winter, spring, and autumn; frost and snow in winter, and heat in summer; darkness and dews in the night, and light and brightness in the day; and so in ten thousand other things: all afflictive dispensations of Providence; times of plucking up and breaking down of weeping and mourning, of losing and casting away are all necessary, and seasonable and beautiful, in their issue and consequences: prosperity and adversity, in their turns, make a beautiful checker work, and work together for good; are like Joseph's coat, of many colours, which was an emblem of those various providences which attended that good man; and were extremely beautiful, as are all the providences of God to men: and all his judgments will be, when made manifest; when he shall have performed his whole work, and the mystery of God in providence will be finished; which is like a piece of tapestry; when only viewed in parts no beauty appears in it, scarce any thing to be made of it but when all is put together, it is most beautiful and harmonious. The words may be rendered, "the beautiful One hath made all things in his time",^{f86}; the Messiah; who, as a divine Person, is the brightness of his Father's glory; as man, is fairer than the sons, of Adam; as Mediator, is full of grace and truth; is white and ruddy, altogether lovely, exceeding precious to his people: this fair and lovely One has made all things in creation; works with his Father in the affairs of providence; and has done all things well in grace and redemption, (~~BOOK~~John 1:2 5:17 ~~BOOK~~Mark 7:37);

also he hath set the world in their heart; so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end; not a sinful love of the world, and the things of it; not a criminal desire after them, and a carking care for them, whereby persons have no heart and inclination, time and leisure, to search into and find out the works of God; for though all this is in the heart of the sons of men, yet, not placed, there by the Lord: nor an opinion of living for ever; of a long time in this world, the word for "world" having the signification of perpetuity in it; so that they regard not, the work of the Lord, nor the operations of his hands, tomorrow being with them as this day, and much more abundant; but this sense meets with the same difficulty as the former. Rather the meaning is, that God hath set before the minds of men, and in them, the whole world of creatures, the

whole book of nature, in which they may see and read much of the wisdom power, and goodness of God in his works; and to some he gives an inclination and desire hereunto; but yet the subject before them is so copious, there is such a world of matter presented to them, and their capacity so small, and life so short, that they cannot all their days find out the works of God, either of creation or providence, to perfection; or find out what God works, from the beginning of the world to the end of it; for, of what he has wrought, but a small portion is known by them, and they know less still what shall be done hereafter: some of God's works of providence are set on foot and but begun in the life of some men; they do not live to see them finished, and therefore cannot find them out; and others are so dark and obscure, that they are obliged to say, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" see (~~6119~~Romans 1:19,20 11:33); and though everything is beautiful in its time, yet till they are made manifest, and all viewed together; they will not be perfectly understood, or the beauty of them seen, (~~6650~~Revelation 15:4). For God has put something "hidden", or "sealed up", in the midst of them, as it may be rendered^{f87}, so that they cannot be perfectly known.

Ver. 12. *I know that [there is] no good in them,* etc.] In these things; as the Arabic version; in the creatures, as Jarchi; in all sublunary enjoyments; in everything the wise man had made a trial of before, as natural Wisdom and knowledge, worldly pleasure, riches, and wealth; the "summun bonum", or happiness of men, did not lie in these things; this he knew by experience, and had the strongest assurance of it: or in them, that is, the children of men, as the Targum: there is no real good thing in them, nor comes out of them, nor is done by them; they cannot think a good thought, nor do a good action, of themselves. Or rather the sense is, I know there is nothing better for them than what follows:

but for [a man] to rejoice; not in sin and sinful pleasures, in a riotous, voluptuous, and epicurean manner; but to be cheerful, and enjoy the blessings of life in a comfortable way, and with a thankful heart; and especially to rejoice in spiritual things, and above all in Christ; and not in any self-boastings or carnal confidences, all such rejoicing is evil; (see ~~2007~~Ecclesiastes 9:7 ~~3004~~Philippians 4:4 ~~3016~~James 4:16). The Targum is,

"but that they rejoice in the joy of the law;"

but it is much better to rejoice in the things of the Gospel, which is indeed a joyful sound;

and to do good in his life: to himself and family, by making use of the good things of life, and not withholding and hoarding them up; and to others, to all men, as opportunity offers, and especially to the household of faith; and not only by liberality and alms deeds, but by doing all good works, from right principles and to right ends, and that always, as long as he lives, (~~4019~~ Galatians 6:9,10 ~~4075~~ Luke 1:75).

Ver. 13. *And also that every man should eat and drink*, etc.] Not to excess, but in moderation; and yet freely, plentifully, and cheerfully; and not alone, but giving the poor a portion with him; and in all having in view the glory of God, (~~4608~~ 1 Corinthians 10:31);

and enjoy the good of all his labour; take the comfort of what he has been labouring for, and not lay it up for, and leave it to, he knows not who: the Targum is,

“and see good in his days, and cause his children, at the time of his death, to inherit all his labour;”

it [is] the gift of God; not only to have, but to enjoy, and make a proper use of the mercies of life. This is the same doctrine which is delivered (~~2024~~ Ecclesiastes 2:24).

Ver. 14. *I know that whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever*, etc.] Which some, as Jarchi, understand of the works of creation, the heavens and the earth, which are however of long standing and duration; and though they shall be dissolved and perish, as to their form and quality, yet not as to the substance of them: the earth particularly is said to abide for ever, (~~2004~~ Ecclesiastes 1:4); the sun and moon, and stars, keep their course or station; and the several seasons of the year have their constant revolution, and shall as long as the earth endures; see (~~0082~~ Genesis 8:22 ~~4835~~ Jeremiah 31:35,36 33:20,21); the several kinds of creatures God has made, in the earth, air, and sea, though the individuals die, their species remain; and man, the chief of creatures, though he dies, shall live again, and live for ever; so the Arabic version,

“I have learned that all the creatures which God hath made shall perpetually remain in the same order and condition:”

though Abarbinel^{f88} interprets this of the continuance of the world for a certain time, and then of the destruction of it; which he thinks is supported by (²⁰⁰⁵Ecclesiastes 3:15), and which is to be understood of the creation of one world after another; and that which is past he explains of the world that is destroyed. But rather this is to be understood of the decrees of God, which are his works “ad intra”; the thoughts of his heart, that are to all generations; the counsel of his will, which always stands, and is performed; his mind, which is one, the same always, and invariable, and which he never changes; his pleasure he always does; his purposes and appointments, which are always accomplished, never frustrated and made void: for he is all wise in forming them, all knowing, and sees the end from the beginning, so that nothing unforeseen can turn up to hinder the execution of them; he is unchangeable, and never alters his will; and all powerful, able to effect his great designs; and faithful and true, cannot deny himself, nor ever lie nor repent. To this sense is the Targum,

“I know, by a spirit of prophecy, that all which the Lord does in the world, whether good or evil, after it is decreed from his mouth, it shall be for ever.”

This holds good of all his works, and acts of grace; election of persons to eternal life stands firm, not on the foot of works, but of grace, and has its certain effect; it can never be made void, nor be surer than it is; it will ever take place, and continue in its fruit and consequences: the covenant of grace, as it is made from everlasting, continues to everlasting; its promises never fail, its blessings are the sure mercies of David: redemption by Christ is eternal; such as are redeemed from sin, Satan, and the law, are ever so, and shall never be brought into bondage to either again: the work of grace upon the heart being begun, shall be performed and perfected; the graces wrought in the soul, as faith, hope, and love, ever remain; the blessings of grace bestowed, as pardon, justification, adoption, and salvation, are never reversed, but ever continue; such as are regenerated, pardoned, justified, adopted, and saved, shall be ever so; and the work of God, as it is durable, so perfect;

nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it; the works of nature have been finished and perfected from the foundation of the world; the decrees of God are a complete system of his will, according to which he does all things invariably, in providence and grace; the covenant of grace is ordered in all things, and nothing wanting in it; the work of redemption is

completely done by Christ, who is a rock, and his work is perfect; and the work of grace on the heart, though at present imperfect, shall be perfected; nor is it in the power of men to add anything to it, nor take anything from it;

and God doth [it], that [men] should fear before him; his works of creation being done in so much wisdom, and giving such a display of his power and goodness, command art awe of him in his creatures, (^{<49816>}Psalm 33:6-9); his works of providence, being all according to his wise purposes and decrees, should be patiently and quietly submitted to; and men should be still, and know that he is God, and humble themselves under his mighty hand: his decrees, respecting the present or future state of men, do not lead to despair, nor to a neglect of means, nor to a dissolute life, but tend to promote the fear of God and true holiness, which they are the source of; and the blessings of grace have a kind influence on the same; particularly the blessing of pardoning grace, which is with God, that he may be feared, (^{<49104>}Psalm 130:4 ^{<20815>}Hosea 3:5); and one principal part of the work of grace on the heart is the fear of God; and nothing more strongly engages to the whole worship of God, which is often meant by the fear of him, than his grace vouchsafed to men; (see ^{<38228>}Hebrews 12:28 ^{<2124>}Ecclesiastes 12:14). The Targum refers this to the vengeance of God in the world: and Jarchi, to the unusual phenomena in it; as the flood, the sun's standing still and going backward, and the like.

Ver. 15. *That which hath seen is now; and that which is to be hath already been,* etc.] That which has been from the beginning now is; that which cometh, and what shall be in the end of days, has been already, as the Targum. Jarchi interprets this of God and his attributes, which are always the same; he is the "I am that I am", (^{<10814>}Exodus 3:14); the immutable and eternal Jehovah, which is, and was, and is to come, invariably the same. Or rather it designs his decrees and purposes; what has been decreed in his eternal mind is now accomplished; and what is future has been already in his decrees; nor does anything come to pass but what he has appointed. So it is interpreted, in an ancient tract^{f89} of the Jews, of

"what was before it came into the world, so that there is nothing new under the sun; now it is obliged to come into this world, as it is said, "before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee", (^{<2006>}Jeremiah 1:5)."

This will also hold true of natural things, and of the identity of them; of some individuals, as the sun, moon, and stars, which are as they always were, and will be; the sun rises and sets as it used to do; and the moon increases and decreases, as it always has done; and the stars keep the same station or course, and so they ever will, as they have: the same seasons are now in their turn as heretofore, and such as will be have been already; as summer, winter, spring, autumn, seedtime, harvest, cold, heat, night, and day: the same kinds and species of creatures, that have been, are; and what will be have been already; so that there is no new thing under the sun; the same thing is here expressed as in (²⁰¹⁰Ecclesiastes 1:9);

and God requireth that which is past; his decrees and purposes to be fulfilled, which are past in his mind; the same seasons to return which have been; and the same kinds and species of creatures to exist which have already. The words may be rendered, “and God seeketh that which is pursued”, or “persecuted”⁹⁰: and accordingly the whole will bear a different sense; and the preacher may be thought to have entered upon a new subject, which he continues in some following verses, the abuse of power and authority: and the meaning then is, the same acts of injustice, violence, and persecution, have been done formerly as now, and now as formerly; and what hereafter of this kind may be, will be no other than what has been; from the beginning persecution was; Cain hated and slew his brother, because of his superior goodness; and so it always has been, is, and will be, that such who are after the flesh persecute those who are after the spirit; but God will make inquisition for blood, and require it at the hands of those that shed it; he will seek out the persecuted, and vindicate him, and, avenge his persecutor. This way the Midrash, Jarchi, and Alshech, and the Septuagint version, render the words; and so the Syriac version, “God seeketh him that is afflicted, who is driven away”; and to this agrees the Targum,

“and in the great day which shall be, the Lord will require the mean and poor man of the hands of the wicked that persecute him.”

And what follows seems to confirm this sense.

Ver. 16. *And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment*, etc.] Courts of judicature, where judges sit, and, causes are brought before them, and are heard and tried; such as were the Jewish sanhedrim, of which the Midrash and Jarchi interpret it;

[that] wickedness [was] there, wicked judges sat there, and wickedness was committed by them; instead of doing justice they perverted it; condemned the righteous, and acquitted the wicked; and oppressed the widow, fatherless, and stranger, whose cause, being just, they should have defended. So the Targum,

“in which lying judges condemn the innocent.”

Well does the wise man say he saw this “under the sun”, for there is nothing of this kind above it; nor approved of by him that is above it;

and the place of righteousness, [that] iniquity [was] there; this signifies the same as before, only it is expressed in different words. The Midrash and Jarchi interpret this of the middle gate in Jerusalem, where Nergal Sharezer, and other princes of the king of Babylon, sat, and which Solomon foresaw by a spirit of prophecy; but the better sense is, that Solomon had observed a great deal of this kind in reading the histories and annals of nations; knew that much of this sort was practised in other countries, and had seen a great deal of it in his own, done in inferior courts, and by subordinate officers; and though he was a wise and righteous prince, yet was not able to rectify all these abuses, for want of sufficient proof, which yet he lamented, and it gave him a concern; compare with this (⁻²⁰²²Isaiah 1:21-23).

Ver. 17. *I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked*, etc.] This he considered in his mind, and set it down for a certain truth, and which relieved him under the consideration of the sad perversion of justice; and made him easy under it, and willing to leave things to him that judgeth righteously, and wait his time when everything that was now wrong would be set right: he knew from reason, from tradition, and from the word of God, that there was a judgment to come, a general, righteous, and eternal one; that this judicial process would be carried on by God himself, who is holy, righteous, just, and true, omniscient, and omnipotent; and, being the Judge of all the earth, would do right; when he would vindicate the righteous, and clear them from all calumnies and charges; acquit and justify them, and condemn the wicked, pass a just sentence on them, and execute it;

for [there is] a time there for every purpose, and for every work; or “then”, as Noldius; in the day of the great judgment, as the Targum adds; and which continues to paraphrase the words thus,

“for a time is appointed for every business, and for every work which they do in this world they shall be judged there;”

there is a time fixed, a day appointed, for the judgment of the world; though of that day and hour knows no man; yet, it is settled, and will certainly come, (^{<4473>}Acts 17:31 ^{<426>}Matthew 24:36); and when it is come, every purpose, counsel, and thought of men’s hearts, will be made manifest, as well as every work, good or bad, open or secret, yea, every idle word, and men will be judged according to these; (see ^{<4045>}1 Corinthians 4:5 ^{<4750>}2 Corinthians 5:10 ^{<2124>}Ecclesiastes 12:14) (^{<4026>}Matthew 12:36,37 ^{<6014>}Jude 1:14,15).

Ver. 18. *I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men,* etc.] He thought of the condition of the children of men, their sinful and polluted state; he weighed and considered in his mind their actions, conversation, and course of life; and was concerned how it would go with them at the day of judgment on account of the same. Some render it, “I said in mine heart after the speech of the children of men”^{f91}; speaking in their language, and representing the atheist and the epicure, as some think the wise man does in the following verses; though he rather speaks his own real sentiments concerning men, as they are in their present state, and as they will appear in the day of judgment;

that God might manifest them; or “separate them”^{f92}; as the chaff from the wheat, and as goats from the sheep; as will be done at the day of judgment, (^{<4180>}Matthew 3:10 25:30,33); or “that they might clear God”^{f93}; as they will, when he shall judge and condemn them;

and that they might see that they themselves are beasts; as they are through the fall, and the corruption of nature, being born like the wild ass’s colt, stupid, senseless, and without understanding of spiritual things; nay, more brutish than the beasts themselves, than the horse and the mule that have no understanding, (^{<4319>}Psalm 32:9); “mulo incitior”, as is Plautus’s^{f94} phrase; (see ^{<4992>}Psalm 49:12,20 ^{<8112>}Job 11:12) (^{<2008>}Isaiah 1:3 ^{<2480>}Jeremiah 8:7); this is now made manifest to the people of God by the word and Spirit; is seen, known, and acknowledged by them, (^{<4972>}Psalm 73:21 ^{<2810>}Proverbs 30:2); and the wicked themselves will see, know, and own what beasts they are and have been, at the day of judgment; how they have lived and died like beasts; how like brute beasts they have corrupted themselves in things they knew naturally; and that as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, spoke evil of things they understood not,

and perished in their own corruption, (^{<6110>}Jude 1:10) (^{<6112>}2 Peter 2:12); and that they have been beasts to themselves, as Jarchi renders and interprets it; made beasts of themselves by their brutish gratifications; have been cruel to themselves, ruining and destroying their own souls; or among themselves, and to one another, “homo lupus homini”; hence wicked men are compared to lions, foxes, evening wolves, vipers, and the like. So Mr. Broughton renders it, “how they are beasts, they to themselves.”

Ver. 19. *For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts*, etc.] Aben Ezra says this verse is according to the thoughts of the children of men that are not wise; but rather the wise man says what he does according to his own thoughts, and proceeds to prove the likeness and equality of men and beasts;

even one thing befalleth them; the same events belong to one as to another; the same diseases and disasters, calamities and distresses: Noah’s flood carried away one as well as another; they both perished in it; several of the plagues of Egypt were inflicted on both; and both are beholden to God for their health, preservation, and safety; see (^{<0072>}Genesis 7:21 ^{<0088>}Exodus 8:18 9:9,25 ^{<0016>}Psalms 36:6);

as the one dieth, so dieth the other; the Targum compares a wicked man and an unclean beast together, in the former clause; and paraphrases this after this manner,

“as an unclean beast dies, so dies he who is not turned to repentance before his death.”

he dies unclean in his sins, stupid, senseless; no more thoughtful of his future state, and of what will become of his precious and immortal soul, than a beast that has none; (see ^{<0044>}Psalms 49:14); perhaps unjust judges, persecuting tyrants, may particularly be regarded: who, though princes, shall not only die like men, but even like beasts, (^{<0017>}Psalms 82:7);

yea, they have all one breath; the same vital breath, or breath of life, which is in the nostrils of the one as of the other; they breathe and draw in the same air, and have the same animal and vegetative life, and equally liable to lose it, (^{<0017>}Genesis 2:7 7:22);

so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: he has reason and speech, which a beast has not; which gives him a preference to them, did he make a right use of them; but, as an animal, he has no preeminence, being

liable to the same accidents, and to death itself: the Targum excepts the house of the grave, man being usually buried when he dies, but a beast is not: yea, in some things a beast has the preeminence of a man; at least some have, in strength, agility, quickness of the senses, etc.

for all [is] vanity; all the gratifications of the senses; all riches, honours, pleasures, power, and authority, especially when abused.

Ver. 20. *All go unto one place*, etc.] The earth¹⁹⁵ from whence they came;

all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again; Adam's body was made of the dust of the earth, and so all his posterity, all of them; in which they agree with beasts, who are made of the dust also; and, when they die, return to it; (see ^{<0007>}Genesis 2:7 3:19 ^{<0A09>}Psalm 104:29).

Ver. 21. *Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward?* etc.] There is indeed a difference between a man and a beast; though they have one breath, they have not one spirit or soul; man has a rational and immortal soul, which, when he dies, goes upwards to God that gave it; to be judged by him, and disposed of by him, in its proper apartment, until the day of the resurrection of the body;

and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth? when the beast dies, its spirit goes down to the earth, from whence it came, and is resolved into it, and is no more. But who is it that sees, or can see and know with the eyes of his body, the difference of these two spirits, or the ascent of the one, and the descent of the other?, Or who knows by the dint of reason, by the strength of his own understanding, without a divine revelation, that man has an immortal soul which goes upwards at death, when that of a beast goes downwards? No man, clearly and fully, as appears from the doubts and half faith of the wisest Heathens concerning it: or rather who knows and considers this difference between the spirit of a man and the spirit of a beast, and thinks within himself what a precious and immortal soul he has, and is concerned for the salvation of it? Very few; and hence it is they live and die like beasts, as they do. The Midrash interprets this of the souls of the righteous that go up to heaven, and of the souls of the wicked that go down to hell.

Ver. 22. *Wherefore I perceive that [there is] nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his own works*, etc.] The Targum is, "in his good works"; not as justifying him before God, but as vindicating him before men, from unjust censures and charges: rather the sense is, that this is the

wise man's conclusion, and this his sentiment, upon the whole; that there is nothing better for a man, than cheerfully to enjoy the fruit of his labours; to eat and drink in moderation, freely, joyfully, and thankfully; and make use of his riches, power, and authority, for his own good, the good of his family for the present, and the good of his fellow creatures; (see ~~2021~~ Ecclesiastes 2:21 3:13);

for that [is] his portion; what is allotted to him, and thus enjoyed, is a very good one, and for which he has reason to be thankful;

for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him? to see who shall succeed him, and what use they will make of what he leaves them; he shall never return after death to see anything of this kind, nor shall any acquaint him with it; he shall not be able to know when he is dead what shall befall his sons, whether they will prosper or no, so Jarchi; wherefore it is best for him to enjoy his substance himself in a comfortable way, and be beneficial to others, and not oppressive to them. The Midrash illustrates it thus,

“who shall bring David to see what Solomon did? and who shall bring Solomon to see what Rehoboam did?”

CHAPTER 4

INTRODUCTION TO ECCLESIASTES 4

In this chapter the wise man reassumes the consideration of the case of the abuse of power, to show that there is no happiness in this world, in grandeur and authority enjoyed; since, as he had observed before, on the one hand, the oppressor shall be judged and condemned at the great day of account; so, on the other hand, the oppressed have their lives made so uncomfortable, that the dead are preferred unto them, and unborn persons to them both, (²⁰⁴¹Ecclesiastes 4:1-3); Another vanity he observes, that whereas men expect to be happy by their diligence and industry, this brings upon them the envy of others, (²⁰⁴⁴Ecclesiastes 4:4); hence some, on the other hand, place their happiness in sloth and ease, which is another vanity, (²⁰⁴⁵Ecclesiastes 4:5,6); and others again in covetousness; who are described by their unsocial life, toilsome labour, unsatisfied desires, and withholding good things from themselves, (²⁰⁰⁷Ecclesiastes 4:7,8); upon which some things are said, to show the benefits of a social life, (²⁰⁴⁹Ecclesiastes 4:9-12). And the chapter is concluded with exposing the vanity of the highest instance of worldly power and grandeur, royal dignity, through the folly of a king; the effects of which are mentioned, (²⁰⁴³Ecclesiastes 4:13,14); and through the fickleness of the people, who are soon weary of a prince on the throne, and court his successor, (²⁰⁴⁵Ecclesiastes 4:15,16).

Ver. 1. *So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun*, etc.] The wise man, according to Aben Ezra, returned from the thought, which he had expressed in the latter part of the preceding chapter, that it was good for a man to rejoice in his works, and called it in; since he could not rejoice, when he considered the oppression and violence that were in the world; but it does not appear that he did call it in, for he afterwards repeats it: or rather he returns to his former subject, the abuse of power and authority, mentioned (²⁰³⁶Ecclesiastes 3:16); and from whence he had digressed a little by the above observation; and takes a review of all kinds of oppressions which are done, and of all sorts of “oppressed”¹⁹⁶ ones, as some render it, which become so, under the sun;

subjects by their prince; the stranger, widow, and fatherless, by unjust judges; the poor by the rich; servants and labourers by their masters; and the like. Moreover, he saw by the Holy Ghost, as Jarchi paraphrases it, all oppressions by a spirit of prophecy; he foresaw all the oppressions that would be done under the sun; as all the injuries done to the people of Israel in their several captivities; so to the church of Christ in Gospel times; all the persecutions of Rome Pagan, and also of Rome Papal; all that has or will be done by antichrist, the man of the earth, who before long will oppress no more, (~~908~~ Psalm 10:18); the Targum restrains these oppressions to those which are done to the righteous in this world: and it is well observed by the wise man, that they are such as are under the sun, for there are none above it, nor any beyond the grave, (~~887~~ Job 3:17,18);

and behold the tears of [such as were] oppressed; which their eyes poured out, and which ran down their cheeks, and were all they could do, having no power to help themselves: it is in the singular number, “and behold the tear”^{f97}; as if it was one continued stream of tears, which, like a torrent, flowed from them; or as if they had so exhausted the source of nature by weeping, that the fountain of tears was dried up, and scarce another could drop; or it was as much as could be, that another should drop from them: and this the wise man could not well behold, without weeping himself; it being the property of a good man to weep with them that weep, especially with good men oppressed;

and they had no comforter; to speak a comfortable word to them; not so much as to do that which would be some alleviation of their sorrow, much less to help them, no human comforter; and this is a very deplorable condition, (~~200~~ Lamentations 1:2,9,16,17 ~~660~~ Psalm 69:20); indeed, when this is the case, good men under their oppressions have a divine Comforter; God comforts them under all their tribulations; one of the names of the Messiah is “the Consolation of Israel”, (~~025~~ Luke 2:25); and the Spirit of God is “another Comforter”, (~~646~~ John 14:16); and such are well off, when all other comforters are miserable ones, or other men have none;

and on the side of their oppressors [there was] power; to crush them and keep them under, or to hinder others from helping or comforting them: or there was no “power [to deliver them] out of the hand of their oppressors”^{f98}; so some render and supply the words; with which sense agrees the Targum,

“and there is none to redeem them out of the hand of their oppressors, by strength of hand and by power.”

It may be rendered, “out of the hand of their oppressors [comes] power”, or violence; such as the oppressed are not able to withstand; so the Arabic version;

but they had no comforter: which is repeated, not so much for confirmation, as to excite attention and pity, and to express the affliction of the oppressed, and the cruelty of others; and this following on the other clause, leads to observe, that the power of the oppressor is what hinders and deters others from comforting. Jarchi interprets this whole verse of the damned in hell, punished for their evil works, weeping for their souls oppressed by the destroying angels; and so, he says, it is, explained in an ancient book of theirs, called Siphri.

Ver. 2. *Wherefore I praised the dead, which are already dead*, etc.] Truly and properly so; not in a figurative sense, as dead sinners, men dead in trespasses and sins; nor carnal professors, that have a name to live, and are dead; nor in a civil sense, such as are in calamity and distress, as the Jews in captivity, or in any affliction, which is sometimes called death: but such who are dead in a literal and natural sense, really and thoroughly dead; not who may and will certainly die, but who are dead already and in their graves, and not all these; not the wicked dead, who are in hell, in everlasting torments; but the righteous dead, who are taken away from the evil to come, and are free from all the oppressions of their enemies, sin, Satan, and the world. The Targum is,

“I praised those that lie down or are asleep, who, behold, are now dead;”

a figure by which death is often expressed, both in the Old and New Testament; sleep being, as the poet^{f99} says, the image of death; and a great likeness there is between them; Homer^{f100} calls sleep and death twins. The same paraphrase adds,

“and see not the vengeance which comes upon the world after their death;”

(see ^{250b} Isaiah 57:1,2). The wise man did not make panegyrics or encomiums on those persons, but he pronounced them happy; he judged them in his own mind to be so; and to be much

more happy

than the living which are yet alive: that live under the oppression of others; that live in this world in trouble until now, as the Targum; of whom it is as much as it can be said that they are alive; they are just alive, and that is all; they are as it were between life and death. This is generally understood as spoken according to human sense, and the judgment of the flesh, without any regard to the glory and happiness of the future state; that the dead must be preferred to the living, when the quiet of the one, and the misery of the other, are observed; and which sense receives confirmation from (²⁰⁴³Ecclesiastes 4:3): otherwise it is a great truth, that the righteous dead, who die in Christ and are with him, are much more happy than living saints; since they are freed from sin; are out of the reach of Satan's temptations; are no more liable to darkness and desertions; are freed from all doubts and fears; cease from all their labours, toil, and trouble; and are delivered from all afflictions, persecutions, and oppressions; which is not the case of living saints: and besides, the joys which they possess, the company they are always in, and the work they are employed about, give them infinitely the preference to all on earth; (see ⁶⁶⁴³Revelation 14:13 ³⁰²²Philippians 1:21,23).

Ver. 3. *Yea, better [is he] than both they which hath not yet been*, etc.] That is, an unborn person; who is preferred both to the dead that have seen oppression, and to the living that are under it; see (³⁸⁵⁰Job 3:10-16 10:18,19). This supposes a person to be that never was, a mere nonentity; and the judgment made is according to sense, and regards the dead purely as such, and so as free from evils and sorrows, without any respect to their future state and condition; for otherwise an unborn person is not happier than the dead that die in Christ, and live with him: and it can only be true of those that perish, of whom indeed it might be said, that it would have been better for them if they had never been born, according to those words of Christ, (⁴¹²⁴Matthew 26:24); and is opposed to the maxim of some philosophers, that a miserable being is better than none at all. The Jews, from this passage, endeavour to prove the pre-existence of human souls, and suppose that such an one is here meant, which, though created, was not yet sent into this world in a body, and so had never seen evil and sorrow; and this way some Christian writers have gone. It has been interpreted also of the Messiah, who in Solomon's time had not yet been a man, and never known sorrow, which he was to do, and has, and so more happy than the dead or living. But these are senses that will not bear; the

first is best; and the design is to show the great unhappiness of mortals, that even a nonentity is preferred to them;

who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun? the evil works of oppressors, and the sorrows of the oppressed.

Ver. 4. *Again I considered all travail, and every right work,* etc.] The pains that men take to do right works. Some apply themselves, with great diligence and industry, to the study of the liberal arts and sciences; and to attain the knowledge of languages; and to writing books, for the improvement of those things, and the good of mankind: and others employ themselves in mechanic arts, and excel in them, and bring their works to great perfection and accuracy; when they might expect to be praised and commended, and have thanks given them by men. But instead thereof, so it is,

that for this a man is envied of his neighbour; who will be sure to find fault with what he has done, speak contemptibly of him and his work, and traduce him among men. This is also true of moral works; which are right, when done from a right principle, from love to God, in faith, and with a view to the glory of God; and which when done, and ever so well done, draw upon a man the envy of the wicked, as may be observed in the case of Cain and Abel, (^{<Q182>}1 John 3:12); though some understand this, not passively, of the envy which is brought upon a man, and he endures, for the sake of the good he excels in; but actively, of the spirit of emulation with which he does it; though the work he does, as to the matter of it, is right; yet the manner of doing it, and the spirit with which he does it, are wrong; he does not do it with any good affection to the thing itself, nor with any good design, only from a spirit of emulation to outdo his neighbour: so the Targum paraphrases it,

“this is the emulation that a man emulates his neighbour, to do as he; if he emulates him to do good, the heavenly Word does good to him; but if he emulates him to do evil, the heavenly Word does evil to him;”

and to this sense Jarchi; compare with this, (^{<Q185>}Philippians 1:15-18).

This [is] also vanity, and vexation of spirit; whether it be understood in the one sense or the other; how dissatisfying and vexatious is it, when a man has taken a great deal of pains to do right works for public good, instead of having thanks and praise, is reproached and calumniated for it?

and if he does a right thing, and yet has not right ends and views in it, it stands for nothing; it has only the appearance of good, but is not truly so, and yields no solid peace and comfort.

Ver. 5. *The fool foldeth his hands together*, etc.] In order to get more sleep, or as unwilling to work; so the Targum adds,

“he folds his hands in summer, and will not labour;”

(see ²¹⁶⁰Proverbs 6:10). Some persons, to escape the envy which diligence and industry bring on men, will not work at all, or do any right work, and think to sleep in a whole skin; this is great folly and madness indeed:

and eateth his own flesh; such a man is starved and famished for want of food, so that his flesh is wasted away; or he is so hungry bitten, that he is ready to eat his own flesh; or he hereby brings to ruin his family, his wife, and children, which are his own flesh, (²³⁸⁷Isaiah 58:7). The Targum is,

“in winter he eats all he has, even the covering of the skin of his flesh.”

Some understand this of the envious man, who is a fool, traduces the diligent and industrious, and will not work himself; and not only whose idleness brings want and poverty on him as an armed man, but whose envy eats up his spirit, and is rottenness in his bones, (²¹⁶¹Proverbs 6:11 14:30). Jarchi, out of a book of theirs called Siphri, interprets this of a wicked man in hell, when he sees the righteous in glory, and he himself judged and condemned.

Ver. 6. *Better [is] a handful [with] quietness*, etc.] These are the words of the fool, according to Aben Ezra; and which is the sense of other interpreters, particularly Mr. Broughton, who connects this verse with (²¹⁰⁵Ecclesiastes 4:5) by adding at the end of that the word “saying”; making an excuse or an apology for himself and conduct, from the use and profitableness of his sloth; that little had with ease, and without toil and labour, is much better

than both the hands full [with] travail and vexation of spirit; than large possessions gotten with a great deal of trouble, and enjoyed with much vexation and uneasiness; in which he mistakes slothful ease for true quietness; calls honest labour and industry travail and vexation; and supposes that true contentment lies in the enjoyment of little, and cannot be

had where there is much; whereas it is to be found in a good man in every state: or else these words express the true sentiments of Solomon's mind, steering between the two extremes of slothfulness, and too toilsome labour to be rich; that it is much more eligible to have a competency, though it is but small, with a good conscience, with tranquillity of mind, with the love and fear of God, and a contented heart, than to have a large estate, with great trouble and fatigue in getting and keeping it, especially with discontent and uneasiness; and this agrees with what the wise man says elsewhere, (~~201516~~ Proverbs 15:16,17 17:1). The Targum is,

“better to a man is a handful of food with quietness of soul, and without robbery and rapine, than two handfuls of food with robbery and rapine;”

or with what is gotten in an ill way.

Ver. 7. *Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun.*] Another vanity besides what he had taken notice of, and is as follows. Aben Ezra's note is,

“I turned from considering the words of this fool, and I saw another fool, the reverse of the former.”

Ver. 8. *There is one [alone], and [there is] not a second,* etc.] According to Aben Ezra, either no friend or companion, or no servant, or no wife, which last sense he prefers; no friend or companion he chooses, because friendship and fellowship lead to expenses; and no servant who would be chargeable to him; and no wife, which would be more expensive, and bring on a family of children; wherefore, to save charges, he chooses to have neither of these; for this is a covetous man who is here desert bed;

yea, he hath neither child nor brother; to inherit his substance, as the Targum adds; some worldly men, whose bellies are filled with hidden treasures, having enjoyed much, when they die, leave the rest of their substance to their babes; but the man here described has no children, nor any relations to leave his wealth unto;

yet [is there] no end of all his labour; when he has executed one scheme to get riches, he forms another; and having finished one work, he enters upon another; he rises early and sits up late, and works and toils night and day, as if he was not worth a dollar, and had a large and numerous family to provide for; or there is no end of what he labours for, or gets by his

labour; there is no end of his treasures, (²¹⁰⁷Isaiah 2:7); he is immensely rich, so Aben Ezra interprets it;

neither is his eye satisfied with riches: with seeing his bags of gold and silver, though he takes a great deal of sure in looking upon them too, without making use of them; yet he is not satisfied with what he has, he wants more, he enlarges his desire as hell, and like the grave never has enough; (see ²¹⁵⁰Ecclesiastes 5:10);

neither [saith he], for whom do I labour? having neither wife nor child, nor relation, nor friend, and yet so wretchedly stupid and thoughtless as never once to put this question to himself, Who am I toiling for? I am heaping up riches, and know not who shall gather them; it is a vexation to a worldly man to leave his substance behind him, and even to a man that has an heir to inherit it, when he knows not whether he will be a wise man or a fool; but for a man that has no heir at all, and yet to be toiling and labouring for the world, is gross stupidity, downright madness, and especially when he deprives himself of the comfort of what he is possessed of;

and bereave my soul of good? instead of richly enjoying what is given him, he withholds it from himself, starves his back and belly, lives in pinching want amidst the greatest plenty; has not power to eat of what he has, and his soul desireth; (see ²¹⁰²Ecclesiastes 6:2).

This [is] also vanity, yea, it [is] a sore travail; a very vain and wicked thing; “an evil business”, as it may be rendered; a very great sin and folly indeed; it is thought by some divines to be the worst species of covetousness, most cruel and unnatural.

Ver. 9. *Two [are] better than one*, etc.] The wise man takes occasion, from the solitariness Of the covetous man before described, to show in this and some following verses the preferableness and advantages of social life; which, as it holds true in things natural and civil, so in things spiritual and religious; man is a sociable creature, was made to be so; and it was the judgment of God, which is according to truth, and who can never err, that it was not good for man to be alone, (⁰⁰¹⁸Genesis 2:18). It is best to take a wife, or at least to have a friend or companion, more or less to converse with. Society is preferable to solitariness; conversation with a friend is better than to be always alone; the Targum is,

“two righteous men in a generation are better than one;”

such may be helpful to each other in their counsels and comforts, and mutual aids and assistances in things temporal and spiritual. The Midrash interprets this of the study in the law together, and of two that trade together, which is better than studying or trading separately;

because they have a good reward for their labour; the pleasure and profit they have in each other's company and conversation; in religious societies, though there is a labour in attendance on public worship, in praying and conferring together, in serving one another in love, and bearing one another's burdens, yet they have a good reward in it all; they have the presence of Christ with them, for, where two or three are met together in his name, he is with them; and whatsoever two of them agree to ask in his name they have it; and if two of them converse together about spiritual things, it is much if he does not make a third with them; besides they have a great deal of pleasure in each other's company, and much profit in their mutual instructions, advices, and reproofs; they sharpen each other's countenances, quicken and comfort each other's souls, establish one another in divine truth, and strengthen each other's hands and hearts.

Ver. 10. *For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow*, etc.] That is, if anyone of them fall, the other will lift him up, as they are travelling together, in whatsoever manner; if one falls from his horse, or out of his carriage, or into a ditch, the other will endeavour to raise him up again: this, as it is true in a natural, so in a figurative and metaphorical sense, with religious persons especially;

“if one of them falls upon the bed, and lies sick,”

as the Targum paraphrases it, his friend and brother in a religious community will visit him, and sympathize with him, and speak a word of comfort to him, and pray with him, which may issue in his restoration. So the Targum,

“the other will cause his friend to rise by his prayer;”

or if he fall into outward distress, poverty, and want, his spiritual friend or friends will distribute to his necessity; if he falls into errors, as a good man may, such as are of the same religious society with him will take some pains to convince him of the error of his way, and to convert him from it, and to save a soul from death, and cover a multitude of sins; and if he falls into sin, to which the best of men are liable, such as are spiritual will endeavour to restore him in a spirit of meekness;

but woe to him [that is] alone when he falleth! for [he hath] not another to help him up; no companion to raise him up when fallen; no Christian friend to visit and comfort him when sick, to relieve him under his necessities, when poor and afflicted, or to recover him from errors in judgment, or immoralities in practice; and especially if he has not Christ with him to raise him up, keep, and uphold him.

Ver. 11. *Again, if two lie together, then they have heat,* etc.] The Targum adds, in the winter; when it is a cold season, they warm one another by lying together. The Targum interprets it of a man and his wife; it is true of others; (see ^{<1000>}1 Kings 1:1,2);

but how can one be warm [alone]? not soon, nor easily, in time of cold weather. This is true in a spiritual sense of persons in a Christian communion and religious society; when they are grown cold in their love, lukewarm in their affections, and backward and indifferent to spiritual exercises, yet by Christian conversation may be stirred up to love and good works: so two cold flints struck against each other, fire comes out of them; and even two cold Christians, when they come to talk with each other about spiritual things, and feel one another's spirits, they presently glow in their affections to each other, and to divine things; and especially if Christ joins them with his presence, as he did the two disciples going to Emmaus, then their hearts burn within them.

Ver. 12. *And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him,* etc.] If an enemy, or a thief, or a robber, attack anyone of them, in friendship and fellowship together, and is more than a match for him; both joined together will be able to resist him; so that he shall not succeed in his enterprise, and do the mischief he designed; see (^{<1000>}2 Samuel 10:11); Thus, when Satan attacks a single believer, which he chooses to do when alone; so he tempted Eve in the garden, and Christ in the wilderness; and one or more fellow Christians know of it, they are capable of helping their tempted friend, by their advice and counsel, they not being ignorant of Satan's devices; and by striving together in their prayers to God for him: so when false teachers make their efforts, as they usually do, Satan like, upon the weaker sex, and, when alone, they too often succeed; but when saints stand fast in one spirit, and strive together for the faith of the Gospel, they stand their ground, withstand the enemy, and maintain truth;

and a threefold cord is not quickly broken; or "in haste"^{f101}; as two are better than one, so three or more united together, it is the better still; they

are able to make head against an enemy; and to conquer him, “vis unita fortior est”: if a family, community, city, or kingdom, are divided against themselves, they cannot stand; but, if united, in all probability nothing can hurt them. This doctrine is taught in the fable of the bundle of sticks the old man gave to his sons to break; which, while fastened together, could not be done; but, when art bound, and took out singly, were easily snapped asunder; teaching them thereby unity among themselves, as their greatest security against their common enemy. The same instruction is given by this threefold cord; while it remains twisted together, it is not easily broke, but if the threads are untwisted and unloosed, they are soon snapped asunder: so persons in religious fellowship, be they more or fewer, while they keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, they are terrible, as an army with banners, and the gates of hell cannot prevail against them. And if this is true of the united love and affections of saints, it must be much more so of the love of Father, Son, and Spirit; that threefold cord, with which the saints are drawn and held; and of which it may be said, that it not only is not quickly broken, but that it cannot be broken at all; and therefore those who are held by it are in the utmost safety. Some apply this to the three principal graces, faith, hope, and love, which are abiding ones; and, though they may sometimes be weak and low in their acts and exercise, can never be lost.

Ver. 13. *Better [is] a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king,* etc.] The wise man proceeds to show the vanity of worldly power and dignity, in the highest instance of it, which is kingly; and, in order to illustrate and exemplify this, he supposes, on the one hand, a person possessed of royal honour; who has long enjoyed it, is settled in his kingdom, and advanced in years; and who otherwise, for his gravity and dignity, would be venerable; but that he is foolish, a person of a mean genius and small capacity; has but little knowledge of government, or but little versed in the arts of it, though he has held the reins of it long in his hand; and, which is worst of all, is vicious and wicked: on the other hand, he supposes one that is in his tender years, not yet arrived to manhood; and so may be thought to be giddy and inexperienced, and therefore taken but little notice of; and especially being poor, becomes contemptible, as well as labours under the disadvantage of a poor education; his parents poor, and he not able to get books and masters to teach him knowledge; nor to travel abroad to see the world, and make his observations on men and things; and yet being wise, having a good genius, which he improves in the best

manner he can, to his own profit, and to make himself useful in the world; and especially if he is wise and knowing in the best things, and fears God, and serves him; he is more happy, in his present state and circumstances, than the king before described is in his, and is fitter to take his place, and be a king, than he is; for though he is young, yet wise, and improving in knowledge, and willing to be advised and counselled by others, older and wiser than himself; he is much to be preferred to one that is old and foolish;

who will no more be admonished; or, “knows not to be admonished any more”^{f102}: he neither knows how to give nor take advice; he is impatient of all counsel; cannot bear any admonition; is stubborn and self-willed, and resolved to take his own way. The Jews, in their Midrash, Jarchi, and others, interpret it, allegorically, of the good and evil imagination in men, the principle of grace, and the corruption of nature; the one is the new man, the other the old man; the new man is better than old Adam: the Targum applies it to Abraham and Nimrod; the former is the poor and wise child, that feared God, and worshipped him early; the latter, the old and foolish king, who was an idolater, and refused to be admonished of his idolatry; and so the Midrash.

Ver. 14. *For out of prison he cometh to reign*, etc.] That is, this is sometimes the case of a poor and wise child; he rises out of a low, mean, abject, obscure state and condition, to the highest dignity; from a prison house, or a place where servants are, to sit among princes, and even to have the supreme authority: so Joseph, to whose case Solomon is thought to have respect, and which is mentioned in the Midrash; who was but a young man, and poor and friendless, but wise; and was even laid in prison, though innocent and guiltless, from whence he was fetched, and became the second man in the kingdom of Egypt; so David, the youngest of Jesse’s sons, was taken from the sheepfold, and set upon the throne of Israel: though Gussetius^{f103} interprets this of the old and foolish king, who comes out of the house or family, *pydws h*, of degenerate persons, as he translates the word, with a degenerate genius to rule; the allusion being to a degenerate vine; which sense agrees with (²⁰¹³Ecclesiastes 4:13), and with what follows;

whereas also [he that is] born in his kingdom becometh poor; who is born of royal parents, born to a kingdom; is by birth heir to one, has it by inheritance, and has long possessed it; and yet, by his own misconduct, or by the rebellion of his subjects, he is dethroned and banished; or by a

foreign power is taken and carried captive, and reduced to the utmost poverty, as Zedekiah, Nebuchadnezzar, and others: or if born poor, so Gussetius; with a poor genius, not capable of ruling, and so loses his kingdom, and comes to poverty. Or it may be rendered, “although in his kingdom he is born poor”^{f104}; that is, though the poor and wise child is born poor in the kingdom of the old and foolish king; yet, out of this low estate, in which he is by birth, he comes and enjoys the kingdom in his room to such a strange turn of affairs are the highest honours subject: or, “for in his kingdom he is born poor”^{f105}; even the person that is born heir to a crown is born a poor man; he comes as naked out of his mother’s womb as the poorest man does; the conditions of both are equal as to birth; and therefore it need not seem strange that one out of prison should come to a kingdom. But the first sense seems best.

Ver. 15. *I considered all the living which walk under the sun*, etc.] All men that were then alive, who were capable of walking upon the earth; even all of them that were under the heavens, in every land and nation, under whatsoever dominion or government: these, and their manners, Solomon had particularly observed, and made his remarks upon, by which it appeared how fickle the minds of the populace were under every government, and how precarious and uncertain were the honour and dignity of princes;

with the second child that shall stand up in his stead: the heir and successor or every prince, that shall rise up and take the throne of his father or predecessor, and reign in his stead. The wise man observed how the people commonly behaved towards him; how that they generally stood best affected to him, than to the reigning prince; worshipped the rising sun, courted his favour and friendship, soothed and flattered him; expressing their wishes to see him on the throne, and treated with neglect and contempt their lawful sovereign. Some, contrary to the accents, connect this with the word “walk”^{f106}; that walk with the second child, join themselves to him, converse with him, and show him great respect and honour: and there are others that, by this second child, understand the poor and wise child, that succeeds the old and foolish king, whom yet, in time, the people grow weary of; such is the levity and inconstancy of people, that they are not long pleased with princes, old or young, wise or foolish. The Targum interprets this of the foresight Solomon had, by a spirit of prophecy, of those that rebelled against his son Rehoboam, and of those that cleaved unto him, who was his second, and reigned in his stead.

Noldius^{f107} thinks Solomon refers to the history of his friend Hiram, king of Tyre, whose kingdom, in his and in his son's time, was very large, flourishing, and opulent, but in a following reign not so; and he renders and paraphrases the words thus,

““I saw all the works under the sun; [with] Baleazarus, the son of a friend” (Hiram, for **ynç**, rendered “second”, is the same as **rbj**, “a friend”), “who shall stand” or “reign after him: there is no end of all the people”,” etc.

the kingdom in those two reigns being flourishing; yet posterity shall not rejoice in him, in Abdastratus, the grandson of Hiram, destroyed by the four sons of his nurse^{f108}.

Ver. 16. [*There is no end of all the people, [even] of all that have been before them,* etc.] Before the present generation, the living that walked under the sun; a vast number they were that lived before them, and they were of the same restless temper and disposition; changeable in their affection and behaviour towards their governors; no end of their number, nor any stable affection for, nor settled satisfaction in, their rulers; but this itch of novelty, of having new princes over them, went from age to age, from generation to generation. Some understand this of the king and his son, the predecessor and successor, and of those that went before them; and of their behaviour to the kings that reigned before them; the people have not their end or satisfaction in their governors, but are restless: which comes to the same sense;

they also that come after shall not rejoice in him; that come after the present generation, and after both the reigning prince, and even after his successor; they will not rejoice long in him that shall be upon the throne after them, any more than the present subjects of the old king, or those that now pay their court to the heir apparent; they will be so far from rejoicing in him, that they will loath and despise him, and wish him dead or dethroned, and another in his room.

Surely this also [is] vanity and vexation of spirit; to a king, to see himself thus used by his subjects; for a short time extolled and praised, and then despised and forsaken.

CHAPTER 5

INTRODUCTION TO ECCLESIASTES 5

This chapter contains some rules and directions concerning the worship of God; how persons should behave when they go into the house of God; concerning hearing the word, to which there should be a readiness, and which should be preferred to the sacrifices of fools, (~~2KRB~~Ecclesiastes 5:1). Concerning prayer to God; which should not be uttered rashly and hastily, and should be expressed in few words; which is urged from the consideration of the majesty of God, and vileness of men; and the folly of much speaking is exposed by the simile of a dream, (~~2KRB~~Ecclesiastes 5:2,3). Concerning vows, which should not be rashly made; when made, should be kept; nor should excuses be afterwards framed for not performing them, since this might bring the anger of God upon men, to the destruction of the works of their hands, (~~2KRB~~Ecclesiastes 5:4-6); and, as an antidote against those vanities, which appear in the prayers and vows of some, and dreams of others, the fear of God is proposed, (~~2KRB~~Ecclesiastes 5:7); and, against any surprise at the oppression of the poor, the majesty, power, and providence of God, and his special regard to his people, are observed, (~~2KRB~~Ecclesiastes 5:8). And then the wise man enters into a discourse concerning riches; and observes, that the fruits of the earth, and the culture of it, are necessary to all men, and even to the king, (~~2KRB~~Ecclesiastes 5:9); but dissuades from covetousness, or an over love of riches; because they are unsatisfying, are attended with much trouble, often injurious to the owners of them; at length perish, and their possessors; who, at death, are stripped quite naked of all, after they have spent their days in darkness and distress, (~~2KRB~~Ecclesiastes 5:10-17); and concludes, therefore, that it is best for a man to enjoy, in a free manner, the good things of this life he is possessed of, and consider them as the gifts of God, and be thankful for them; by which means he will pass through the world more comfortably, and escape the troubles that attend others, (~~2KRB~~Ecclesiastes 5:18-20).

Ver. 1. *Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God,* etc.] The house of the sanctuary of the Lord, the temple built by Solomon; and so any place of divine worship, where the word of God is preached, and his

ordinances administered. The wise man, having observed many vanities under the sun, directs men to the house of God, where they might learn the nature of them, and how to avoid them; though if care was not taken, they would find or introduce vanity there; which, of all vanities, is the worst, and ought to be guarded against. Wherefore, when men go to any place of divine worship, which to do is their duty and interest, and for their honour, pleasure, and profit, they should take care to “keep [their] feet”, for the singular is here put for the plural, not from going into it; nor does it signify a slow motion towards it, which should be quick, in haste, showing earnestness, fervency, and zeal; but they should keep their feet in proper case, in a suitable condition. The allusion is either to the pulling off of the shoes off the feet, ordered to Moses and Joshua, when on holy ground, (~~Exodus~~ Exodus 3:5 ~~Joshua~~ Joshua 5:15); and which the Jews observed, when they entered the temple on their festivals and sabbaths, even their kings, as Juvenal^{f109} jeers them: not that such a rite should be literally used now, or what is analogous to it; putting off of the hat, in a superstitious veneration of a place; but what was signified by it, as the putting off of the old man, with his deeds, laying aside depraved affections and sordid lusts; two apostles, James and Peter, have taught us this, when we come to the house of God to hear his word, (~~James~~ James 1:21 ~~1 Peter~~ 1 Peter 2:1,2); or the allusion is to the custom of persons in those eastern countries dressing or washing their feet when they visited, especially those of any note; and entered into their houses on any business, as Mephibosheth, when he waited on David, (~~2 Samuel~~ 2 Samuel 19:24); or to the practice of the priests, who washed their feet when they went into the tabernacle of the Lord, (~~Exodus~~ Exodus 30:19,20). Schindler^{f110} says that hence (because of this text) the Jews had before their synagogues an iron fixed in the wall (which we call a “scraper”), on which they cleaned their shoes before they went into the synagogue. All which may denote the purity and cleanness of the conversation of the true worshippers of God; for, as the feet are the instruments of the action of walking, they may intend the conduct and behaviour of the saints in the house of God, where they should take care to do all things according to his word, which is a lamp to the feet, and a light unto the path: moreover, what the feet are to the body, that the affections are to the soul; and these, when a man enters into the house of God for worship, should be set on divine and spiritual things, and not on the world, and the things of it, which will choke the word heard, and make it unprofitable; the thoughts should be composed, sedate, and quiet, and the mind attentive to what is spoken

or done; or otherwise, if diverted by other objects, the service will be useless;

and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools; there are sacrifices to be offered unto God in his house, which are acceptable to him; the sacrifices of beneficence and alms deeds to the poor, with which he is well pleased; and the presentation of the bodies of men, as a holy, living, and acceptable sacrifice unto him; and especially their hearts, and those as broken and contrite, which are the sacrifices of God; as also the sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving, which are acceptable to him through Jesus Christ: and under the former dispensation, while sacrifices were in use by divine appointment, when they were offered up in the faith of the sacrifice of Christ, they were well pleasing to God; but when they were not done in faith, and were without repentance for sin and reformation of life; when men retained their sins with them, and made these a cover for them, and thought by them to make atonement for their crimes, they were no other than the sacrifices of fools, and abominable unto God; see (^{<2011>}Isaiah 1:11-16 ^{<2009>}Jeremiah 7:9,10 ^{<1027>}Proverbs 21:27); when these sacrifices were performed in the best manner, moral duties, as hearing and obeying the word of the Lord, and showing mercy to men, and offering up the spiritual sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving, were preferred unto them, (^{<0952>}1 Samuel 15:22 ^{<2006>}Hosea 6:6 ^{<0580>}Psalm 69:30,31 ^{<1123>}Mark 12:33); and much more to the sacrifices of fools. To be ready, or near^{f111}, is to hear the word of the Lord, as Jarchi interprets it; though Aben Ezra understands it of God being near to hear his people, when they call upon him in truth. The word of the Lord was not only read publicly in the temple and synagogues, but was explained by the priests and prophets, the ecclesiastical rulers of the people; (see ^{<3007>}Malachi 2:7 ^{<4035>}Acts 13:15 15:21); so the Targum,

“draw near thine ear to receive the doctrine of the law, from the priests and wise men:”

and so the people of God should draw near to hear the word; be swift to hear it, attentive to it, and receive it with all reverence, humility, love, and affection; and should not take up with mere outward forms, which is but the sacrifice of fools;

for they consider not that they do evil; or “know not”^{f112}; they think they are doing well, and doing God good service, when they are doing ill; they know not truly the object of worship, nor the spiritual nature of it, nor the right end and true use of it: or, “they know not, [only] to do evil”, so Aben

Ezra supplies it: to do good they have no knowledge: or, “they know not to do the will”, or “good pleasure”^{f113}; that is, of God; this sense of the word Aben Ezra mentions.

Ver. 2. *Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter [any] thing before God*, etc.] In private conversation care should be taken that no rash and unadvised words be spoken in haste, as were by Moses and David; and that no evil, nor even any idle word he uttered, since from, the abundance of the heart the mouth is apt to speak, and all is before, the Lord; not a word in the tongue but is altogether known by him, and must be accounted for to him, (⁴⁹⁴⁶³Psalm 106:33 116:11 139:4 ⁴¹²³⁴Matthew 12:34-37). Jerom interprets this of words spoken concerning God; and careful men should be of what they say of him, of his nature and perfections, of his persons, and of his works; and it may be applied to a public profession of his name, and of faith in him; though this should be done with the heart, yet the heart and tongue should not be rash and hasty in making it; men should consider what they profess and confess, and upon what foot they take up and make a profession of religion; whether they have the true grace of God or no: and it will hold true of the public ministry of the word, in which everything that comes uppermost in the mind, or what is crude and undigested, should not be, uttered; but what ministers have thought of, meditated on, well weighed in their minds, and properly digested. Some understand this of rash vows, such as Jephthah’s, is supposed to be, which are later repented of; but rather speaking unto God in prayer is intended. So the Targum,

“thy, heart shall not hasten to bring out speech at the time thou prayest before the Lord;”

anything and everything that comes up into the mind should not be, uttered before God; not anything rashly and hastily; men should consider before they speak to the King of kings; for though set precomposed forms of prayer are not to be used, yet the matter of prayer should be thought of beforehand; what our wants are, and what we should ask for; whether for ourselves or others; this rule I fear we often offend against: the reasons follow;

for God [is] in heaven, and thou upon earth; his throne is in the heavens, he dwells in the highest heavens, though they cannot contain him; this is expressive of his majesty, sovereignty, and supremacy, and of his omniscience and omnipotence; he is the high and lofty One, that dwells in

the high and holy place; he is above all, and sees and knows all persons and things; and he sits in the heavens, and does whatever he pleases; and therefore all should stand in awe of him, and consider what they say unto him. Our Lord seems to have respect to this passage when he directed his disciples to pray, saying, “Our Father, which art in heaven”, (^(40B)Matthew 6:9 ^(21D)Luke 11:2); and when we pray to him we should think what we ourselves are, that we are on the earth, the footstool of God; that we are of the earth, earthly; dwell in houses of clay, which have their foundation in the dust; crawling worms on earth, unworthy of his notice; are but dust and ashes, who take upon us to speak unto him;

therefore let, by words be few; of which prayer consists; such was the prayer of the publican, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner”, (^(21B3)Luke 18:13); and such the prayer which Christ has given as a pattern and directory to his people; who has forbid vain repetitions and much speaking in prayer, (^(40B)Matthew 6:7,8); not that all lengthy prayers are to be condemned, or all repetitions in them; our Lord was all night in prayer himself; and Nehemiah, Daniel, and others, have used repetitions in prayer, which may be done with fresh affection, zeal, and fervency; but such are forbidden as are done for the sake of being heard for much speaking, as the Heathens; and who thought they were not understood unless they said a thing a hundred times over^{f114}; or when done to gain a character of being more holy and religious than others, as the Pharisees.

Ver. 3. *For a dream cometh through the multitude of business*, etc.] Or, “for as a dream”^{f115}, so Aben Ezra; as that comes through a multiplicity of business in the daytime, in which the mind has been busied, and the body employed; and this brings on dreams in the night season, which are confused and incoherent; sometimes the fancy is employed about one thing, and sometimes another, and all unprofitable and useless, as well as vain and foolish;

and a fool’s voice [is known] by multitude of words; either his voice in conversation, for a fool is full of words, and pours out his foolishness in a large profusion of them; or his voice in prayer, being like a man’s dream, confused, incoherent, and rambling. The supplement, “is known”, may be left out.

Ver. 4. *When thou vowest a vow unto God*, etc.] Or “if thou vowest”^{f116}, as the Vulgate Latin version; for vows are free and indifferent things, which persons may make or not; there is no precept for them in the word of God;

instances and examples there are, and they may be lawfully made, when they are in the power of man to perform, and are not inconsistent with the will and word of God; they have been made by good men, and were frequent in former times; but they seem not so agreeable to the Gospel dispensation, having a tendency to ensnare the mind, to entangle men, and bring on them a spirit of bondage, contrary to that liberty wherewith Christ has made them free; and therefore it is better to abstain from them: holy resolutions to do the will and work of God should be taken up in the strength of divine grace; but to vow this, or that, or the other thing, which a man previous to his vow is not obliged unto, had better be let alone: but however, when a vow is made that is lawful to be done,

defer not to pay it; that is, to God, to whom it is made, who expects it, and that speedily, as Hannah paid hers; no excuses nor delays should be made;

for [he hath] no pleasure in fools; that is, the Lord hath no pleasure in them, he will not be mocked by them; he will resent such treatment of him, as to vow and not pay, or defer payment and daily, with him. So the Targum,

“for the Lord hath no pleasure in fools, because, they defer their vows, and do not pay;”

pay that which thou hast vowed; precisely and punctually; both as to the matter, manner, and time of it.

Ver. 5. *Better [is it] that thou shouldest not vow*, etc.] For a vow is an arbitrary thing; a man is not bound to make it, and while he vows not, it is in his own power, and at his option, whether he will do this or that, or not; but when he has once vowed, he is then brought under an obligation, and must perform; (see ^{418B}Acts 5:4); and therefore it is better not to vow; it is more acceptable to God, and, it is better for a man;

than that thou shouldest vow and not pay; for this shows great weakness and folly, levity and inconstancy, and is resented by the Lord.

Ver. 6. *Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin*, etc.] That is, himself, who is corrupt and depraved; either by making a rash vow, which it is not in his power to keep; or such is the corruption of his nature, and the weakness of the flesh, that he cannot keep it; or by making sinful excuses after he has made the vow, and so is guilty of lying, or false swearing, or other sins of the flesh. Jarchi by “flesh” understands his children, on whom

his iniquity may be visited and punished; and the Targum interprets this punishment of the judgment or condemnation of hell; (see ^{<RB>}Proverbs 20:25);

neither say thou before the angel that it [was] an error; that it was done ignorantly and through mistake: that it was not intended, and that this was not the meaning of the vow; and therefore desires to be excused performing it, or to offer a sacrifice in lieu of it. Interpreters are divided about the angel before whom such an excuse should not be made. Some think angel is put for angels in general, in whose presence, and before whom, as witnesses, vows are made; and who were signified by the cherubim in the sanctuary, where they were to be performed, and who are present in the worshipping assemblies of saints, where these things are done, (^{<RB>}1 Timothy 5:21 ^{<RB>}1 Corinthians 11:10); others think the guardian angel is meant, which they suppose every man has; and others that Christ, the Angel of the covenant, is designed, who is in the midst of his people, sees and knows all that is done by them, and will not admit of their excuses; but it is most probable the priest is intended, called the angel, or messenger, of the Lord of hosts, (^{<RB>}Malachi 2:7); to whom such who had made vows applied to be loosed from them, acknowledging their error in making them; or to offer sacrifice for their sin of ignorance, (^{<RB>}Leviticus 5:4,5);

wherefore should God be angry at thy voice; either in making a rash and sinful vow, or in excusing that which was made;

and destroy the work of thine hands? wrought with success, for which the vow was made; and so, instead of its succeeding, is destroyed, and comes to nothing. Vows made by the Jews were chiefly about their houses, or fields, or cattle; (see ^{<RB>}Leviticus 27:28); and so the destruction suggested may signify the curse that God would bring upon any of these, for excusing or not performing the vow made.

Ver. 7. *For in the multitude of dreams, and many words, [there are] also [divers] vanities*, etc.] Or as, “in a multitude of dreams, [there are] many vanities, [so] also in a multitude of words”^{f117}; as dreams are vain things, or there are abundance of vain things that come into the mind in dreams; so vain and idle are the many excuses which are made for the non-performance of vows; or there are many vain things which are uttered in making of them, or in long prayers to God; or in discourses concerning him; to all which is opposed the fear of God;

but fear thou God; give no heed to dreams, nor to the many words of men, which are vain and foolish; but keep close to the word of God, and worship him internally and externally, in spirit and in truth; for herein lies the sum and substance of religion; (see ^{<2123>}Ecclesiastes 12:13); The Targum is,

“for in the multitude of the dreams of the false prophets believe not, nor in the vanities of the authors of enchantments, and the many speeches of ungodly men; but serve the wise and just, and of them seek doctrine, and fear before the Lord;”

(see ^{<2238>}Jeremiah 23:28);

Ver. 8. *If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of justice in a province*, etc.] Which is a very disagreeable sight, but often seen; the poor are oppressed, and judgment and justice perverted, and that in a very violent and flagrant manner, in open courts of judicature, in the several provinces and kingdoms of the world;

marvel not at the matter; as though it was some strange and uncommon thing, when nothing is more common: or “marvel not at the will” or “pleasure”^{f118}; that is, of God, who suffers such things to be. So the Targum, Jarchi, and Aben Ezra, interpret it; stumble not at it, nor arraign the wisdom and justice of God; let not that temptation prevail in thee as it has done in some good men, who have been tempted from hence to think there was nothing in religion, nor no providence attending the affairs of this world; do not be frightened and astonished, and hurried into such a thought; nor be distressed at the calamities and oppressions of poor and innocent men;

for [he that is] higher than the highest regardeth: that is, God, who is the most high in all the earth; higher, than the kings of the earth, and all high and haughty oppressors; higher indeed than the heavens, and the angels there: he “regards” all his people, his eyes are on them, and he never withdraws them from them; he regards their cries, and hears and answers them; he regards their oppressors, and their oppressions; and will, in his own time, deliver them; or he “keeps”^{f119} his people as the apple of his eye, in the hollow of his hand, night and day, lest any hurt them; he keeps them by his power through faith unto salvation. It may be rendered, “the high One from on high observes”^{f120}; God, who is the high and lofty One, looks down from the high heavens where he dwells, and takes notice of all the sons of men, and considers all their works; (see ^{<2883>}Psalms 33:13-15);

and [there be] higher than they; either the holy angels, who are higher than tyrannical oppressors, higher in nature, and excel in strength and power; and these are on the side of the oppressed, have the charge of saints, and encamp about them; and, whenever they have an order, can destroy their enemies in a moment: or rather the three divine Persons are meant, by the plural expression used, Father, Son, and Spirit; Jehovah the Father is above men, the greatest of men, in the things in which they deal proudly; he is greater than all, and none can pluck his sheep out of his hands, and worry them: Christ, the Son of the Highest, is higher than the kings, of the earth; he is King of kings, and Lord of lords, and able to deliver and save his people; and the Holy Spirit is the power of the Highest, and is greater than he or they that are in the world, the avowed enemies of the saints. Aben Ezra interprets it of the secret of the name of God, which he says is inexplicable. So the Midrash understands it of the holy blessed God; and in another tract it is said, on mention of this passage, there are three superiors above them in the way of emanation, and of them it is said^{f121}, “there be higher than they.”

Ver. 9. *Moreover, the profit of the earth is for all*, etc.] Or, “the excellency of the earth in” or “above all things [is] this”^{f122}; that God most high rules over all the earth, and is higher than the kings of it, and all oppressors in it; or in all respects there is a preference, a superior excellency in the country as opposed to the city, especially in this, that there are not so many tumults, riots, and oppressions there; though this is mostly understood of the preference and superior excellency of agriculture, or tillage of the earth. So the Targum,

“the excellency of the praise of tilling the earth is above all things:”

and to the same purpose Jarchi and Aben Ezra; and the profit arising from it is enjoyed by all; it is for all, even the beasts of the field have grass from hence, as well as man has bread corn, and all other necessities;

the king [himself] is served by the field; his table is served with bread corn, and flesh, and wine, and fruits of various sorts, the produce of the earth, which spring from it, or are nourished by it; were it not for husbandry the king himself and his family could not subsist; and therefore it becomes kings to encourage it, and not oppress those who are employed in it: or “the king [is a] servant to the field”^{f123}; some kings have addicted themselves to husbandry, and been great lovers of it, as Uzziah was, (~~1400~~2 Chronicles 26:10); and some of the Chinese emperors, as their histories^{f124}

show; and the kings of Persia^{f125}: Vulcan, in the shield of Achilles, represented the reapers, gatherers, and binders of sheaves at work in the field, and a king standing among the sheaves with a sceptre in his hand, looking on with great pleasure, while a dinner is prepared by his orders for the workmen^{f126}; many of the Roman generals, and high officers, were called from the plough, particularly Cincinnatus^{f127}; and these encouraged husbandry in their subjects, as well as took care of their own farms. There is another sense of the words given, besides many more;

“and the most excellent Lord of the earth (that is, the most high God) is the King of every field that is tilled; (that is, the King of the whole habitable world;) or the King Messiah, Lord of his field, the church, and who is the most eminent in all the earth^{f128}.”

The Midrash interprets it of the holy blessed God.

Ver. 10. *He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver*, etc.] The tillage of the earth is necessary, a very laudable and useful employment, and men do well to busy themselves in it; without this, neither the common people nor the greatest personages can be supplied with the necessaries of life; but then an immoderate love of money is criminal, which is here meant by loving silver, one kind of money, which when loved beyond measure is the root of all evil; and besides, when a man has got ever so much of it, he is not satisfied, he still wants more, like the horse leech at the vein cries Give, give; or he cannot eat silver, so Jarchi; or be “fed with money”, as Mr. Broughton renders it; and herein the fruits of the earth, for which the husbandman labours, have the preference to silver; for these he can eat, and be filled and satisfied with them, but he cannot eat his bags of gold and silver;

nor he that loveth abundance with increase; that is, he that coveteth a great deal of this world’s things shall not be satisfied with the increase of them, let that be what it will; or, he shall have “no increase”^{f129}, be ever the better for his abundance, or enjoy the comfort and benefit of it: or, “he that loveth abundance [from whence there is] no increase”^{f130}; that loves to have a multitude of people about him, as manservants and maidservants; a large equipage, as Aben Ezra suggests, which are of very little use and service, or none at all;

this [is] also vanity: the immoderate love of money, coveting large estates and possessions, and to have a train of servants. Jarchi allegorically

interprets silver and abundance, of the commands, and the multitude of them.

Ver. 11. *When goods increase, they are increased that eat them,* etc.]

When a man's substance increases by trade, or otherwise, very often so it is that his family increases, and he has more mouths to feed, and backs to clothe; or his estate growing larger, if he lives suitably to it, he must keep more servants; and these, as they have but little work to do, are described by their eating, rather than by their working; and besides, such a growing man in the world has more friends and visitors that come about him, and eat with him, as well as the poor, which wait upon him to receive his alms: and if his farms, and his fields, and his flocks, are enlarged, he must have more husbandmen, and labourers, and shepherds to look after them, who all must be maintained. So Pheraulas in Xenophon^{f131} observes,

“that now he was possessed of much, that he neither ate, nor drank, nor slept the sweeter for it; what he got by his plenty was, that he had more committed to his keeping, and more to distribute to others; he had more care and more business, with trouble; for now, says he, many servants require food of me, many drink, many clothing, some need physicians, etc. it must needs be, adds he, that they that possess much must spend much on the gods, on friends, and on guests;”

and what good [is there] to the owners thereof, saving the beholding [of them] with their eyes? he can go into his grounds, his fields, and his meadows to behold his flocks and his herds, and can say, all these are mine; he can go into his chambers and open his treasures, and feed his eyes with looking upon his bags of gold and silver, his jewels, and other riches; he can behold a multitude of people at his table, eating at his expense, and more maintained at his cost: and, if a liberal man, it may be a pleasure to him; if otherwise, it will give him pain: and, excepting these, he enjoys no more than food and raiment; and often so it is, that even his very servants have in some things the advantage of him, as follows. The Targum is,

“what profit is there to the owner thereof who gathers it, unless he does good with it, that he may see the gift of the reward with his eyes in the world to come?”

Jarchi interprets it after this manner,

“when men bring many freewill offerings, the priests are increased that eat them; and what good is to the owner of them, the Lord, but the sight of his eyes, who says, and his will is done?”

Ver. 12. *The sleep of a labouring man [is] sweet, whether he eat little or much,* etc.] Or “of a servant”^{f132}, who enjoys sleep equally as a king; a tiller of the ground, as Jarchi; who also interprets it of one that serves the Lord, as likewise the Targum; a beloved one of his, to whom he gives sleep, (^{4C7D}Psalm 127:2). A refreshing sleep is always reckoned a great mercy and blessing, and which labouring men enjoy with sweetness^{f133}; for if they have but little to eat at supper, yet coming weary from their work, sleep is easily brought on when they lie down, and sound sleep they have, and rise in the morning lively and active, and fit for business; or, if they eat more plentifully, yet through their labour they have a good digestion, and their sleep is not hindered: so that should it be answered to the above question, what has the master more than the servant, though he eats and drinks more freely, and of the best, and lives voluptuously? yet it may be replied, that, in the business of sleep, the labouring man has the preference to him; which must be owned to be a great blessing of life, and is often interrupted by excessive eating and drinking;

but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep; either the abundance of food which he eats, which loads his stomach, and fills his head with vapours, and makes him restless, so that he can get no sleep, or what he does get is very uncomfortable: or the abundance of his riches fills him with cares, what he shall do with them, and how to keep and increase them; and with fears, lest thieves should break in and take them away from him, so that he cannot sleep quietly^{f134}. The Targum is,

“sweet is the sleep of a man that serves the Lord of the world with a perfect heart; and he shall have rest in the house of his grave, whether he lives a few years or more, &c;”

and much to the same purpose Jarchi; and who says, it is thus interpreted in an ancient book of theirs, called Tanchuma.

Ver. 13. *There is a sore evil [which] I have seen under the sun,* etc.] Or “an evil sickness”^{f135}. A sinful disease in the person with whom it is found, and very disagreeable to others to behold; it is enough to make one sick to see it; and what he is about to relate he himself was an eyewitness of:

[namely], riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt; laid up in barns and granaries, as the fruits of the earth; or in chests and coffers, as gold and silver, for the use and service of the owners of them; and which yet have been to their real injury; being either used by them in a luxurious and intemperate way, so have brought diseases on their bodies, and damnation to their souls; or not used at all for their own good, or the good of others, which brings the curse of God upon them, to their ruin and destruction, both here and hereafter: and oftentimes so it is, and which no doubt had fallen under the observation of Solomon, that some who have been great misers, and have hoarded up their substance, without using them themselves, or sharing them with others, have not only been plundered of them, but, for the sake of them, their lives have been taken away in a most barbarous manner, by cutthroats and villains; sometimes by their own servants, nay, even by their own children. Riches ill gotten and ill used are very prejudicial to the owners; and if they are well got, but ill used, or not used at all, greatly hurt the spiritual and eternal state of men; it is a difficult thing for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven, and a covetous man cannot; if a professor, the word he hears is choked and made unprofitable; he errs from the faith, and pierces himself through with many sorrows now, and is liable to eternal damnation hereafter. The Targum interprets it of a man that gathers riches, and does no good with them; but keeps them to himself, to do himself evil in the world to come.

Ver. 14. *But those riches perish by evil travail,* etc.] Or, “by an evil business or affair”^{f136}. That is, such riches as are not well got, or are not used as they should be, these waste away and come to nothing; either by the owner’s bad management, and misconduct in trade and business; or by fire, tempest, thieves, and robbers, and many other ways and means: these are very certain things; and there are various ways by which they make themselves wings and flee away, under the direction of a divine providence;

and he begetteth a son, and [there is] nothing in his hand; the riches he had hoarded up, he designed for his son; but being stripped of them by one means or another, when he comes to die, has nothing to leave his son: or if his riches do not perish in his own lifetime, yet they are quickly consumed by his son, who, in a short time, has nothing to live upon; and so being brought up a gentleman, and in no business, is in a worse condition than such who have been brought up to work for their living, and in no expectation of an estate after the decease of their friends. The Targum understands it in this latter sense, paraphrasing the words thus,

“and those riches, which he shall leave his son after his death, shall perish, because he hath gotten them in an evil way; and they shall not remain in the hand of the son whom he hath begotten; neither shall anything remain in his hand.”

Ver. 15. *As he came forth of his mother’s womb, naked shall he return to go as he came*, etc.] This may be understood either of the covetous rich man, or of his son; and that supposing what is before said should not be the case of either of them, but they should possess their substance as long as they live; yet, when they come to die, they will be stripped of them all; of their gold and silver, their plate and jewels, and rich household furniture; of their cattle and possessions, farms and estates, which are no longer theirs; and even of their very clothes, and be as naked as they were when they came into the world; and which is indeed the case of every man, (^{<K02>}Job 1:21); and is used as an argument, and a very forcible one, against covetousness;

and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand; nothing of his substance, which he has got by his labour, and hoarded up with great care; not the least portion of it can he carry away with him when he dies; not any of his jewels, nor bags of gold and silver; and if any of these should be put into his grave, which has been sometimes done at the interment of great personages, these are of no manner of use and service to him, either to comfort and refresh his body, or to save his soul from hell, and procure it an entrance into the heavenly glory; (see ^{<S00>}1 Timothy 6:7 ^{<010>}Proverbs 11:4). The Targum allegorizes this in a very orthodox way, not very usual, in favour of original sin, and against the doctrine of merit;

“as he goes out of his mother’s womb naked, without a covering, and without any good; so he shall return to go to the house of his grave, indigent of merit, as he came into this world; and no good reward shall he receive by his labour, to take with him into the world to which he goes, that it may be for merit in his hand.”

Ver. 16. *And this also [is] a sore evil, [that] in all points as he came, so shall he go*, etc.] This seems not to be an evil or vanity, distinct from the former; but the same repeated and confirmed, and expressed, if possible, in stronger terms, that a man is in all respects alike, when he goes out of the world, as when he came in. A man’s birth is signified by “coming”, that is, out of his mother’s womb, and into the world; and which is a description of

every man born into it, (~~ROM~~ John 1:9); he is of the earth, earthly; comes forth like a flower, and springs up as grass; he comes not of himself, nor casually, but by means of his parents; and according to the determinate will of God, and to answer some end or other: and his death is signified by “going”: a going the way of all flesh; a going out of the world; a going to the grave, the house of all living, a man’s long home; it is like going from one house to another; for death is not an annihilation of man, but a remove of him from hence elsewhere; and a man’s birth and death are in all points alike. This is to be understood of natural and civil things; of riches and honours, which men cannot carry with them; and with respect to them, they are as they were born, naked and stripped of them; and with respect to the body, the parts of it then are the same, though more grown; it is as naked as it was born; and a man is as much beholden to his friends for his grave as for his swaddling clothes; it becomes what it was at first, earth and dust; and as a man comes not into the world at his own will and pleasure, so neither does he go out of it at his will, but the Lord’s. The Midrash interprets it thus,

“as a man comes into the world, with crying, weeping, and sighing, and without knowledge, so he goes out.”

Likewise this is only true of natural and unregenerate men as to moral things; as they are born in sin, they die in sin; with only this difference, an addition of more sin; as they come into the world without the image of God, without a righteousness, without holiness, and without the grace of God, so they go out of it without these things: but this is not true of saints and truly gracious persons; they come into the world with sin, but go out of it without it; being washed in the blood of Christ, justified by his righteousness, and all their sins expiated and pardoned through his sacrifice: they are born without a righteousness, but do not die without one; Christ has wrought out an everlasting righteousness for them; this is imputed to them; is received by faith; given them; they are found in it, living and dying; and this introduces them into heaven and happiness: they are born without holiness, but do not live and die without it; they are regenerated and sanctified by the Spirit of God, and at the moment of death made perfectly holy. This only therefore is true of men, as natural, and with respect to natural and civil things: the Targum interprets it,

“as he comes into this world void of merit, so he shall go into that;”

and what profit hath he that hath laboured for the wind? for riches, which are as unsatisfying as the wind; which are as shifting, and as swift to flee away, as that; and can no more be held, when it is the will of God they should go, and especially at death, than the wind is to be held in the fist of men; and which are as unprofitable as that in the hour of death.

Particularly, what profit has a man of all his riches, which he has got by labour, when he neither makes use of them in life for his own good, nor the good of others; and when he comes to die, they leave him and stand him in no stead; and especially having been unconcerned about his immortal soul; and having been wholly taken up in the pursuit of such vain and transitory things? (see ⁴⁰⁶⁵Matthew 16:26).

Ver. 17. *All his days also he eateth in darkness*, etc.] To all that has been said is added another evil, that attends such whose hearts are inordinately set on riches; that all their days, throughout the whole of their lives, they live a most uncomfortable life; for eating is here put for their whole manner of living: such not only eat coarse bread, and very mean food of any sort, but wear sordid apparel, and live in a poor cottage, in a very obscure and miserable manner. Aben Ezra understands it literally of the night, to which time such a man defers eating, that he might lose no time in his labour; and that it might not be seen what sort of food he eats, and how sparingly, and that others might not eat with him; and what he does eat is not eaten freely, but grudgingly, and with anguish and distress of mind, without any real pleasure and joy; and much less with the light of God's countenance, the discoveries of his love, and communion with him: the Targum is,

“all his days he dwelleth in darkness, that he may taste his bread alone;”

and [he hath], much sorrow and wrath with his sickness; either the sickness of his mind, his covetousness; or the sickness of his body, emaciated by withholding from himself the necessaries of life: or when he comes upon a sick bed, he is filled with sorrow and indignation, that he must live no longer, to accumulate more wealth, and accomplish his projects and designs; and that he must leave his wealth, he has been at so much pains to gather together. Or, “and he is much angry”^{f137}; when things do not answer in trade according to his wishes; when his substance diminishes, or, however, does not increase as he desires; when he is cheated by fraudulent men, or robbed by thieves: “and he hath sickness”^{f138}; either of body or mind, or both, because matters do not

succeed as he would have them; and through fretfulness at losses and crosses, and disappointments; and through cares in getting and keeping what he has: “and wrath”; at all about him, whom he is ready to charge with slothfulness or unfaithfulness to him; and even at the providence of God, that does not give him the desired success; so that he has no manner of pleasure and comfort in life.

Ver. 18. *Behold that which I have seen*, etc.] Observed, considered and approved of, and which he recommended and excited attention to, and is as follows;

[it is] good and comely [for one] to eat and to drink; to make use of the creatures God has given for service in a free and liberal manner, without excess, and with moderation; and not deprive a man’s self of those things he may lawfully partake of, and are necessary for him: to do this is good for himself, and for the health of his body; and is right in the sight of God, and is comely before men; it is not only lawful, but laudable. There is another version and sense of the words, “it is good to eat and drink him that is fair”^{f139}, or comely; Christ, who is fairer than the children of men; to live by faith on him, to eat his flesh, and drink his blood; but this, however true, spiritual, and evangelical, it seems foreign to the text. It follows,

and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him; this last clause, “which God giveth him”, is not to be connected with “the good of all his labour”; though it is true, that whatever good is got by labour is the gift of God; but with “all the days of his life”; for the life of man, and all the days of it, be they more or fewer, are the gift of God, and according to his determinate will and pleasure; and throughout this time a man should enjoy, in a comfortable way, with thankfulness to God, the good things he has gotten by his labour and industry, through the blessing of God along with them. This Solomon frequently inculcates; Aben Ezra says, this is the third time, but it seems to be the fourth; (see ²¹⁰²⁴Ecclesiastes 2:24 3:13,22);

for it [is] his portion; that is, in this life; for otherwise, if a good man, he has a better portion in another: this is the part which God has allotted to him here; and it is his duty, and for his good and comfort, to make use of it.

Ver. 19. *Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth*, etc.] Which include the whole of a man’s substance; all his estate, personal and

real; and all his goods and possessions, movable and immovable, as gold, silver, cattle, fields, and farms; which are all the gift of God, by whatsoever means they may be acquired or possessed;

and hath given him power; or, “caused him to have dominion”^{f140}, over his wealth and riches, and not be a slave to them, as many are: but to have so much command of them and of himself, as

to eat thereof; comfortably enjoy them; and dispose of them to his own good, the good of others, and the glory of God. It follows,

and to take his portion; which God hath allotted him; to take it thankfully, and use it freely and comfortably;

and to rejoice in his labour; in the things he has been labouring for, in a cheerful use of them; blessing God for them, and taking the comfort of them;

this [is] the gift of God; to have such power over his substance, and not be a slave to it, and to enjoy the fruits of his labour, in a cheerful and comfortable manner; this is as much the gift of God as riches themselves^{f141}.

Ver. 20. *For he shall not much remember the days of his life*, etc.] Be they more or fewer, as Jarchi: he will not think life long and tedious; nor dwell upon, and distress himself with, the troubles he has met with, or is likely to meet with; but, being content with the good things God has given him, and freely and cheerfully enjoying them, he passes away his time delightfully and pleasantly. Some, as Aben Ezra observes, and which he approves of, and is agreeably to the accents, render the words, “if he [has] not much, he remembers the days of his life”^{f142}; if he has but little of the good things of this life, he remembers how few his days are he has to live; and doubts not he shall have enough to carry him to the end of his days, and therefore is quite easy and content; he calls to mind how he has been supplied all his days hitherto, and is persuaded that that God, who has provided for him, will continue his goodness to him, and that he shall not want any good thing; and therefore does not distress himself with what is to come;

because God answereth [him] in the joy of his heart; he calls upon God for a blessing on his labours, asks of him his daily food, and desires what may be proper and sufficient for him, or what he judges is necessary and convenient; and God answers his prayers and petitions, and good wishes,

by filling his heart with food and gladness; and giving him that cheerfulness of spirit, and thankfulness of heart, in the enjoyment of every blessing; and especially if along with it he lifts up the light of his countenance, and grants him joy in the Holy Ghost; he will go on so pleasantly and comfortably as to forget all his former troubles; and it will dissipate his doubts and fears about how he shall live for the future.

CHAPTER 6

INTRODUCTION TO ECCLESIASTES 6

The wise man goes on to expose the vanity of riches, as possessed by a covetous man, who makes no use of them; an evil, and a common one under the sun, (²⁰⁰¹Ecclesiastes 6:1); Who is described by the good things he has; which he has not a power to enjoy, but a stranger enjoys them, (²⁰⁰²Ecclesiastes 6:2); by his numerous offspring and long life; yet neither is he satisfied with good in life, nor has he a burial at death; wherefore an abortive is preferred unto him, (²⁰⁰³Ecclesiastes 6:3); For though many things may be said of that which are disagreeable, yet worse of him, and that has more rest than he; and besides, they both go to one place, the grave, (²⁰⁰⁴Ecclesiastes 6:4-6); and the vanity of an anxious labour for riches is further argued from the use of them, at most and best, which is only for the body, and the sustenance of it, but cannot satisfy the mind or soul, (²⁰⁰⁵Ecclesiastes 6:7); and this use a fool can make of, them, as well as a wise man; and a poor man, that is knowing, diligent, and industrious to live, as well as the rich, (²⁰⁰⁶Ecclesiastes 6:8). Wherefore it is best to enjoy and be content with present mercies, than to let loose the wandering desires after what may never be had, (²⁰⁰⁷Ecclesiastes 6:9); and especially it should be considered, that let a man be in what circumstances he will, he is but a man; and these circumstances are determined and appointed by God, which he cannot alter; and therefore it is both vain and sinful to contend with him, (²⁰⁰⁸Ecclesiastes 6:10). And, after all, a man is never the better for his carking cares and wandering desires, since there are so many things that increase vanity, (²⁰⁰⁹Ecclesiastes 6:11); and a man is so ignorant of what is good for him for the present, and of what shall be after him, (²⁰¹⁰Ecclesiastes 6:12).

Ver. 1. *There is an evil which I have seen under the sun*, etc.] The Vulgate Latin version reads it, another evil; but wrongly, for the same is considered as before, the evil of covetousness; which is one of the evil things that come out of the heart of man; is abominable to the Lord, contrary to his nature and will, and a breach of his law, which forbids it, and is the root of

all evil; this is an evil under the sun, for there is nothing of this kind above it; and it fell under the observation of Solomon in various instances;

and it [is] common among men; or, “great over men”^{f143}; or “over the man”, the covetous man: it spreads itself over them; few were free from it, even so long ago, in those early times, and in such times in which silver was made no account of, and was like stones in Jerusalem, as common as they; and yet the sin of covetousness, of hoarding up money and making no use of it, for a man’s own good, and the good of others, was very rife among men, (^{<11027>}1 Kings 10:27).

Ver. 2. *A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honour*, etc.] By “riches” may be meant gold and silver, things which a covetous man is never satisfied with; and by “wealth”, cattle, with which farms and fields are stocked: the wealth of men, especially in former times, and in the eastern countries, lay very much in these, as did the wealth of Abraham and Job, (^{<10132>}Genesis 13:2 ^{<10103>}Job 1:3); and all these, as they are reckoned glorious and honourable in themselves; so they create honour and glory among men, and raise to high and honourable places; and these, as they go, they are usually put together, and are called by the name of honour and glory itself; (see ^{<10116>}Proverbs 3:16 ^{<14011>}2 Chronicles 1:11,12 ^{<10130>}Genesis 31:1). And they are all the gifts of God, which he either as blessings bestows upon men, or suffers men to attain unto, though a curse may go along with them; which is the case here, for no man whatever is possessed of them but by the will of God or his divine permission; (see ^{<13912>}1 Chronicles 29:12); and which a man may, and sometimes has, such a plentiful portion of;

so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth: he has not only for the supply of his wants, what is necessary for his daily use and service, but even what is for delight and pleasure; yea, as much as he could reasonably wish for; nay, more than heart could wish, (^{<13973>}Psalm 73:7);

yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof; the Targum adds, “because of his sin”; either he takes it away from him, he making no use of it; or his appetite is taken away, that he has no desire to it; or rather he has no heart to enjoy what he has, and scarce any part of it; not to eat and drink, and wear suitably to his circumstances, but grudges whatever he lays out on his back or belly, or in housekeeping in his family; for though God gives him a large substance, yet not a heart to make use of it, without which he cannot

enjoy it; and therefore it would have been as good, or better for him, to have been without it; (see ^{<2069>}Ecclesiastes 5:19);

but a stranger eateth it; the Syriac version adds, “after him”; enjoys it, not only a part of it, but the whole; one that is not akin to him, and perhaps was never known by him; and yet, by one means or another, either in a lawful or unlawful way, comes into the possession of all he has; this has been always reckoned a great unhappiness, (^{<288D>}Lamentations 5:2 ^{<300D>}Hosea 7:9). Hence it follows,

this [is] vanity, and it [is] an evil disease; it is a vain thing to be possessed of great substance, and not enjoy anything of it in a comfortable way, through the sin of covetousness; which is a spiritual disease, and a very bad one; very prejudicial to the soul, and the state of it, and is rarely cured. Juvenal^{f144} calls it frenzy and madness for a man to live poor, that he may die rich; he is like the ass that Crassus Agelastus saw, loaded with figs, and eating thorns.

Ver. 3. *If a man beget an hundred [children]*, etc.] Sons and daughters, a certain number for an uncertain. Some have had many children, and almost this number; Rehoboam had twenty eight sons and threescore daughters; and Ahab had seventy sons, how many daughters is not said, (^{<412D>}2 Chronicles 11:21 ^{<200D>}2 Kings 10:1); this was reckoned a great honour and happiness to have many children; happy was the man that had his quiver full of them, (^{<40CB>}Psalms 127:3); such a case is here supposed;

and live many years, so that the days of his years be many; or “sufficient”, as Jarchi interprets it; he lives as long as life is desirable; lives to a good old age, to the full age of men, threescore years and ten; yea, supposing he was to live to be as old as Methuselah,

and his soul be not filled with good; does not enjoy the good things he has; has no pleasure nor satisfaction in the temporal good things of life, has not the comfort of them, and is always uneasy, because he has not more of them; and especially if his soul is not filled with spiritual good things, the grace of God, and righteousness of Christ;

And also [that] he have no burial; as Jezebel, Jehoiakim, and others; who is either destroyed by robbers and cutthroats, for the sake of his substance, and cast into a ditch or a river, or some place, where he is never found to be interred; or else, being of such a sordid disposition, he provides not for a decent burial, suitably to his circumstances, or forbids one; or, being

despised and disesteemed by all men, his heirs and successors either neglect or refuse to give him one; (see ²⁰²³Jeremiah 22:29);

I say [that] an untimely birth [is] better than he; an abortive is to be preferred unto him; it would have been better for him if he had never been born, or had been in such a case.

Ver. 4. *For he cometh in with vanity*, etc.] The Targum adds, “into this world.” Some understand this of the abortive, and render it, “though he cometh in with vanity”^{f145}, yet is to be preferred to the covetous man: others interpret it of the covetous man himself; and scrape of both: or, however, they may be compared together in these instances; the abortive comes into the world in vain, for nothing, and answers no purpose, as can well be observed; and the same may be said of a covetous rich man; he walks in a vain show, and is altogether vanity, in his coming in, in his life, and going out;

and departeth in darkness; or, “into darkness”^{f146}; goes out of the world without any notice taken of him; and goes down to the dark grave, where he lies in obscurity;

and his name shall be covered with darkness; the abortive has no name, and is never spoken of; and so the name and memory of such a man as is here described rot and perish: and in this respect the abortive has the preference to him; for though he is covered with darkness, yet no ill is ever spoken of him; whereas the name of the wicked covetous man is cursed.

Ver. 5. *Moreover, he hath not seen the sun*, etc.] This must be spoken of the abortive, and seems to confirm the sense of the former text, as belonging to it; and whereas it has never seen the light of the sun, nor enjoyed the pleasure and comfort of it, it is no ways distressing to it to be without it. The Targum is,

“the light of the law he seeth not; and knoweth not between good and evil, to judge between this world and that to come:”

so the Vulgate Latin version, “neither knows the difference of good and evil”;

nor known [anything]; not the sun, nor anything else: or “experienced”^{f147} and “felt” the heat of the sun, and its comfortable influences; which a man may, who is blind, and has never seen it, but an abortive has not; and

indeed has known no man, nor any creature nor thing in this world, and therefore it is no concern to it to be without them; and besides, has never had any knowledge or experience of the troubles of lifts, which every living man is liable to. Wherefore this is certain,

this hath more rest than the other; that is, the abortive than the covetous man; having never been distressed with the troubles of life, and now not affected with the sense of loss.

Ver. 6. *Yea, though he live a thousand years twice [told]*, etc.] Or two thousand years, which no man ever did, nor even one thousand years; Methuselah, the oldest man, did not live so long as that; this is than twice the age of the oldest man: there is one sort of the Ethiopians, who are said^{f148} to live almost half space of time longer than usual, called from thence Macrobian; which Pliny^{f149} makes to be one hundred and forty years, which is just double the common term of life. This here is only a supposition. Aben Ezra interprets it, “a thousand thousand”, but wrongly; so the Arabic version, “though he lives many thousand years”;

yet hath he seen no good, not enjoyed the good of his labour, what he has been labouring for and was possessed of; and therefore has lived so long as he has to very little purpose, and with very little comfort or credit; and especially he has had no experience of spiritual good;

do not all go to one place? that is, the grave; they do, even all men; it is the house appointed for all living, (~~Job~~ Job 30:23); and hither go both the abortive, and the covetous rich man; so that he has in this no pre-eminence to it. Jarchi interprets it of hell, the one place, whither all sinners go; but the former sense is best.

Ver. 7. *All the labour of man [is] for his mouth*, etc.] For the food of his mouth, as the Targum; for the sustenance of his body, for food and clothing, part being put for the whole: all that a man labours for is to get this; and if he does not enjoy it, his labour is in vain; meats are for the belly, which are taken in by the mouth, and for these a man labours; and if he does not eat them, when he has got them, he labours to no purpose;

and yet the appetite is not filled; even the bodily or sensual appetite; no, not even by those who eat the fruit of their labour; for though their hunger is allayed for the present, and the appetite is satisfied for a while, yet it returns again, and requires more food, and so continually: or, “the soul is not filled”, or “satisfied”^{f150}; it is the body only that is filled or satisfied with

such things, at best; the mind of man grasps after greater things, and can find no contentment or satisfaction in earthly or sensual enjoyments. This seems to be a new argument, proving the vanity of riches, from the narrow use of them; which only reaches to the body, not to the soul.

Ver. 8. *For what hath the wise more than the fool,* etc.] More delight and pleasure, in gratifying his senses, by eating and drinking: the wise man enjoys no more than the fool; the fool finds as much pleasure in the labour of his hands, which is for his mouth, as the wise man does; and the wise man can get no more satisfaction to his mind, from these outward gratifications, than the fool;

what hath the poor, that knoweth to walk before the living? either, what does the poor man want more than the rich man, that knows how to get his bread, and is diligent and industrious among men to live, and does get a livelihood for himself and family; he enjoys all the sweets and comforts of life, as well as the rich man: or what hath the poor knowing man? as Aben Ezra interprets it, according to the accents; what has he more or does he enjoy more, than the poor foolish man, provided he has but sense enough to behave himself among men, so as to have bread to eat, and clothes to wear; which is as much as any man can enjoy, be he ever so rich or so wise?

Ver. 9. *Better [is] the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire,* etc.] By “the sight of the eyes” is not meant the bare beholding outward riches, as in (²⁰⁶¹Ecclesiastes 5:11); but the enjoyment of present mercies; such things as a man is in the possession of, and with which he should be content, (³⁸³⁵Hebrews 13:5); and by “the wandering of the desire”, the craving appetite and insatiable lust of the covetous mind, which enlarges its desire as hell, after a thousand things, and everything it can think of; such a mind roves through the whole creation, and covets everything under the sun: now it is better to enjoy contentedly things in sight and in possession, than to let the mind loose in vague desires, after things that may never be come at, and, if attained to, would give no satisfaction;

this [is] also vanity and vexation of spirit: a most vain thing, to give the mind such a loose and liberty in its unbounded desires after worldly things; and a vexation of spirit it is to such a craving mind, that it cannot obtain what it is so desirous of.

Ver. 10. *That which hath been is named already, and it is known that it [is] man*, etc.] Which may be understood of the first man Adam, who has been, has existed, was produced by the immediate power of God, creating and forming him out of the dust of the earth; was made after the image, and in the likeness of God, a wise and knowing creature, a rich and powerful one, the figure of him that was to come, being the head and representative of all his posterity; and he has been named already, he had his name from the Lord himself, suitable to his nature and formation; he called his name Adam, from “Adamah”, the earth, from whence he was taken; and though he was so wise and great, and even affected deity, which was the snare laid for him by his enemy, it is well known he was but a man, of the earth, earthly, and returned to it again. Some have applied this to the second man, the Lord from heaven, as the ordinary gloss, and Jerom; and render it, “that which shall be”, so the Vulgate Latin version; as yet he was not man, though he had agreed to be and was prophesied of that he should; however he was named already the seed of the woman, Shiloh, Ithiel, the Messiah, or Anointed; hence by Solomon, in allusion to this name, his “name is [said to be] as ointment poured forth”, (²⁰⁰⁸Song of Solomon 1:3); and as it was known that he should be man, so it is now known that he is really and truly man; though not merely so, but God as well as man; yet as to his human nature his Father is greater and mightier than he; but this sense some interpreters despise and laugh at: and indeed though the whole of it is truth, it does not seem to be the truth of the text, nor suitable to the context: rather the words are to be understood of mankind in general, of all men, not only that have been, but that are or shall be; these were all appointed to come into being by the Lord; they have been in his eternal purposes and decrees, and their names are written or not written in the Lamb’s book of life; and they have all one common name, that of “man”, weak, frail, mortal, wretched man; they are, as is said of the Egyptians, men and not God, (²³⁰⁸Isaiah 31:3); particularly this is true of persons the most famous that have been in the world; such who have been in ages past, and their names have been called, or they have obtained a name among men, men of renown, that are on the list of fame; such who have been the most famous for wisdom, for riches, for strength, or for power and authority, and have even had deity ascribed to them, and divine worship given them; yet it has been notorious that they were but men, and not God, so Jarchi; and died as such; see (³⁹⁰⁸Psalms 9:20 82:1,6,7 ³⁵³⁸Ezekiel 28:2,8,9 ⁴¹²²Acts 12:22,23). Moreover, this may be understood of all things relating to men; that all that has been, is, or shall be, has been

already named of God, determined and appointed by him; so the Targum renders it,

“all is the decree of the Word of the Lord;”

all things relating to the temporal affairs of men, as to their birth and place of abode, their callings and stations of life; so to their circumstances of poverty or riches, which with all their craving desires and carking cares it is impossible for them to alter, or make them otherwise than they are; which is observed, to check the wandering and insatiable desires of men after worldly things;

neither may he contend with him that is mightier than he; the Lord of the world, as the Targum; not the angel of death, as Jarchi; the devil, which had the power of death, and is stronger than men; nor death itself, as others, against which there is no standing, (²¹⁰⁸Ecclesiastes 8:8) (²³⁸⁵Isaiah 28:15,18); but God himself, who is mightier than men, and with whom a creature should not strive or contend; either about his being and the make of it, or concerning his circumstances in the world, that they are not, greater and better than they be; or about God’s decrees concerning these or other things; but quietly submit to his will, and be content in whatsoever circumstances they are, considering that he is the Creator, and a sovereign Being, they are creatures, and dependent on him; and let their circumstances be what they will, wise or unwise, rich or poor, they are but men, and can never rise higher; see (¹⁸⁰⁸Job 9:3,4 33:12,13 ²³⁰⁰Isaiah 49:9,10 ⁴⁰⁹Romans 9:19,20). It is observed by the Masorites that this is just the middle of the book.

Ver. 11. *Seeing there be many things that increase vanity*, etc.] As appears by all that has been said in this and the preceding chapters; such as wisdom and knowledge, wealth and riches, pleasure, power, and authority. Man is a poor vain creature himself, all he is and has is vanity; and these serve but to increase it, and make him vainer and vainer still;

what [is] man the better? for these things? not at all, rather the worse, being more vain; there is no profit by them, no excellency arises to him from them, no happiness in them, nothing that will be of any service to him, especially with respect to a future state, or when he comes to die. It may be rendered, as it is in the Septuagint and Vulgate Latin versions, “seeing there are many words that multiply vanity”; as all such words do that are used with God by way of murmur and complaint concerning a man’s lot

and condition in this world, and as expostulating and contending with him about it; these increase sin, and by them men contract more guilt, and therefore are not the better for such litigations, but the worse; and so the words stand in connection with (²⁰⁶⁰Ecclesiastes 6:10): but the former sense seems best, this being the conclusion of the wise man's discourse concerning vanity. So the Targum and Jarchi understand it of things, and not words.

Ver. 12. *For who knoweth what [is] good for man in [this] life?* etc.] To be in a higher or lower station of life, to live in grandeur or meanness, to be rich or poor, learned or unlearned; since that which seems most agreeable to human nature is at, ended with so much vanity, the occasion of so much sin, and often issues in ruin and misery, that no man knows what is best for him; and therefore it is the wisest way to be content with what a man has, and enjoy it in the most comfortable manner, and use it to the best ends and purposes he can. The Targum is,

“for who is he that knows what is good for a man in this world, but to study in the law, which is the life of the world?”

so the Midrash,

all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow? or “the number of the days of vain life, which he makes as a shadow”^{f151}; that is, which God makes as a “shadow”, as Cocceius observes; makes to pass away swiftly: this is a description of the vanity, brevity, and uncertainty of human life; it consists of days, rather than of months and years; and those such as are easily numbered, and which pass away suddenly and swiftly, like a shadow that has no substance and reality in it, and leaves nothing behind it; or like a bird that flies away, as Jarchi, and is seen no more; such is the life of man, a most vain life, vanity itself; so it may be rendered, “the number of the days of the life of his vanity”^{f152}; since therefore he has so short a time to enjoy anything in, it is hard to say what is best for him to have, and the rather since he is quite ignorant of what is to come;

for who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun? he does not know himself, nor can any man inform him, what will become of his wealth and riches after his death, which he has got together; who shall enjoy them, and how long and what use will be made of them, either to their own good, or the good of others.

CHAPTER 7

INTRODUCTION TO ECCLESIASTES 7

The wise man having exposed the many vanities to which men are subject in this life, and showed that there is no real happiness in all outward enjoyments under the sun; proceeds to observe what are remedies against them, of which he had interspersed some few hints before, as the fear and worship of God, and the free and, moderate use of the creatures; and here suggests more, and such as will protect from them, or support under them, or teach and instruct how to behave while attended with them, and to direct to what are proper and necessary in the pursuit of true and real happiness; such as care of a good name and reputation, (^{2100b}Ecclesiastes 7:1); frequent meditation on mortality, (^{2100b}Ecclesiastes 7:2-4); listening to the rebukes of the wise, which are preferable to the songs and mirth of fools, (^{2100b}Ecclesiastes 7:5,6); avoiding oppression and bribery, which are very pernicious, (^{2100b}Ecclesiastes 7:7); patience under provocations, and present bad times, as thought to be, (^{2100b}Ecclesiastes 7:8-10); a pursuit of that wisdom and knowledge which has life annexed to it, (²¹⁰⁷¹Ecclesiastes 7:11,12); submission to the will of God, and contentment in every state, (²¹⁰⁷³Ecclesiastes 7:13,14); shunning extremes in righteousness and sin, the best antidote against which is the fear of God, (²¹⁰⁷⁵Ecclesiastes 7:15-18); such wisdom as not to be offended with everything that is done, or word that is spoken, considering the imperfection of the best of men, the weakness of others, and our own, (²¹⁰⁷⁹Ecclesiastes 7:19-22); and then the wise man acknowledges the imperfection of his own wisdom and knowledge, notwithstanding the pains he had taken, (²¹⁰⁷³Ecclesiastes 7:23-25); and laments his sin and folly in being drawn aside by women, (²¹⁰⁷³Ecclesiastes 7:26-28); and opens the cause of the depravity of human nature, removes it from God, who made man upright, and ascribes it to man, the inventor of evil things, (²¹⁰⁷³Ecclesiastes 7:29).

Ver. 1. *A good name [is] better than precious ointment*, etc.] The word “good” is not in the text, but is rightly supplied, as it is by Jarchi; for of no other name can this be said; that which is not good cannot be better. Some understand this of the name of God, which is God himself, who is the

“summum bonum”, and chief happiness of men, and take it to be an answer to the question (²⁰⁶²Ecclesiastes 6:12); this and this only is what is a man’s good, and is preferable to all outward enjoyments whatever; interest in him as a covenant God; knowledge of him in Christ, which has eternal life annexed to it; communion with him; the discoveries of his lovingkindness, which is better than little; and the enjoyment of him to all eternity. This is true of the name of Christ, whose name Messiah which signifies anointed, is as ointment poured forth, and is preferable to it, (²⁰⁰⁸Song of Solomon 1:3 ³⁰⁴⁴John 1:41); so his other names, Jesus a Saviour; Jehovah, our righteousness; Immanuel, God with us; are exceeding precious to those who know the worth of him, and see their need of righteousness and salvation by him; his person, and the knowledge of him; his Gospel, and the fame and report it gives of him; infinitely exceed the most precious and fragrant ointment; see (⁴⁰²⁴2 Corinthians 2:14-16). So the name or names given to the people of God, the new names of Hephzibah and Beulah, the name of sons of God, better than that of sons and daughters; and of Christians, or anointed ones, having received that anointing from Christ which teacheth all things, and so preferable to the choicest ointment, (²⁵⁹⁵Isaiah 56:5 62:3,4 65:15 ⁶⁰²⁷Revelation 2:17) (⁴¹¹⁵Acts 11:26 ³¹²¹1 John 2:20, 27). Likewise to have a name written in heaven, in the Lamb’s book of life, and to have one’s name confessed by Christ hereafter before his Father and his holy angels; or even a good name among men, a name for a truly godly gracious person; for love to Christ, zeal for his cause, and faithfulness to his truths and ordinances; such as the woman got, better than the box of ointment poured on Christ’s head; and which the brother had, whose praise in the Gospel was throughout the churches; and as Demetrius, who had good report of all then, and of the truth itself, (⁴⁰⁵³Matthew 26:13 ⁴⁰⁸⁸2 Corinthians 8:18) (⁶⁰¹²3 John 1:12). Such a good name is better than precious ointment for the value of it, being better than all riches, for which this may be put; (see ²³⁹⁰Isaiah 39:2 ³¹²⁰Proverbs 22:1); and for the fragranciness of it, emitting a greater; and for the continuance of it, being more lasting, (³⁹²⁶Psalms 112:6) (³⁰⁰⁶Proverbs 10:6). The Targum is,

“better is a good name the righteous get in this world, thin the anointing oil which was poured upon the heads of kings and priests.”

So Alshech,

“a good name is better than the greatness of a king, though anointed with oil;”

and the day of death than the day of one's birth; some render it, in connection with the preceding clause, “as a good name is better, etc. so the day of death than the day of one's birth”^{f153}; that is, the day of a man's death than the day of his birth. This is to be understood not of death simply considered; for that in itself, abstracted from its connections and consequences, is not better than to be born into the world, or come into life, or than life itself; it is not preferable to it, nor desirable; for it is contrary to nature, being a dissolution of it; a real evil, as life, and long life, are blessings; an enemy to mankind, and a terrible one: nor of ether persons, with whom men have a connection, their friends and relations; for with them the day of birth is a time of rejoicing, and the day of death is a time of mourning, as appears from Scripture and all experience; (see ^{<B1C2>}John 16:21 ^{<O4D>}Genesis 40:20) (^{<O4E>}Matthew 14:6-10 ^{<O2D>}Genesis 23:2 ^{<B1C3>}John 11:31,33). It is indeed reported^{f154} of some Heathenish and barbarous people in Thrace, and who inhabited Mount Caucasus, that they mourned at the birth of their children, reckoning up the calamities they are entering into, and rejoiced at the death of their friends, being delivered from their troubles: but this is to be understood of the persons themselves that are born and die; not of all mankind, unless as abstracted from the consideration of a future state, and so it is more happy to be freed from trouble than to enter into it; nor of wicked men, it would have been better indeed if they had never been born, or had died as soon as born, that their damnation might not have been aggravated by the multitude of their sins; but after all, to die cannot be best for them, since at death they are cast into hell, into everlasting fire, and endless punishment: this is only true of good men, that have a good name living and dying; have a good work of grace upon them, and so are meet for heaven; the righteousness of Christ on them, and so have a title to it; they are such who have hope in their death, and die in faith and in the Lord: their death is better than their birth; at their birth they come into the world under the imputation and guilt of sin, with a corrupt nature; are defiled with sin, and under the power of it, liable in themselves to condemnation and death for it: at the time of their death they go out justified from sin through the righteousness of Christ, all being expiated by his sacrifice, and pardoned for his sake; they are washed from the faith of sin by the blood of Christ, and are delivered from the power and being of it by the Spirit and grace of God; and are secured from

condemnation and the second death: at their coming into the world they are liable to sin yet more and more; at their going out they are wholly freed from it; at the time of their birth they are born to trouble, and are all their days exercised with it, incident to various diseases of the body, have many troubles in the world, and from the men of it; many conflicts with a body of sin and death, and harassed with the temptations of Satan; but at death they are delivered from all these, enter into perfect peace and unspeakable joy; rest from all their labours and toils, and enjoy uninterrupted communion with God, Father, Son, and Spirit, angels, and glorified saints. The Targum is,

“the day in which a man dies and departs to the house of the grave, with a good name and with righteousness, is better than the day in which a wicked man is born into the world.”

So the Midrash interprets it of one that goes out of the world with a good name, considering this clause in connection with the preceding, as many do.

Ver. 2. [*It is*] *better to go to the house of mourning*, etc.] For deceased relations or friends, who either lie unburied, or have been lately interred; for the Jews kept their mourning for their dead several days afterwards, when their friends visited them in order to comfort them, as the Jews did Martha and Mary, (⁴¹¹³John 11:31). So the Targum here,

“it is better to go to a mourning man to comfort him;”

for at such times and places the conversation was serious and interesting, and turned upon the subjects of mortality and a future state, and preparation for it; from whence useful and instructive lessons are learned; and so it was much better to be there

than to go to the house of feasting: the Targum is,

“than to the house of a feast of wine of scorners;”

where there is nothing but noise and clamour, luxury and intemperance, carnal mirth and gaiety, vain and frothy conversation, idle talk and impure songs, and a jest made of true religion and godliness, death and another world;

for that [is] the end of all men; not the house of feasting, but the house of mourning; or mourning itself, as Jarchi; every man must expect to lose his

relation and friend, and so come to the house of mourning; and must die himself, and be the occasion of mourning: death itself seems rather intended, which is the end of all men, the way of all flesh; for it is appointed for men to die; and so the Targum,

“seeing upon them all is decreed the decree of death;”

and the living will lay [it] to his heart; by going to the house of mourning, he will be put in mind of death, and will think of it seriously, and consider his latter end, how near it is; and that this must be his case shortly, as is the deceased’s he comes to mourn for. So the Targum interprets it of words concerning death, or discourses of mortality he there hears, which he takes notice of and lays to his heart, and lays up in it. Jarchi’s note is,

“their thought is of the way of death.”

Ver. 3. *Sorrow [is] better than laughter*, etc.] Sorrow, expressed in the house of mourning, is better, more useful and commendable, than that foolish laughter, and those airs of levity, expressed in the house of feasting; or sorrow on account of affliction and troubles, even adversity itself, is oftentimes much more profitable, and conduces more to the good of men, than prosperity; or sorrow for sin, a godly sorrow, a sorrow after a godly sort, which works repentance unto salvation, that needeth not to be repented of, is to be preferred to all carnal mirth and jollity. It may be rendered, “anger [is] better than laughter”^{f155}; which the Jews understand of the anger of God in correcting men for sin; which is much better than when he takes no notice of them, but suffers them to go on in sin, as if he was pleased with them; the Midrash gives instances of it in the generation of the flood and the Sodomites: and the Targum inclines to this sense,

“better is the anger, with which the Lord of that world is angry against the righteous in this world, than the laughter with which he derides the ungodly.”

Though it may be better, with others, to understand it of anger in them expressed against sin, in faithful though sharp rebukes for it; which, in the issue, is more beneficial than the flattery of such who encourage in it; (see ~~27:5~~ Proverbs 27:5,6);

for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better: when the sadness is not hypocritical, as in the Scribes and Pharisees, but serious and real, arising from proper reflections on things in the mind; whereby the

heart is drawn off from vain, carnal, and sensual things; and is engaged in the contemplation of spiritual and heavenly ones, which is of great advantage to it: or by the severity of the countenance of a faithful friend, in correcting for faults, the heart is made better, which receives those corrections in love, and confesses its fault, and amends.

Ver. 4. *The heart of the wise [is] in the house of mourning*, etc.] When his body is not; when it does not suit him to go thither in person, his mind is there, and his thoughts are employed on the useful subjects of the frailty and mortality of human nature, of death, a future judgment, and a world to come; which shows him to be a wise man, and concerned for the best things, even for his eternal happiness in another state;

but the heart of fools [is] in the house of mirth; where jovial company is, merry songs are sung, and the cup or glass passes briskly round, and all is gay and brilliant: here the fool desires to be oftener than he is, and when he cannot; which shows the folly of his mind, what a vain taste he has, and how thoughtless he is of a future state, and of his eternal welfare.

Ver. 5. *[It is] better to hear the rebuke of the wise*, etc.] To listen to it diligently, receive it cordially, and act according to it; though it may be disagreeable to the flesh, and give present pain, yet the effect and issue will be good, and show that man to be wise that hears it, as well as he that gives it; (see ^{<19E0>}Psalm 141:1 ^{<105>}Proverbs 15:31,32 17:10);

than for a man to hear the song of fools; the vain and impure songs that foolish men sing in the house of mirth; or the flatteries of foolish men, which tickle and please the mind, as music and songs do: or, “than a man that hears the song of fools”^{f156}, and is pleased with it.

Ver. 6. *For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so [is] the laughter of the fool*, etc.] As thorns are weak, useless, and unprofitable; yea, hurtful and pernicious, and only fit for burning; so are foolish and wicked men, (^{<1216>}2 Samuel 23:6 ^{<2704>}Isaiah 27:4); and as the noise and sound of the one under a pot is very short, they make a blaze for a while, and is soon over; so though the laughter of a fool is loud and noisy, it makes no melody, no more than the noise of thorns; and is but for a moment, and will be soon changed for weeping and howling, which will last for ever; (see ^{<18115>}Job 20:5);

this also [is] vanity; the carnal mirth of wicked men.

Ver. 7. *Surely oppression maketh a wise man mad*, etc.] Which is to be understood either passively, when he is oppressed by others, or sees others oppressed; it raises indignation in him, disturbs his mind, and he is ready to pass a wrong judgment on the dispensations of Providence, and to say rash and unadvised things concerning them, (^{<497AD>}Psalm 73:2,3,12-14); or actively, of oppression with which he oppresses others; when he gives into such measures, his wisdom departs from him, his mind is besotted, he acts the part of a madman, and pierces himself through with many sorrows. Some understand this of wealth got in an ill way; or of gifts given to bribe men to do injury to others; and which the following clause is thought to explain;

and a gift destroyeth the heart; blinds the eyes of judges other ways wise; perverts their judgment, and causes them to pass a wrong sentence, as well as perverts justice: or, “and destroys the heart of gifts”^{f157}; a heart that is possessed of the gifts of wisdom and knowledge; or a munificent heart, a heart disposed to give bountifully and liberally, that oppression destroys and renders useless.

Ver. 8. *Better [is] the end of a thing than the beginning thereof*, etc.] If the thing is good, other ways the end of it is worse; as the end of wickedness and wicked men, whose beginning is sweet, but the end bitter; yea, are the ways of death, (^{<318D>}Proverbs 5:4 16:25); and so the end of carnal professors and apostates, who begin in the Spirit, and end in the flesh, (^{<488B>}Galatians 3:3 ^{<602D>}2 Peter 2:20,21); but the end of good things, and of good men, is better than the beginning; as the end of Job was, both with respect to things temporal and spiritual, (^{<388E>}Job 8:7 42:12); see (^{<437F>}Psalm 37:37 ^{<400D>}Matthew 10:22 ^{<265>}Luke 16:25);

[and] the patient in spirit [is] better than the proud in spirit; patience is a fruit of the Spirit of God; and is of great use in the Christian’s life, and especially in bearing afflictions, and tends to make men more humble, meek, and quiet; and such are highly esteemed of God; on them he looks, with them he dwells, and to them he gives more grace; when such who are proud, and elated with themselves, their riches or righteousness, are abominable to him; (see ^{<265>}Luke 16:15 18:14).

Ver. 9. *Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry*, etc.] With men, for every word that is said, or action done, that is not agreeable; encourage not, but repress, sudden angry emotions of the mind; be not quick of resentment, and at once express anger and displeasure; but be slow to wrath, for such a

man is better than the mighty, (~~3019~~James 1:19) (~~3062~~Proverbs 16:32); or with God, for his corrections and chastisements; so the Targum,

“in the time that correction from heaven comes upon thee, do not hasten in thy soul to be hot (or angry) to say words of rebellion (or stubbornness) against heaven;”

that advice is good,

“do nothing in anger^{f158},”

for anger resteth in the bosom of fools; where it riseth quick, and continues long; here it soon betrays itself, and finds easy admittance, and a resting dwelling place; it easily gets in, but it is difficult to get it out of the heart of a fool; both which are proofs of his folly, (~~3026~~Proverbs 12:16 14:17); (see ~~4006~~Ephesians 4:26); the bosom, or breast, is commonly represented as the seat of anger by other writers^{f159}.

Ver. 10. *Say not thou, what is [the cause] that the former days were better than these?* etc.] This is a common opinion, that in all ages prevails among men, that former times were better than present ones; that trade flourished more, and men got more wealth and riches, and lived in greater ease and plenty; and complain that their lot is cast in such hard times, and are ready to lay the blame upon the providence of God, and murmur at it, which they should not do;

for thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this: this is owing to ignorance of former times; which, if rightly inquired into, or the true knowledge of them could be come at, it would appear that they were no better than the present; and that there were always bad men, and bad things done; frauds, oppressions, and violence, and everything that can be complained of now: or if things are worse than they were, this should be imputed to the badness of men; and the inquirer should look to himself, and his own ways, and see if there is not a cause there, and study to redeem the time, because the days are evil; and not arraign the providence of God, and murmur at that, and quarrel with it; as if the distributions of it were unequal, and justice not done in one age as in another

Ver. 11. *Wisdom [is] good with an inheritance*, etc.] It is good of itself. Or, “is as good as an inheritance”^{f160}, as it may be rendered; it is a portion of itself, especially spiritual and divine wisdom. The Targum interprets it, the wisdom of the law, or the knowledge of that; but much more excellent

is the wisdom of the Gospel, the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom; the knowledge of which, in an experimental way, is preferable to all earthly inheritances: but this with an inheritance is good, yea, better than without one; for wisdom, without riches, is generally overlooked and despised in men; see (<2096>Ecclesiastes 9:16); when wealth, with wisdom, makes a man regarded; this commands respect and attention; as well as he is in a better condition to do good, if willing to share, and ready to distribute;

and [by it there is] profit to them that see the sun; mortals in this present state, who are described as such that see the sun rise and set, and enjoy the heat and light of it, receive much advantage from men who are both wise and rich: or, “and [it is] an excellency to them that see the sun”; it is an excellency to mortals and what gives them superiority to others, that they have both wisdom and riches.

Ver. 12. *For wisdom [is] a defence, [and] money [is] a defence*, etc.] Or, a “shadow” of refreshment and protection, under which men sit with pleasure and safety; a man by his wisdom, and so by his money, is able to defend himself against the injuries and oppressions of others, and especially when both meet in one and the same man. Jarchi renders and interprets it,

“he that is in the shadow of wisdom is in the shadow of money, for wisdom is the cause why riches come;”

and so the Targum,

“as a man is hid in the shadow of wisdom, so he is hid in the shadow of money, when he does alms with it;”

compare with this (<2169>Luke 16:9); (see <2179>Ecclesiastes 7:19 <2196>Ecclesiastes 9:16 <2181>Proverbs 18:11). Theognis^{f161} has a saying much like this,

“riches and wisdom are always inexpugnable to mortals;”

but the excellency of knowledge [is, that] wisdom giveth life to them that have it; or, “the excellency of the knowledge of wisdom giveth life”^{f162}, etc. not of natural wisdom, or the knowledge of natural and civil things, the vanity of this is exposed, before by the wise man; but the knowledge of God in Christ; the knowledge of Christ, who is the Wisdom of God; and of the Gospel, and of all divine and spiritual things: this is a superior

excellency to riches, which often expose a man's life to danger, cannot preserve him from a corporeal death, much less from an eternal one. When this is the excellency of spiritual knowledge, that spiritual life goes along with it; such as are spiritually enlightened are spiritually quickened; live by faith on Christ, whom they know; and, through the knowledge of him, have all things pertaining to life and godliness, and have both a right and meetness for eternal life; yea, this knowledge is life eternal, (^{<B7B>}John 17:3); (see ^{<60B>}2 Peter 1:3); and this is the pure gift of Wisdom, or of Christ, and not owing to the merit of men, or works done in obedience to the law, which cannot give this life; (see ^{<B7D>}John 17:2 10:28) (^{<B7E>}Romans 6:23 ^{<B7F>}Galatians 3:21).

Ver. 13. *Consider the work of God*, etc.] This is dressed to those who thought the former days better than the present, and were ready to quarrel with the providence of God, (^{<207D>}Ecclesiastes 7:10); and are therefore advised to consider the work of God; not the work of creation, but of providence; which is the effect of divine sovereignty, and is conducted and directed according to the counsel of his will, and is always wisely done to answer the best ends and purposes: everything is beautiful in its season; contemplate, adore, and admire the wisdom, power, and goodness of God, displayed therein; it is such as cannot be made better, nor otherwise than it is;

for who can make [that] straight which he hath made crooked? or which seems to be so, irregular and disagreeable? No man can mend or make that better he finds fault with and complains of; nor can he alter the course of things, nor stay the hand, nor stop the providence of God: if it is his pleasure that public calamities should be in the world, or in such a part of it, as famine, pestilence, or the sword; or any affliction on families, and particular persons, or poverty and meanness in such and such individuals, there is no hindering it; whatever he has purposed and resolved, his providence effects, and there is no frustrating his designs; it signifies nothing for a creature to murmur and complain; it is best to submit to his will, for no alteration can be made but what he pleases. Some understand this of natural defects in human bodies, with which they are born, or which attend them, as blindness, lameness, etc. so the Targum,

“consider the work of God, and his strength, who made the blind, the crooked, and the lame, to be wonders in the world; for who can

make straight one of them but the Lord of the world, who made him crooked?”

Others, of spiritual defects in such who walk in crooked ways, and are hardened in them; who can correct them, and make them other ways, if God does not give them his grace to convert them, and soften their hard hearts? he hardens whom he will, and who hath resisted his will? Jarchi’s paraphrase is,

“who can make straight after death what he has made crooked in life?”

(see Gill on “⁻²⁰¹⁵Ecclesiastes 1:15”). Alshech interprets it of the first man Adam.

Ver. 14. *In the day of prosperity be joyful*, etc.] Or, “in a good day”^{f163}. When things go well in the commonwealth, in a man’s family, and with himself, health, peace, and plenty, are enjoyed, a man’s circumstances are thriving and flourishing; it becomes him to be thankful to God, freely and cheerfully to enjoy what is bestowed on him, and do good with it: or, “be in good”^{f164}; in good heart, in good spirits, cheerful and lively; or, “enjoy good”, as the Vulgate Latin version; for what God gives to men is given them richly to enjoy, to make use of themselves, and be beneficial unto others; so the Targum,

“in the day the Lord does well to thee be thou also in goodness, and do good to all the world;”

(see ⁻⁸⁶⁰Galatians 6:10); Jarchi’s paraphrase is,

“when it is in thine hand to do good, be among those that do good;”

but in the day of adversity consider; or, “in the day of evil”^{f165}; consider from whence affliction comes; not out of the dust, nor by chance, but from God, and by his wise appointment; and for what it comes, that sin is the cause of it, and what that is; and also for what ends it is sent, to bring to a sense of sin, and confession of it, and humiliation for it; to take it away, and make good men more partakers of holiness: or, “look for the day of adversity”^{f166}; even in the day of prosperity it should be expected; for there is no firmness and stability in any state; there are continual vicissitudes and changes. The Targum is,

“that the evil day may not come upon thee, see and behold;”

be careful and circumspect, and behave in a wise manner, that so it may be prevented. Jarchi’s note is,

“when evil comes upon the wicked, be among those that see, and not among those that are seen;”

and compares it with (²¹⁶⁴Isaiah 66:24); It may be observed, that there is a set time for each of these, prosperity and adversity; and that the time is short, and therefore called a day; and the one is good, and the other is evil; which characters they have according to the outward appearance, and according to the judgment and esteem of men; otherwise, prosperity is oftentimes hurtful, and destroys fools, and adversity is useful to the souls of good men;

God also hath set the one over against the other; they are both by his appointment, and are set in their proper place, and come in their proper time; succeed each other, and answer to one another, as day and night, summer and winter, and work, together for the good of men;

to the end that man should find nothing after him; should not be able to know what will be hereafter; what his case and circumstances will be, whether prosperous or adverse; since things are so uncertain, and so subject to change, and nothing permanent; and therefore can find nothing to trust in and depend upon, nothing that he can be sure of: and things are so wisely managed and disposed, that a man can find no fault with them, nor just reason to complain of them; so the Vulgate Latin version, “not find just complaints against him”; and to the same purpose the Syriac version, “that he may complain of him”; the Targum is,

“not find any evil in this world.”

Ver. 15. *All [things] have I seen in the days of my vanity*, etc.] Or, “all these things”^{f167}. What goes before and follows after, the various changes men are subject unto, both good and bad; these he had made his observations upon, throughout the course of his life, which had been a vain one, as every man’s is, full of evil and trouble; (see ²¹⁶²Ecclesiastes 6:12); perhaps the wise man may have some respect to the times of his apostasy; and which might, among other things, be brought on by this; observing good men afflicted, and the wicked prosper, which has often been a stumbling to good men;

there is a just [man] that perisheth in his righteousness; not eternally; no truly just man ever perished, who is made so by the righteousness of Christ imputed to him; for though the righteous man is said to be scarcely saved, yet he is certainly saved: it can be true only in this sense of one that is only outwardly righteous, that trusts to his own righteousness, in which he may perish; but this is to be understood temporally and corporeally; one that is really just may perish in his name, in his substance, as well as at death, and that on account of his righteousness; he may lose his good name and character, and his substance, for righteousness's sake; yea, his life also, as Abel, Naboth, and others; this is the case "sometimes", as Aben Ezra observes, not always: or a just man, notwithstanding his righteousness, dies, and sometimes lives but a short time; which sense the antithesis seems to require;

and there is a wicked [man] that prolongeth [his life] in his wickedness; is very wicked, and yet, notwithstanding his great wickedness, lives a long time in the world; (see ^{<800>}Job 21:7).

Ver. 16. *Be not righteous over much*, etc.] This is not meant of true and real righteousness, even moral righteousness, a man cannot be too holy or too righteous; but of a show and ostentation of righteousness, and of such who would be thought to be more righteous and holy than others, and therefore despise those who, as they imagine, do not come up to them; and are very rigid and censorious in their judgment of others, and very severe in their reproofs of them; and, that they may appear very righteous persons, will do more than what the law requires of them to do, even works of supererogation, as the Pharisees formerly, and Papists now, pretend, and abstain from the lawful use of things which God has given to be enjoyed; and macerate their bodies by abstinence, fastings, pilgrimages, penance, scourges, and the like, as the Eremites among the Christians, and the Turks, as Aben Ezra on the place observes; and many there be, who, by an imprudent zeal for what they judge right, and which sometimes are mere trifles, and by unseasonable reproofs for what is wrong, expose themselves to resentment and danger. Some understand this of political and punitive justice, exercising it in too strict and rigorous a manner, according to the maxim, "summum jus saepe summa injuria est"^{f168}; and Schultens^{f169}, from the use of the word in the Arabic language, renders it, "be not too rigid"; and others, in a contrary sense, of too much mercy and pity to offenders. So the Midrash; and Jarchi illustrates it by the case of Saul, who had mercy on the wicked, and spared Agag. The Targum is,

“be not over righteous at a time that a sinner is found guilty of slaughter in thy court of judicature, that thou shouldest spare and not kill him;”

neither make thyself over wise; above what is written, or pretend to be wiser than others. So the Arabic version, “show not too much wisdom”; do not affect, as not to be more righteous than others, so not more wise, by finding fault with present times, or with the dispensations of Providence, or with the manners and conduct of men; setting up for a critic and a censurer of men and things; or do not pry into things, and seek after a knowledge of them, which are out of your reach, and beyond your capacity;

why shouldest thou destroy thyself? either by living too strictly and abstemiously, or by studying too closely, or by behaving in such a manner to men, as that they will seek thy destruction, and bring it on thee: or “why shouldest thou”, or “whereby”, or “lest, thou shouldest be stupid”^{f170}; lose thy sense and reason, as persons who study the knowledge of things they have not a capacity for: or why shouldest thou become foolish in the eyes of all men by thy conduct and behaviour? or, “why shouldest thou be desolate”^{f171}; alone, and nobody care to have any conversation and acquaintance with thee?

Ver. 17. *Be not over much wicked*, etc.] Not that a man should be wicked at all; but some, observing that wicked men prolong their days in wickedness, are encouraged to go into greater lengths in sin than they have yet done, and give up themselves to all iniquity; and run into excess of not, into the grossest and most scandalous enormities. Some render it, “do not disturb” or “frighten thyself”^{f172}, distress and distract thyself with the business of life, bustling and stirring, restless and uneasy, to get wealth and riches; but be easy and satisfied with what is enjoyed, or comes without so much stir and trouble; this is the original sense of the word. The meaning seems to be, either do not multiply sin, add unto it, and continue in it; or do not aggravate it, making sins to be greater and more heinous than they are, and a man’s case worse than it is, and so sink into despair; and thus it stands opposed to an ostentatious show of righteousness;

neither be thou foolish; or give up thyself to a profligate life, to go on in a course of sin, which will issue in the ruin of body and soul; or in aggravating it in an excessive manner;

why shouldest thou die before thy time? bring diseases on thy body by a wicked course of living, which will issue in death; or fall into the hands of the civil magistrate, for capital offences, for which sentence of death must pass and be executed, before a man comes to the common term of human life; (see ^(~~1683~~) Psalm 55:23 90:10); or, as Mr. Broughton renders it, “before thy ordinary time”; not before the appointed time^{f173}. The Targum is,

“be the cause of death to thy soul;”

or through despair commit suicide.

Ver. 18. [*It is good that thou shouldest take hold of this*, etc.] This advice, as the Arabic version, in the several branches of it; neither to be over much righteous or wicked, and over much wise or foolish; to avoid the one and the other, to keep clear of extremes, and pursue the path that is safest; such advice as this it is right to lay hold on, embrace, and hold fast;

yea, also from this withdraw not thine hand; from what follows concerning the fear of God; or “this [and] this” may be rendered “this [and] that”^{f174}, and the sense be, lay hold on this, that is, the last part of the advice, not to be over much wicked or foolish, which is often the cause of an immature death; and do not slacken or be remiss in regarding that other and first part of it, not to be over much righteous or wise;

for he that feareth God shall come forth of them all; or escape them all; the phrase is become Rabbinical, that, is, he shall be free or exempt from them all; from over much righteousness and over much wisdom, and over much wickedness or over much folly; the fear of God, which is the beginning of wisdom, is the best preservative from, and antidote against, these things; for a man that fears God is humble, and renounces his own righteousness, and distrusts his own wisdom; he fears to commit sin, and shuns folly.

Ver. 19. *Wisdom strengtheneth the wise*, etc.] Against such extremes as before mentioned; it is a guard about him, as well as a guide unto him; it is a defence unto him, as before observed, (^(~~2072~~) Ecclesiastes 7:12); and is better than strength of body, or weapons of war, (^(~~2096~~) Ecclesiastes 9:16,18); and a wise man does greater things by it than a strong man with them, and is safer with it than he can be by them. Some understand this of Christ, the Wisdom of God, without whom a good man can do nothing, but all things through him strengthening him; and who being a strong tower and place of refuge to him, he is safer in him than if he was in the strongest garrison,

and under the protection of ever so large a number of valiant men: Christ, and grace from him, strengthen

more than ten mighty [men] which are in the city; that is, than many mighty men, or men of war, which guard a city; the city of Jerusalem, or any other. The Targum applies this to Joseph, and paraphrases it,

“the wisdom of Joseph the son of Jacob helped him to make him wiser than all his ten righteous brethren.”

Ver. 20. *For [there is] not a just man upon earth*, etc.] Or “although”, or “notwithstanding”^{f175}, wisdom is so beneficial, and guards and strengthens a good man, yet no man has such a share of it as to live without sin; there was not then one on earth, there never had been, one, nor never would be, nor has been, excepting the man Christ Jesus; who indeed, as man, was perfectly just, while here on earth, and went about doing good, and never sinned in all his life; but this cannot be said of any other, no, not of one that is truly and really just; not externally and in his own opinion only, but who is made so by the obedience of Christ, or by his righteousness imputed to him, while he is here on earth; otherwise in heaven, where the spirits of just men are made perfect, there it may be said of them what follows, but nowhere else;

that doeth good, and sinneth not; it is the character of a just man to do good, to do that which is according to the will of God, from a principle of love to him, through faith in him, in the name and strength of Christ, and with a view to the glory of God; to do good in such a sense wicked men cannot; only such who are made good by the grace of God, are regenerated and made new creatures in Christ, are quickened by his Spirit, and are true believers in him; who appear to be what they are, by the fruits of good works they bring forth; and this not in a mercenary way, or in order to obtain life and righteousness, but as constrained by the grace of God, by which they are freely justified; and yet these are not free from sin, as appears by their confessions and complaints, by their backslidings, slips, and falls, and their petitions for fresh discoveries of pardoning grace; and even are not without sin, and the commission of it, in religious duties, or while they are doing good; hence their righteousness is said to be as filthy rags, and mention is made of the iniquity of holy things, (²³⁶Isaiah 64:6 ²³⁸Exodus 28:38). The Targum is,

“that does good all his days, and sins not before the Lord.”

Aben Ezra justly gives the sense thus,

“who does good always, and never sins;”

and observes that there are none but sin in thought, word, or deed. The poet^{f176} says,

“to sin is common to all men;”

no man, though ever so good, is perfect on earth, or free from sin; see (<1K8>1 Kings 8:46 <1P8>Proverbs 20:9 <1J8>1 John 1:8). Alshech’s paraphrase is,

“there is not a righteous man on earth, that does good, and sins not;
awhh bwj b, “in that good;”

which is the true sense of the words.

Ver. 21. *Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken*, etc.] Seeing so it is, that imperfection attends the best of men, no man is wise at all times, foolish words and unguarded expressions will sometimes drop from him, which it is better to take no notice of; they should not be strictly attended to, and closely examined, since they will not bear it. A man should not listen to everything that is said of himself or others; he should not curiously inquire what men say of him; and what he himself hears he should take no notice of; it is often best to let it pass, and not call it over again; to feign the hearing of a thing, or make as if you did not hear it; for oftentimes, by rehearsing a matter, or taking up words spoken, a deal of trouble and mischief follows; a man should not “give [his] heart”^{f177} to it, as it is in the Hebrew text; he should not give his mind to what is said of him, but be careless and indifferent about it; much less should he lay it up in his mind, and meditate revenge for it. The Targum, Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic versions, restrain it to words spoken by wicked men, whose tongues are their own, and will say what they please; among these may be ranked, more especially, detractors, whisperers, backbiters, and talebearers, who should not be listened unto and encouraged; though there is no necessity of thus limiting the sense, which is more general, and may include what is said by any man, even good men, since they have their infirmities; it seems chiefly to have respect to defamatory words, by what follows;

lest thou hear thy servant curse thee; speak slightly, scoffingly, and reproachfully of thee, as Shimei of David; which must be very disagreeable

and vexatious to hear from one so mean and abject, and who is dependent on him, earns his bread of him, and gets his livelihood in his service; and to whom, perhaps, he has been kind, and so is guilty of base ingratitude, which aggravates the more; or, if not, if what he says is just, to hear it must give great uneasiness.

Ver. 22. *For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth*, etc.] Or “thy conscience”, as the Vulgate Latin version, which is as a thousand witnesses; which, if a man attends to, he will be convinced of his own faults, failings, and infirmities, he is frequently in the commission of. Particularly,

that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others; either in heart, or with the tongue; thought ill of them, wished ill to them; spoke contemptibly of them, reviled and reproached them; called them by bad names, and abused them; and said some very hard and severe words concerning them, in a passionate fit, being provoked; and afterwards repented of it, being better informed of the state of the case, or being convinced of the evil of passion and rash speaking; and therefore such should consider the like passions and infirmities of others, and pass over them, and forgive them: so Alshech,

“if thou hast cursed others, and dost desire men should forgive thee, so do thou also forgive;”

(see ⁴⁰⁶⁴Matthew 6:14,15). The word “oftentimes”, in the first clause, is to be connected, not with the word “knoweth”, as if a man often knew this, but with the word “cursed”; suggesting, that a man may be often guilty of this himself, and therefore should be more sparing of his censures of others; (see ⁴⁰⁰⁸Matthew 7:1-5).

Ver. 23. *All this have I proved by wisdom*, etc.] Referring either to all that he had been discoursing of hitherto in this book, concerning the vanity of natural wisdom and knowledge, of pleasure, power, and riches; or to the several useful instructions given in this chapter, particularly concerning patiently bearing everything from the hands of God or men, (²⁰⁰⁸Ecclesiastes 7:8-22). This, by the help and use of that wisdom which God had given him, he had made trial of, and found it to be right, and therefore recommended it to others; though he acknowledges that, with all his wisdom, he was from perfection;

I said, I will be wise; but it [was] far from me; he determined, if possible, to attain to the perfection of wisdom, and made use of all means to come at

it; that he might know all the works of God in creation, the nature, use, and excellency of them; in providence, his different dispensations towards the sons of men, and the causes of them; and in grace, the redemption and salvation of men, and the mysteries thereof; but the more he knew, the more he was convinced of his own ignorance, and seemed further off from the summit of knowledge than he was before; and plainly saw, that perfection in wisdom is not attainable in this life. The Targum restrains this to the wisdom of the law; but it is better to understand it in a more general sense.

Ver. 24. *That which is far off*, etc.] Or, “far off [is] that which has been”^{f178}. That which has been done by God already, in creation and providence, is out of the reach of men, is far from their understandings wholly to comprehend or account for; and likewise that which is past with men, what has been done in former ages, the history of past times, is very difficult to come at: or rather, according to Schmidt, and Rambachius after him, what was of old is now afar off or absent; the image of God in man which consisted of perfect wisdom, and was created at the same time with him, is now lost, and that is the reason why wisdom is far from him;

and exceeding deep, who can find it out? the primitive perfect wisdom is sunk so deep and gone, that no man can find it to the perfection it was once enjoyed; (see ^{<8382>}Job 28:12-23). This may respect the knowledge of God, and the perfections of his nature; which are as high as heaven, and deeper than hell, (^{<8107>}Job 11:7,8); and of his thoughts, counsels, purposes, and decrees, which are the deep things of God; as well as the doctrines of the Gospel, and the mysteries of grace, (^{<4120>}1 Corinthians 2:10,11); and even his providential dispensations towards the sons of men, (^{<6133>}Romans 11:33). The Targum of the whole is,

“Lo, now it is far off from the children of men to know all that has been from the days of old; and the secret of the day of death, and the secret of the day in which the King Messiah shall come, who is he that shall find it out by his wisdom?”

Ver. 25. *I applied mine heart to know, and to search, and to seek out wisdom*, etc.] Or, “I and my heart turned about”^{f179}; took a circuit, a tour throughout the whole compass of things; looked into every corner, and went through the circle of knowledge, in order to search and find out what true wisdom is; which is no other than Christ, and a spiritual knowledge of him; a variety of words is used to express his eager desire after wisdom,

and the diligent search he made, from which he was not discouraged by the difficulties he met with; (see ^{<2013>}Ecclesiastes 1:13);

and the reason [of things]; either in nature or providence: or the estimation ^{f180} of them; the excellency of them, how much they are to be accounted of, esteemed, and valued; as Christ, the Wisdom of God, and all things relating to him, should;

and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness [and] madness; the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the folly and madness that are in it; sin is the effect of folly, and the excess of it, and a spiritual madness; it is true of all sin in general, but especially of the sin of uncleanness, which Solomon seems to have in view by what follows; (see ^{<2017>}Ecclesiastes 1:17 2:12); and may chiefly intend the wickedness of his own folly, and the foolishness of his own madness.

Ver. 26. *And I find more bitter than death the woman*, etc.] This was the issue of his diligent studies and researches, and the observations he had made; this was what he found by sad and woeful experience, and which he chose to take particular notice of; that he might not only expose this vanity among others, and caution men against it, even the love of women, which at best is a bitter sweet, as the poet ^{f181} calls it, though here adulterous love is meant; but having this opportunity, might express his sincere repentance for this folly of his life, than which nothing had been more bitter to him, in the reflection of his mind upon it: death is a bitter thing, and terrible to nature, (^{<0652>}1 Samuel 15:32); but to be ensnared by an adulterous woman is worse than that; it brings not only such diseases of body as are both painful and scandalous, but such horrors into the conscience, when awakened, as are intolerable, and exposes to eternal death; (see ^{<2018>}Proverbs 5:3,4). By “the woman” is not meant the sex in general, which was far from Solomon’s intention to reflect upon and reproach; nor any woman in particular, not Eve, the first woman, through whom came sin and death into the world; but an adulterous woman: (see ^{<2014>}Proverbs 5:4). Some interpret this of original sin, or the corruption of nature, evil concupiscence, which draws men into sin, and holds them in it, the consequence of which is death eternal; but such who find favour in the eyes of God are delivered from the power and dominion of it; but obstinate and impenitent sinners are held under it, and perish eternally. Jarchi, by the woman, understands heresy; and so Jerom and others interpret it of heretics and idolaters: it may very well be applied to that Jezebel, the

whore of Rome, the mother of harlots, that deceives men, and leads them into perdition with herself, (^{<66704>}Revelation 17:4,5,8 18:23); and who is intended by the harlot, and foolish and strange woman, in the book of Proverbs, as has been observed;

whose heart [is] snares and nets, [and] her hands [as] bands; all the schemes and contrivances of a harlot are to ensnare men by her wanton looks and lascivious gestures; which are like snares laid for the beasts, and likeness spread for fishes, to take them in; and when she has got them, she holds them fast; it is a very difficult thing and a very rare one, ever to get out of her hands; so Plautus^{f182} makes mention of the nets of harlots: the same holds true of error and heresy, and of idolatry, which is spiritual adultery; the words used being in the plural number, shows the many ways the adulterous woman has to ensnare men, and the multitudes that are taken by her; see (^{<66338>}Revelation 13:3,10,14);

whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her: or, “who is good before God”, or “in his sight”^{f183}; (see Gill on “^{<2026>}Ecclesiastes 2:26”); to whom he gives his grace and is acceptable to him; such an one as Joseph was shall escape the snares and nets, the hands and bands, of such a woman; or if fallen into them, as Solomon fell, shall be delivered out of them, as it is observed by various interpreters: nothing but the grace of God, the true fear of God, the power of godliness and undefiled religion, can preserve a person from being ensnared and held by an impure woman; not a liberal nor religious education, not learning and good sense, nor any thing else; if a man is kept out of the hands of such creatures, he ought to esteem it a mercy, and ascribe it to the grace and goodness of God;

but the sinner shall be taken by her; a hardened and impenitent sinner, that is destitute of the grace and fear of God; who is habitually a sinner, and gives up himself to commit iniquity; whose life is a continued series of sinning; who has no guard upon himself, but rushes into sin, as the horse into the battle; he becomes an easy prey to a harlot; he falls into her snares, and is caught and held by her; see (^{<2024>}Proverbs 22:14).

Ver. 27. *Behold, this have I found*, etc.] That a harlot is more bitter than death; and which he found by his own experience, and therefore would have it observed by others for their caution: or one man among a thousand, (^{<2028>}Ecclesiastes 7:28);

(saith the preacher); of which title and character (see ^{<2006>}Ecclesiastes 1:1); it is here mentioned to confirm the truth of what he said; he said it as a preacher, and, upon the word of a preacher, it was true; as also to signify his repentance for his sin, who was now the “gathered soul”, as some render it; gathered into the church of God by repentance;

[counting] one by one, to find out the account; not his own sins, which he endeavoured to reckon up, and find out the general account of them, which yet he could not do; nor the good works of the righteous, and the sins of the wicked, which are numbered before the Lord one by one, till they are added to the great account; as Jarchi, from the Rabbins, interprets it, and so the Midrash: but rather the sense is, examining women, one by one, all within the verge of his acquaintance; particularly the thousand women that were either his wives or concubines; in order to take and give a just estimate of their character and actions. What follows is the result.

Ver. 28. *Which yet my soul seeketh, but I find not*, etc.] He was very earnest and diligent in his inquiry; he took a great deal of pains, and was exceedingly solicitous; he sought with great intenseness of mind, and with an eager desire, to find out a chaste and virtuous woman among them all, but could not;

one man among a thousand have I found; it is a great rarity to find a good man ^{f184}, truly wise and gracious; there are many that walk in the broad way, and but few that find the strait gate and narrow way, and are saved; they are but as one to a thousand; (see ^{<2181>}Jeremiah 5:1 ^{<2173>}Matthew 7:13,14). Or rather, by this one of a thousand, is meant the, Messiah, the Wisdom of God, he sought for, (^{<2075>}Ecclesiastes 7:25); and now says he found; to whom he looked for peace, pardon, and atonement, under a sense of his sins; who is the messenger, an interpreter, one among a thousand; yea, who is the chiefest among ten thousands, (^{<1833>}Job 33:23 ^{<2150>}Song of Solomon 5:10); who is superior to angels and men, in the dignity of his person; in the perfection, purity, and holiness of his nature; in the excellency of his names; in his offices and relations; and in his concern in the affairs of grace and salvation; and who is to be found by every truly wise and gracious soul that seeks him early and earnestly, in the word and ordinances, under the illumination and direction of the blessed Spirit. If it is to be understood of a mere man, I should think the sense was this; of all the men that have been ensnared and taken by an adulterous woman, but

one of a thousand have I observed, and perhaps Solomon has respect to himself, that was ever recovered out of her hands;

but a woman among all those have I not found; that is, among all the harlots and adulterous women I ever knew or heard of, I never knew nor heard of one that was ever reclaimed from her evil ways, and reformed or became a chaste and virtuous woman: he may have respect to the thousand women that were either his wives and concubines, and, among all these, he found not one that deserved the above character; for this is not to be understood of women in general, for Solomon must have known that there have been good women in all ages, and perhaps more than men; and that there were many in his days, though those with whom his more intimate acquaintance was were not such, which was his unhappiness; and his criminal conversation with them is what he lamented and repented of. It may be interpreted thus, One man, the Messiah, among all the sons of men, have I found, free from original sin; but one woman, among all the daughters of Eve, I have not found clear of it. The Targum is,

“there is another thing which yet my soul seeketh, and I have not found; a man perfect and innocent, without corruption, from the days of Adam, till Abraham the righteous was born; who was found faithful and just among the thousand kings who were gathered together to build the tower of Babel; and a woman among all the wives of those kings, as Sarah, I found not.”

Ver. 29. *Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright*, etc.] The first man Adam, as the Targum and Jarchi interpret it; and not Adam only, but Eve also with him; for these were both made by the Lord, and on the same day, and in the same image, and had the same common name of Adam given them, (^{<00027>}Genesis 1:27 5:2); And they were both made “upright”; which is to be understood, not of the erectness of their bodies, but of the disposition of their minds; they were

“right and innocent before him,”

or in the sight of God, as the Targum; which is best explained by their being made in the image and likeness of God, (^{<00026>}Genesis 1:26,27); and which, according to the apostle, lay in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, (^{<00024>}Ephesians 4:24 ^{<00023>}Colossians 2:3); agreeably to which Plato^{f185} make likeness to God to be righteous and holy, with prudence: for this likeness of Adam and Eve to God; lay not in the shape of their bodies,

for God is a spirit, and not a corporeal being, as the Anthropomorphites imagined, and so fancied men to be made like unto him in this respect; but in their souls, and it consisted of knowledge; of the knowledge of the creatures, their nature, use, and ends for which they were made, and put under their government; and of God, and his perfections, as made known in the creatures; and of his mind and will, and manner of worshipping him, he revealed unto them; and they might know the trinity of Persons in the Godhead, who were concerned in the making of them, though they seem not to have known Christ, as Mediator and Saviour, which was not necessary previous to their fall; nor evangelical truths suited to a fallen state: also this image lay in righteousness and true holiness, which was original, natural, and created with them; it was with them as soon as they were; not acquired, but infused; not a habit obtained, but a quality given; and this not supernatural, but natural; it was perfect in its kind, and entirely agreeable to the holy, just, and good law of God; it had no defects in it, yet was but the righteousness of a creature, and loseable, as the event showed; and so very different from the righteousness of Christ, man is justified by. Likewise, this uprightness is no other than the rectitude of human nature, of all the powers and faculties of the soul of man, as they were when he was created; his understanding clear of all errors and mistakes, either about divine or human things; his affections regular and ordinate, no unruly passion in him, no sinful affection, lust, and desire; he loved God with all his heart and soul, and delighted in him, and communion with him; the bias of his will was to that which is good; the law of God was written on his heart, and he had both power and will to keep it; and, during his state of integrity, was pure and sinless; yet he was not impeccable, as the confirmed angels and glorified saints are; nor immutable, as God only is; but being a creature, and changeable, he was liable to temptation, and subject to fall, as he did. Now Solomon, with all his diligent search and scrutiny, could not find out the infinity of sin, the boundless extent of it among mankind, the exceeding sinfulness of it, which he sought after, (²⁰⁷⁵Ecclesiastes 7:25); yet this he “found” out, and this “only”, the fountain of all sin, the origin of moral evil; namely, the corruption of human nature through the fall of Adam: this he found by reading the Scriptures, the three first chapters of Genesis; and by consulting human nature he found some remains of the image of God, and of the law that was in man’s heart; whereby he perceived that man was once another man than he is now; and that this corruption is not owing to God, who is not the author of any thing sinful, he made man upright; but to himself, his own sin and folly: and this he

found confirmed by sad experience; in himself and others, and by observing the history of all ages, from the times of the first man; and as this was notorious, it was worth knowing and observing, and therefore he calls upon others to take notice of it; lo, behold, consider it, as well as what follows;

but they have sought out many inventions; that is, Adam and Eve, not content with their present knowledge and happiness, they sought out new ways and means of being wiser and happier than God made them, or it was his will they should be. “They sought out the inventions of the many”, or “great things”, or “of the mighty and great ones”^{f186}, as it may be rendered, the eternal Three in One; they sought to be as wise as God himself; or, however, as the great and mighty ones, the angels, who excelled them, as in strength, so in knowledge; (see ~~ORR~~ Genesis 3:5); or they sought out thoughts of sin, as Jarchi says it is interpreted in the Midrash. Sins are the inventions of men, and these are many and numerous; they sought to gratify their senses, on which followed innumerable evils; and then they sought for shifts and evasions to excuse themselves; the man shifting it from himself, and throwing the blame upon the woman, and the woman upon the serpent: and so sinning, they lost the knowledge they had; their righteousness and holiness, the rectitude of their nature; the moral freedom of their will to that which is good, and their power to perform it; and they lost the presence of God, and communion with him: and so their posterity are not only inventors of evil things, of sins, but of new ways of happiness; some placing it in riches; others in honours; others in pleasures; and some in natural wisdom and knowledge; and some in their own works of righteousness; the vanity of all which Solomon has before exposed.

CHAPTER 8

INTRODUCTION TO ECCLESIASTES 8

The preacher begins this chapter with the praise of wisdom, from its excellency and usefulness, (²⁰⁸¹Ecclesiastes 8:1); and advises men, if they would live quietly and comfortably, to honour and obey the king that rules over them, and not be rebellious against him, since he has great power and authority, (²⁰⁸²Ecclesiastes 8:2-5); and not be anxious about things to come, since there is a set time for everything, and future things cannot be known nor frustrated; and, particularly, there is no avoiding the hour and stroke of death, (²⁰⁸³Ecclesiastes 8:6-8); Though there are times wherein wicked men rule over others, it is to their own hurt, and they must die; and though they may be pompously buried, yet are soon forgotten, (²⁰⁸⁹Ecclesiastes 8:9,10); and the reason of their insolence is the delay of justice; yet there will come a time when it shall be well with them that fear God, and ill with the wicked, though they may live long in wickedness; and for the present it may befall good then what wicked men deserve, and wicked men may have that which might, be thought more proper for good men, (²⁰⁸¹Ecclesiastes 8:11-14); wherefore this should give no uneasiness; but men should cheerfully and freely enjoy what they have with thankfulness, there being nothing better than that under the sun, (²⁰⁸⁵Ecclesiastes 8:15); and the chapter is concluded with observing the unsearchableness of divine Providence, (²⁰⁸⁶Ecclesiastes 5:16,17).

Ver. 1. *Who is as the wise [man]?* etc.] Who is as the first man, that was made upright, and was a wise man? not one of his sons. Or who is as the wise man, meaning himself? no man; he was the wisest of men; and yet he could not find out wisdom, and the reason of things, and the wickedness of folly, (²⁰⁷⁵Ecclesiastes 7:25-29); how therefore should any other man? what can the man do that comes after the king? Or who is like to a wise man, to he compared to him for honour and dignity? none; not those of the highest birth and blood, of the greatest wealth and riches, or in the highest places of power and authority; a wise man is above them, they being without wisdom; and especially such as are wise to salvation; these are the excellent in the earth, and the most worthy among men. Or who is a truly wise man?

is there really such a person in the world, that has got to the perfection of wisdom? not one; and very few they are that can, in a true and proper sense, be called wise men. The Targum is,

“who is a wise man, that can stand against the wisdom of the Lord?”

and who knoweth the interpretation of a thing? or “a word”^{f187}? the word of God, which is not of private interpretation? none know it rightly, but such who have the Spirit of God, the enditer of the word: Christ is the interpreter, one among a thousand; and, next to him are those who have his mind, and rightly divide the word of truth. The Targum is,

“and to know the interpretation of the words in the prophets:”

this may be understood of the solution of any difficulties in things natural or civil; and of the interpretation of any of the works of God, either in nature or providence, as well as of his word; and he is a wise man, that not only has wisdom in himself, but is able to teach others, and make them wise; can solve doubts, remove difficulties, interpret nature, the works and word of God. Aben Ezra repeats the note of similitude from the former clause, and so it may be rendered, “Who is as he that knows the interpretation of a thing”, or “word?” such an one as Solomon was, (^{<3006>}Proverbs 1:6);

a man’s wisdom maketh his face to shine: as Moses, when he came down from the mount, full fraught with the knowledge of the will of God, (^{<0349>}Exodus 34:29,30); and as Stephen, whose wisdom and spirit, by which he spoke, were irresistible, (^{<4060>}Acts 6:10,15); wisdom, which discovers itself in a man’s words and actions, gives comeliness to his person, makes him look amiable and lovely in the eyes of others: or, it “enlightens his face”^{f188}; by it he is able to see the difference between truth and falsehood, and what is to be done and not done; what way he should walk in, and what he should shun and avoid;

and the boldness of his face shall be changed; the ferocity and austerity of his countenance, the impudence and inhumanity that appeared in him before, through his wisdom and knowledge, are changed into meekness, gentleness, and humanity; of an impudent, fierce, and badly behaved man, he becomes meek, modest, affable, and humane; this effect natural wisdom and knowledge has on men^{f189}; and much more spiritual and evangelical wisdom, which comes from above, and is first pure, then peaceable and

gentle, (^{<3017>}James 3:17). Some read it, “the strength of his face shall be doubled”, or “renewed”^{f190}; he shall be changed into the same image, from glory to glory; his spiritual strength shall be renewed, and his light and knowledge increase yet more and more, (^{<4718>}2 Corinthians 3:18 ^{<2308>}Isaiah 40:31 ^{<2079>}Ecclesiastes 7:19 ^{<1048>}Proverbs 4:18). But Gussetius^{f191} renders it, his “boldness”, or impudence, “shall be hated”.

Ver. 2. *I [counsel thee] to keep the king’s commandment*, etc.] Or, “to observe the mouth of the king”^{f192}; what he says, and do according to it when it is agreeably to the law of God, and according to the laws of the kingdom, by which he is to govern; for kings are to be honoured, obeyed, and submitted to, in the lawful discharge of their office: and such counsel and advice as this is wholesome; and, being taken, contributes much, as to the honour of kings, so to the good of kingdoms and states, and to a man’s own peace and comfort. Aben Ezra supplies it,

“I command thee, or I admonish thee;”

for it may be either a charge, or art advice, respecting this and what follows. Jarchi supplies and paraphrases it thus,

“I have need, and am prepared, to observe the mouth (or keep the commandment) of the King of the world;”

and so Alshech,

“observe that which goes out of the mouth of the King of the world.”

And indeed, to understand it, not of an earthly king, but of the King of kings, as it is understood by other interpreters also, suits better with what is said of this King in the following verses; whose commandments, which are not grievous, but to be loved above fine gold, should be kept from a principle of love, without mercenary and selfish views, as they are delivered out by him, and to his glory; and such a charge as this should be attended to, and such counsel be received;

and [that] in regard of the oath of God; who has sworn, that if his children forsake his law, and walk not in his statutes, he will visit their transgressions with a rod, and their iniquities with stripes; and therefore should be careful to keep his commandments, (^{<388>}Psalm 89:30-35). Those who interpret this of an earthly king, by the oath of God understand the

oath of allegiance and fidelity to him, taken in the name and presence of God, and therefore for conscience's sake should obey him: or render it, "but [so that thou observest] the manner of the oath of God"^{f193}; or takest care to obey him; or do nothing in obedience to kings, which is contrary to the will of God; for God is to be obeyed rather than men, (~~40B~~ Acts 4:19 5:29); especially, and above all things, that is to be regarded.

Ver. 3. *Be not hasty to go out of his sight*, etc.] But of the sight of the King of kings. Do not think to hide thyself from him, for there is no fleeing from his presence, (~~3D07~~ Psalm 139:7); it is best, when under some consternation, as the word^{f194} signifies, or under some fearful apprehension of his wrath and indignation, to fall down before him, acknowledge the offence, and pray for pardon: and to this purpose is the Targum,

"and in the time of the indignation of the Lord, do not cease to pray before him; being terrified (or troubled) before him, go and pray, and seek mercy of him;"

and with which agrees the note of Jarchi,

"be not troubled, saying that thou wilt go and free from his presence, to a place where he does not rule, for he rules in every place."

Such who interpret this of an earthly king suppose this forbids a man going out from the presence of a king in a pet and passion, withdrawing himself from his court and service in a heat, at once;

stand not in an evil thing; having done it, continue not in it; but repent of it, acknowledge and forsake it, whether against God or an earthly king;

for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him; which best agrees with the King of kings, who does what he pleases, in heaven above and in earth below, both in nature, providence, and grace; (see ~~82B~~ Job 23:13 ~~4B3B~~ Psalm 115:3); though earthly kings indeed have long hands, as is usually said, and can reach a great way, and do great things, especially despotic and arbitrary princes, and it is very difficult escaping their hands. The Targum is,

"for the Lord of all worlds, the Lord will do what he pleases."

Ver. 4. *Where the word of a king [is, there is] power*, etc.] Or "dominion"^{f195}. Authority goes along with his word of command; and there is an inferior magistracy, a subordinate power under him, ready to execute

his will upon the rebellious and disobedient. Jarchi interprets it, the word of the holy blessed God; and the Targum, the word of that King who rules over all the world; where his word of doctrine comes, not in word only, it is with power: his written word is quick and powerful; the word of his Gospel preached is the power of God to salvation; or is accompanied with power to enlighten dark minds, quicken dead sinners, unstop deaf ears, soften hard hearts, and deliver men from the slavery of sin and Satan; it makes men, of enemies, friends to God, Christ, and good men; transforms them by the renewing of their minds, and comforts and establishes saints; all which is attributed to the word; and are the effects of almighty power, (~~3012~~ Hebrews 4:12 ~~3016~~ Romans 1:16); his word of command also comes with power, being clothed with his authority; and is submitted to by his people in the day of his power upon them, who readily and cheerfully obey it;

and who may say unto him, what dost thou? call him to an account for, or complain of any of his works of creation, providence, or grace? This best agrees with God than with an earthly king; and is said of him elsewhere, (~~3012~~ Job 9:12 33:14 ~~2045~~ Daniel 4:35).

Ver. 5. *Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing*, etc.] Either the commandment of an earthly king, which should be kept, when agreeably to the laws of the nation, and not inconsistent with the commands of God; and such as do observe it “know no evil”^{f196}, as it may be rendered, or no sorrow; they live peaceably and quietly, and enjoy the favour and protection of the government under which they are, and have praise of men; (see ~~3013~~ Romans 13:3 ~~3012~~ 2 Timothy 2:2); or the commandments of the heavenly King, the singular being put for the plural; so the Targum,

“whoso keepeth the commandments of the Lord shall know no evil in the world to come.”

Nor in this world neither; no evil befalls them; what may be thought to be so is for their good; though they know and are conscious of the evil of sin, and commit it, yet not willingly, and with love to it, and so as to make it the work of their lives; but lament it, repent of it, and forsake it, and do not feel the evil of punishment for it; yea, such enjoy much good; have much communion with God; large discoveries of his love; dwell in him, and shall at last dwell with him in the heavenly city; (see ~~3012~~ John 14:21,23 ~~3012~~ 1 John 3:22,24 ~~3024~~ Revelation 22:14);

and a wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment; he knows not only what is his duty to do, both with respect to God and men, to a temporal prince or the King eternal; but he knows also the most fit and convenient time of doing it; and lays hold on every opportunity that offers, and which may be called "redeeming time", (⁴⁸⁵⁰Galatians 6:10

⁴⁸⁵⁶Ephesians 5:16); and he knows the right manner in which it should be performed, with all the agreeable circumstances of it, which he carefully observes; or he knows the judgment that will be passed, or the punishment that will be inflicted on delinquents, either by God or men; and therefore is careful to keep the commandment, and avoid it: and especially he remembers there is a judgment to come, when everything will be brought to an account; and, though he does not know the precise day and hour, yet he knows there will be such a time; so some render it, "the time of judgment"^{f197}: the Targum is,

"and the time of prayer, and of judgment, and of truth, is known by the heart of the wise."

Ver. 6. *Because to every purpose there is time and judgment*, etc.] There is a fit season, and a right and proper manner of doing everything that is to be done; (see ²⁰⁰¹Ecclesiastes 3:1-8); which a wise man discerns; and which when a man hits upon, it prevents a great deal of mischief, which for want of it comes upon men, as the following clause shows; some refer this to the punishment of the wicked, and to a future judgment. So the Targum,

"to every business there is a time good and evil, and according to the judgment of truth the whole world is judged;"

and to the same purpose Jarchi,

"there is a time fixed for the visitation of the wicked, and there is judgment before the Lord; this is vengeance or punishment;"

therefore the misery of man [is] great upon him; he not observing the right time and manner of doing what he ought, brings much trouble upon himself; his days are few and full trouble, and every day has a sufficiency of evil in because of the evil of sin, the evil of misery presses upon him, and is a heavy burden on him Jarchi's note is,

"when the wickedness of a man is great, then cometh his visitation."

Ver. 7. *For he knoweth not that which shall be,* etc.] Or that “it shall be”^{f198}; that he ever shall have the opportunity again he has lost, nor what is to come hereafter; what shall be on the morrow, or what shall befall him in the remaining part of his days; what troubles and sorrows he shall meet with, or what will be the case and circumstances of his family after his death;

for who can tell him when it shall be? or “how it shall be”^{f199}? how it will be with him or his; no one that pretends to judicial astrology, or to the art of divination, or any such devices, can tell him what is to come; future things are only certainly known by God; none but he can tell what will certainly come to pass; (see ²⁰¹⁸²Ecclesiastes 3:22 6:12); Jarchi interprets it of a man’s not considering for what God will bring him to judgment, and that no man can tell him the vengeance and punishment that will be inflicted.

Ver. 8. [*There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit,* etc.] Which is not to be understood of the wind, which the word used sometimes signifies, and of men’s having no power to restrain that, or hinder it from blowing; for to what purpose should Solomon mention this? rather it may be considered as a check upon despotic and arbitrary princes not to stretch their power too far; since they had none over the spirits or minds of men, and could not hinder them from thinking ill of them, and wishing ill to them, nor restrain their hatred of them; whatever power they had or exercised over their bodies and estates, they had none over their spirits, or their consciences; no lawful power to restrain them from their to God, nor to oblige them to do that which he has forbidden; nor to compel them to anything against conscience; nor to bind their consciences in matters indifferent: or as an argument with subjects to obey the commands of their sovereign; since it is not in their power to restrain the spirit and wrath of princes, which is as the roaring of a lion, and as: he messengers of death, (²⁰¹⁶⁴Proverbs 16:14 19:12); particularly to be careful that they do not commit any capital offence, for which sentence may be passed to take away life; when it will not be in their power to retain it; nor rescue themselves out of the hands of justice and the civil magistrate, but must submit. Or else it is to be understood of every man’s spirit at the hour of death, and of the unavoidableness of it, as the next clause explains it; and by “spirit” is meant, either the sensitive soul, the same with the spirit of a beast, without which the body is dead, and is like the wind that passeth away, and ceaseth when the breath is stopped; or the rational soul, the

spirit that is committed to God, and returns to him at death, (^{<0238>}Luke 23:43 ^{<4075>}Acts 7:59) (^{<2120>}Ecclesiastes 12:7). This a man has not power over to dismiss or retain at pleasure; he cannot keep it one moment longer when it is called for and required by the Father of spirits, the Creator of it; he has not power “to restrain”^{f200} it, as in a prison, as the word signifies, as Alshech observes; whence Aben Ezra says, that the spirit or soul in the body is like a prisoner in a prison; but nothing, that attends a man in this life, or he is in possession of, can keep the soul in this prison, when the time of its departure is come; not riches, nor honours, nor wisdom and leaning, nor strength and youth, nor all the force of medicine; the time is fixed, it is the appointment of God, the bounds set by him cannot be passed, (^{<2000>}Ecclesiastes 3:2 ^{<8007>}Hebrews 9:27 ^{<0479>}Genesis 47:29) (^{<1845>}Job 14:5). The Targum is,

“no man has power over the spirit of the soul to restrain the soul of life, that it might not cease from the body of man;”

and to the same sense Jarchi,

“to restrain the spirit in his body, that the angel of death should not take him;”

neither [hath he] power in the day of death; or “dominion”^{f201}; death strips a man of all power and authority, the power that the husband has over the wife, or parents over their children, or the master over his servant, or the king over his subjects; death puts down all power and authority: it is an observation of Jarchi’s, that David after he came to the throne is everywhere called King David, but, when he came to die, only David, (^{<1000>}1 Kings 2:1); no king nor ruler can stand against death any more than a beggar; up man is lord of death any more than of life, but death is lord of all; all must and do submit to it, high and low, rich and poor; there is a day fixed for it, and that day can never be adjourned, or put off to another; and as man has not power to deliver himself in the day of death, so neither his friend, as the Targum, nor any relation whatever;

and [there is] no discharge in [that] war; death is a warfare as well as life, with which nature struggles, but in vain; it is an enemy, and the last that shall be destroyed; it is a king, and a very powerful one; there is no withstanding him, he is always victorious; and there is no escaping the battle with him, or fleeing from him; a discharge of soldiers in other wars is sometimes obtained by interest, by the entreaty of friends, or by money; but

here all cries and entreaties signify nothing; nor does he value riches, gold, or all the forces of strength; (see ^{<10128>}2 Samuel 12:18 ^{<18369>}Job 36:19); under the old law, if a person had built a new house, or married a wife, or was faint hearted, he was excused and dismissed; but none of these things are of any avail in this war, (^{<6316>}Deuteronomy 20:5,6,8); captives taken in war are sometimes dismissed by their conquerors, or they find ways and means to make their escape; but nothing of this kind can be done when death has seized on the persons of men. Some render it, there is “no sending to” or “in [that] war”^{f202}; there is no sending forces against death to withstand him, it is to no purpose; there is no sending a message to him to sue for a peace, truce, or reprieve; he will hearken to nothing; there is no sending one in the room of another, as Jarchi observes,

“a man cannot say, I will send my son, or my servant;”

no surrogation is allowed of in this case, as David wished for, (^{<10853>}2 Samuel 18:33). Aben Ezra interprets it, no armour, and so many interpreters; and so the Targum;

“nor do instruments of armour help in war;”

in this war: in other wars a man may put on a helmet of brass and a coat of mail, to protect and defend him, or throw darts and arrows; but these signify nothing when death makes his approach and attack;

neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it; or “the masters of it”^{f203}; that is, from death; neither Satan the wicked one, as Jerom, who is wickedness itself, and with whom wicked men are confederate, can deliver them from death; nor sinners the most abandoned deliver themselves, who have made a covenant with it, and an agreement with hell, (^{<23815>}Isaiah 28:15,18); such who are masters of the greatest wicked craft and cunning, and who devise many ways to escape other things, can contrive none to escape death; nor will riches gotten by wickedness deliver the owners of them from death; (see ^{<3002>}Proverbs 10:2 11:4); This sense is mentioned by Aben Ezra, and not to be despised.

Ver. 9. *All this have I seen*, etc.] Observed, taken notice of, and thoroughly considered; all that is said above, concerning the scarcity of good men and women, the fall of our first parents, the excellency of wisdom, the necessity and advantage of keeping the king’s commandment, the time and manner of doing it, the evil consequences that follow an

inattention to these things, ignorance of what is to come, and the unavoidable-ness of death;

and applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun; not so much to mechanic works and manual operations performed by men, as to moral or immoral works, and chiefly the work of Providence with respect to good and bad men, the consequence of which were the following observations;

[there is] a time wherein one man ruleth over another to his own hurt; or “the man ruleth over men”^{f204}; for this is not to be understood of private rule in families, of the parent over his children, or master over his servant, but of a king over his subjects; who is the man, the principal man in the kingdom; and such a man ruling in an arbitrary and tyrannical way is to his own detriment in the issue. So Rehoboam; by his oppressive government, lost ten tribes out of twelve. Some have lost their whole kingdoms, and come to an untimely end; as well as ruined their immortal souls. Some render it “to his hurt”^{f205}; to the hurt of those that are ruled, when it should be for their good, the protection of their persons and properties; but instead of that they lay heavy burdens upon them, take away their property, and injure and insult their persons. So the Targum,

“to do ill to him.”

But Jarchi interprets it of the king himself. Some take it in both senses; and so it is usually in fact, that wicked princes rule to their own hurt, and the hurt of their subjects.

Ver. 10. *And so I saw the wicked buried*, etc.] Or “truly”^{f206}, verily, as the Targum, this is matter of fact; or “then I saw”, as Aben Ezra and others, upon applying his heart to every work; or when he observed particularly wicked magistrates, he took notice that some of them continued in their power until death, and died in their beds, and were carried to their graves in great pomp and state, and interred in a very magnificent manner, when they deserved no burial at all, but, as King Jeconiah, to be buried with the burial of an ass;

who had come and gone from the place of the holy; which most understand of the same persons, of wicked magistrates buried, who kept their posts of honour and places of power and authority as long as they lived; and went to and came from the courts of judicature and tribunals of justice, in great state and splendour; where they presided as God’s

vicegerents, and therefore called the place of the holy, (¹⁸³⁰Psalm 82:1,6); or though they were sometimes deposed, yet they were restored again to their former dignity; or though they died and were buried, yet in a sense rose again in their children that succeeded them, so Aben Ezra: but it seems better to understated it of other persons, and render the, words thus, “and they came, and from the place of the holy”, or “the holy place they walked”^{f207}; that is, multitudes came to attend the funeral of such rich and mighty men, and walked after or followed the corpse; and ever, the priests and Levites from the temple made a part of the funeral procession, and walked in great solemnity from thence to the place of interment, which was usually without the city;

and they were forgotten in the city where they had done; all their evil deeds were forgotten, their acts of oppression and injustice, as if they had never been done by them. The Septuagint and Vulgate Latin versions are, “and they were praised in the city”; panegyrics upon them were written and rehearsed, monuments were erected to their honour, with large encomiums of them; and so it may be read by the change of a letter; and Jarchi says, do not read “forgotten”, but “praised”; and so he says it is interpreted by their Rabbins. The whole may be considered in a very different view thus “but then I saw”, etc. such arbitrary rulers die, and laid in the grave, one after another, and their names have been buried in oblivion, and never remembered more in the city where they have exercised so much power and authority. The latter part of the text is by many understood of good men, and rendered thus, “and” or “but [on the contrary] they were forgotten in the city where they had done right”^{f208}; their persons and their good deeds were remembered no more; but this seems contrary to (¹⁸³⁶Psalm 112:6 ²⁰⁰⁷Proverbs 10:7). The Targum paraphrases the whole thus;

“and in truth I have seen sinners that are buried and destroyed out of the world, from the holy place where the righteous dwell, who go to be burned in hell; and they are forgotten among the inhabitants of the city; and as they have done, it is done to them;”

this [is] also vanity; the pompous funeral of such wicked magistrates.

Ver. 11. *Because sentence [against] an evil work is not executed speedily*, etc.] Any evil work done by magistrates, or others, against which the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, and is threatened with his vengeance; the decree is gone forth, the sentence is passed, God is determined upon

punishment; but there is a delay of it, he exercises patience and longsuffering to answer some end of his, both towards his own people and the wicked; as well as to display some of his own perfections; but because so it is, the judgment comes not at once;

therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil; or their “heart is full to do evil”^{f209}; they have not only a fulness of sin in them naturally as is in every man’s heart; but they are filled with resolution, boldness, and courage, to commit sin, promising themselves impurity from the seeming delay of justice; such an abuse do they make of the patience and forbearance of God; they become more and more hardened in sin and bent upon the commission of it.

Ver. 12. *Though a sinner do evil an hundred times*, etc.] That is ever so many times, a certain number for an uncertain; though he lives in a continued course of sin, being resolved upon the above consideration to give himself a swing to his lusts. The Targum renders it a hundred years; though he should live so long in sin, yet at last should be accursed (^{אין} Isaiah 65:20). This and what follows are said to check the boldness and presumption of the sinner upon the patience of God; and to make the people of God easy under the delay of justice, and the prosperity of the wicked;

and his [days] be prolonged: or rather, “and he prolongs unto him”^{f210}; that is, God prolongs unto him, not days only, but the execution of the sentence against his evil works; or defers his wrath and punishment; so Jarchi,

“and the holy blessed God prolongs to him, and does not take vengeance on him;”

and to this purpose is the Targum,

“and from the Lord is given to him space to return;”

yet surely I know; from the word and promise, and from experience, having observed it in a multitude of instances, which have abundantly confirmed the truth;

that it shall be well with them that fear God; not with a servile but filial fear, with a holy, humble, fiducial, affectionate, and an obediential fear; not through any terrible apprehension of his majesty, his judgment, his wrath

now and hereafter; but under a sense of his being and perfections, and especially his mercy, grace, and goodness: it is well with such persons in all things; with respect to things temporal they shall not want what is proper for them; and with respect to things spiritual they are interested in the love, grace, and mercy of God; have much made known to them; are remembered by him; the sun of righteousness rises upon them; the eye of God is on them, and his heart towards them, and his hand communicates every needful supply to them; and they are guarded, not only by his angels, but by himself; and it is well with them at all times; in times of public calamity they are either taken from it beforehand, or preserved in it; all afflictions are for their good; it goes well with them at death and judgment; and they will be happy both in the millennium state and in the ultimate glory, So the Targum,

“it shall be well in the world to come with them that fear the Lord;”

(see ^{<1347>}Psalm 34:7-9 31:15 ^{<6118>}Revelation 11:18); with this compare (^{<2180>}Isaiah 3:10,11); it is added,

which fear before him: whose fear is not hypocritical, but sincere and hearty; not in show only, but in reality; not the precepts of men, and as before them, but as the sight of God; having always a sense of omniscience and omnipresence before them; and especially this fear is exercised by them when they are his house, in the assembly of his saints, attending his word and ordinances: or “which fear at his presence”; which fills them with a holy awe, as well as with joy and gladness. The Targum is,

“which fear before him, and do his will.”

Ver. 13. *But it shall not be well with the wicked*, etc.] It shall be ill with him; more is designed than is expressed, (^{<2181>}Isaiah 3:11); in life they have no solid peace and comfort; at death they will be turned into at judgment they will hear the awful sentence, “Go, ye cursed”, and will be in torment to all eternity, (^{<4254>}Matthew 25:41);

neither shall he prolong [his] days, [which are] as a shadow: wicked men sometimes do not live out half their days, which, according to the course of nature, and common term of life, they might be thought to live; or if they prolong their days in wickedness, as sometimes they do, (^{<21075>}Ecclesiastes 7:15); yet their days at longest are but a shadow which declines, and is quickly gone; or, however, they do not attain to eternal life, which is sometimes meant by prolonging days, and is length of days for ever and

ever, (²⁵³⁰Isaiah 53:10 ¹²⁰⁴Psalm 21:4); this they never enjoy; but when the righteous go into life lasting, they go into everlasting punishment. The reason of this is,

because he feareth not before God; the fear of God is not before his eyes, nor in his heart; he goes on in sin without fear of him, boldly and openly commits it, and instead of taking shame for it, or repenting of it, glories in it; stretches out his hand against God, and bids defiance to him, and desires not the knowledge of him, and refuses to obey him The Targum of the whole is,

“and it shall not be well with the wicked, and he shall have no space in the world to come; and in this world his days shall be cut off, and they shall flee and pass away as a shadow, because he fears not God.”

Ver. 14. *There is a vanity which is done upon the earth*, etc.] Transacted in this lower world under the sun, through the permission and direction of divine Providence; not that it is a vanity on the part of God, who has wise ends to answer by it, for the good of his people, the trial of their graces, etc. or to bring sinners to repentance, or harden them in sin; but this shows the vanity and uncertainty of all worldly things, and that there is no happiness to be had in them;

that there be just [men], unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked: to whom evil comes, as the Targum and Jarchi; who are treated as if they were wicked men, and dealt with in providence as sinners would be, if they had the just desert of their wicked works; being attended with poverty, sickness, and disgrace, and other calamities of life, as Job, Asaph, Lazarus, and others, and yet truly righteous and good men;

again, there be wicked [men] to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous; to whom good things come, as the Targum and Jarchi; who have an affluence of good things, all the outward blessings of life, as health, wealth, honour, long life, etc. as if they had lived the best of lives, and were the most righteous persons upon earth; see (¹⁸⁰⁷Job 21:7-13 ¹⁷³⁴Psalm 73:4,5,7 ²¹⁶⁹Luke 16:19);

I said, that this also [is] vanity; this is said, as some think, according to the judgment of corrupt nature; or as it is apprehended by such who do not rightly consider the judgments of God and the wisdom of Providence in the ordering of things to answer good purposes; or rather the sense is, this is

one of the miseries and infelicities of this life, and which demonstrates the emptiness of all things here below, and that the chief good and supreme happiness is not to be had here; but there is and must be a future state, when all things will be set right, and everyone will have and enjoy his proper portion.

Ver. 15. *Then I commended mirth*, etc.] Innocent mirth, a cheerfulness of spirit in whatsoever state condition men are; serenity and tranquillity of mind, thankfulness for what they have, and a free and comfortable use of it; this the wise man praised and recommended to good men, as being much better than to fret at the prosperity of the wicked, and the seemingly unequal distribution of things in this world, and because they had not so much of them: as others; who yet had reason to be thankful for what they had, and to lift up their heads and be cheerful, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God in another world. The Targum interprets it of the joy of the law;

because a man hath no better thing under the sun than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry; of earthly things there is nothing better than for a man freely and cheerfully, with moderation and thankfulness, to enjoy what God has given him; this is what had been observed before, (~~20024~~ Ecclesiastes 2:24 3:22 5:18); and is not the language of an epicure, or a carnal man, who observing that no difference is made between the righteous and the wicked, that it is as well or better with the wicked than the righteous, determines to give up himself to sensual lusts and pleasures; but it is the good and wholesome advice of the wise man, for men to be easy under every providence, satisfied with their present condition and circumstances, and be cheerful and pleasant, and not distress themselves about things they cannot alter;

for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun; man's present life is under the sun, and is continued as long as it pleases God; though it is but short, rather to be counted by days than years, and is a laborious one; and all that he gets by his labour, enjoyed by him, is to eat and drink cheerfully; and this he may expect to have and continue with him as long as he lives, even food and raiment, and with this he should be content.

Ver. 16. *When I applied mine heart to know wisdom*, etc.] The nature and causes of things; the wisdom of God in his providence, and the grounds

and reasons of his various dispensations towards the children of men: the Targum interprets it, the wisdom of the law;

and to see the business that is done upon the earth; either the business of Providence, in dealing so unequally with the righteous and the wicked, before observed; and which is a business very afflictive and distressing for curious persons to look into, not being able to account for it: or the labour and toil of men to get wealth and riches, and to find happiness in them;

(for also [there is that] neither day nor night seeth sleep with his eyes); or has any sleep in his eyes, through his eager pursuit after worldly things, or, however, has but little; he rises early and sits up late at his business, so close and diligent is he at it, so industrious to obtain riches, imagining a happiness in them there is not: or else this describes persons curious and inquisitive into the affairs of Providence, and the reasons of them; who give themselves no rest, day nor night, being so intent upon their studies of this kind; and perhaps the wise man may design himself.

Ver. 17. *Then I beheld all the work of God*, etc.] Not of creation, but of Providence; took notice of it, contemplated on it, considered it, and weighed it well; viewed the various steps and methods of it, to find out, if possible, at least, some general rule by which it proceeded: but all so various and uncertain,

that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: he can find out that it is done, but not the reason why it is done: the ways of God are in the deep, and not to be traced; they are unsearchable and past finding out; there is a βαψος, a depth of wisdom and knowledge, in them, inscrutable by the wisest of men, (^{<49719>}Psalm 72:19 ^{<5113>}Romans 11:33);

because, though a man labour to seek [it] out, yet he shall not find [it]; Noldius and others render it “although”; not only a man that, in a slight and negligent manner, seeks after the knowledge of the works of divine Providence, and the reasons of them; but even one that is diligent and laborious at it is not able to find them out; they being purposely concealed by the Lord, to answer some ends of his;

yea, further, though a wise [man] think to know [it], yet shall he not be able to find [it]; a man of a great natural capacity, such an one as Solomon himself, though he proposes to himself, and determines within himself to find it out, and sets himself to the work, and uses all the means and methods he can devise, and imagines with himself he shall be able to find

out the reasons of the divine procedure, in his dispensations towards the righteous and the wicked; and yet, after all, he is not able to do it. The Targum is,

“what shall be done in the end of days;”

wherefore it is best for a man to be easy and quiet, and enjoy what he has in the best manner he can, and submit to the will of God.

CHAPTER 9

INTRODUCTION TO ECCLESIASTES 9

Though the wise man, with all his wisdom, search, and labour, could not find out the causes and reasons of divine Providence, in the branches and methods of it; yet some things he did find out, and observe, in making this inquiry, and which he declares; as that good and wise men, more especially their persons and their affairs, were in the hand of God, under his guidance, government, and direction; and that an interest in his love and hatred was not to be known by the outward estate of men, (⁽²⁰⁰⁸⁾Ecclesiastes 9:1); That the same events happen to good and bad men, who are variously described; that the hearts of wicked men are full of sin and madness as long as they live, and that they all must and do die, (⁽²⁰⁰²⁾Ecclesiastes 9:2,3); and then the state of such dead is described, as being without hope, knowledge, reward, or memory; and without love, hatred, or envy, or any portion in the things of this life, (⁽²⁰⁰⁴⁾Ecclesiastes 9:4-6). Wherefore good men are advised to live cheerfully, in a view of acceptance with God, both of persons and services; and eat and drink, and clothe well, according to their circumstances, and enjoy their friends and families; since nothing of this kind can be done in the grave, (⁽²⁰⁰⁷⁾Ecclesiastes 9:7-10). Then the wise man observes another vanity; that success in undertakings is not always to persons who bid fair, and might hope for it, but looks like the effect of chance, (⁽²⁰⁰¹⁾Ecclesiastes 9:11); which want of success is often owing to their ignorance of the proper time of doing things, and to their want of foresight, thought, and care, to prevent evils; for which reason they are compared to fishes and birds, taken in a net or snare, (⁽²⁰⁰²⁾Ecclesiastes 9:12). And concludes with a commendation of wisdom, illustrated by an example of it, in a certain person that delivered a city by it, (⁽²⁰¹³⁾Ecclesiastes 9:13-15); and though the man's wisdom was despised, yet it is preferable to strength, or weapons of war, or the noise of a foolish ruler, who destroys much good, (⁽²⁰⁰⁶⁾Ecclesiastes 9:16-18).

Ver. 1. *For all this I considered in mine heart*, etc.] What goes before, in the latter end of the preceding chapter, concerning the various providences of God, the difficulty of finding out the reasons of them, and the

fruitlessness of attempting it; and also what follows, the work of Providence: Solomon gave his mind unto, attended it with great application, and strictly considered and examined it, in order to find it out, but could not; and if he could not, no other man could. And he had a good intention in all; his views were,

even to declare all this; for the end of search and inquiry should be, to make known what is found for the good of others, (~~487~~ Job 5:27); and as the wise man had done before, (~~2075~~ Ecclesiastes 7:25-29); or “to purge”, or “purify”, as the word ^{f211} signifies; to make dark providences clear, and consistent with the perfections and promises of God; to free and vindicate them from all charges of unrighteousness and partiality, and to set them in a clear light to others: now though he failed in his attempt, yet having made some discoveries, he imparted them, as follows: and the observations he made were,

that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, [are] in the hand of God; that those who are truly “righteous” in the sight of God; are so, in an evangelical sense, made so by the obedience of Christ; and who believe in him for righteousness, and live soberly, righteously, and godly: and who are “wise”, not for the things of this world but another, who are wise unto salvation; and are concerned for the truth of grace, as well as an outward profession, and walk wisely in the world; these, their persons, are under the special care of divine Providence; they receive from the hand of God what is needful and proper for them, and they are preserved and protected by him, (~~5408~~ 1 Timothy 4:8,10); and their “works”, or affairs; all events relating to them, are all appointed, ordered, and directed by the hand of God, and all for their good. In a more evangelic sense, their persons are in the hands of God, Father, Son, and Spirit; in the hands of the Father of Christ, being engraven there: he looks at them, and upon them; with delight and pleasure, and never forgets them; he has a high and honourable esteem of them, they are a crown of glory, and a royal diadem in his hand; he directs and guides them, holds them, and upholds them with his right hand; and keeps them, by his power, through faith unto salvation, (~~4302~~ John 10:29 ~~3406~~ Isaiah 49:16 62:3 41:10 ~~4733~~ Psalm 73:23,24 ~~4105~~ 1 Peter 1:5). They are in the hands of Christ; put there by his Father, as the effect of his love, care, and wisdom; where they are in his possession, the objects of his delight; and are under his guidance and direction, his care and protection, (~~4838~~ Deuteronomy 33:3 ~~2886~~ Song of Solomon 8:6 ~~4987~~ Psalm 95:7 ~~4101~~ Revelation 2:1 ~~4108~~ John 10:28). And they are in the hands of the Spirit,

who begins and carries on his own work in them; leads them to Christ, and into all truth, and guides them safe to glory, (^{<4868>}John 16:8,13,14 ^{<4830>}Psalms 143:10). And so their “works” also are in the hands of God; the work of grace upon the soul is in the hand of the Spirit, to carry it on and finish it; good works done by them are done by the assistance of divine grace, the strength of Christ, and the aid of the blessed Spirit; are received and accepted with God through Christ; and will not be forgotten, but are retained, and will be remembered another day; (see ^{<2107>}Ecclesiastes 9:7 ^{<3860>}Hebrews 6:10 ^{<6413>}Revelation 14:13);

no man knoweth either love or hatred [by] all [that is] before them; no man knows his own love and hatred, his passions are so fickle and inconstant; what he loves now, he presently hates, as may be seen in the instances of Ammon, Ahasuerus, and others: or he knows not that what he loves and hates shall befall him, all depending on divine Providence; or he does not know the love and hatred of others, who are his friends or his foes, there is such deceitfulness in men: or rather, he does not know the love and hatred of God, with respect to himself or others, by the outward conduct of Providence; since the same things happen to one as to another; as health and strength, wealth and riches, honour and fame, wisdom and learning, long life, and the like: good men may know that they are loved of God, by his love being shed abroad in them, by the blessings of grace bestowed on them, and the witnessings of the Spirit to them; and know that sin is abominable to God, and wicked men are hated by him; and living and dying in sin, will be eternally damned; but who is an elect person, and who a reprobate, is not to be known by the outward estate of men, as to the things of life. Some render it, “even love and hatred”^{f212}, in connection with the preceding clause; that is, these are in the hands of God also; his love to his people is purely sovereign, according to his own will; not through any motives in them, as their love, loveliness, or good works; and his hatred of others, or the punishment of them for sin, and appointment of them to it; for the same is also as he pleases; see (^{<4891>}Romans 9:11-22); or the love and hatred of men; for God has the hearts and passions of all men in his hand, and at his command, and can raise or restrain them at his pleasure, (^{<2106>}Proverbs 21:1); the love and hatred (of good men; he works in them love to himself and all divine things, and hatred of that which is evil; and also of bad men, he can make them love his people, and he can restrain their wrath when he pleases, (^{<2107>}Proverbs 16:7 ^{<4760>}Psalms 76:10); and then the last clause is rendered, “no man knoweth all [that is] before them”^{f213};

either before Elohim, the three divine Persons, to whom all things are manifest, or that were before decreed, as Aben Ezra; the purposes and decrees of God, which are the secret and deep things of God, and cannot be known but by his promises or providences: or man is so short sighted, that he cannot discern the things that are plain and manifest before him; and much less things future, that are yet to come. But the words, according to the accents, may be better rendered, as by Munster, “neither love nor hatred man knows”; whether the love professed to him is sincere, and what secret hatred is bore to him: “but all things are before him”; Elohim, the three divine Persons.

Ver. 2. *All [things come] alike to all*, etc.] That is, all outward things in this life, good and bad men share in alike; which proves that neither love nor hatred can be known by them: so the emperor Mark Antonine, in speaking of life and death, of honour and dishonour, of pain and pleasure, riches and poverty, says^{f214}, all these things happen alike to good men and bad men;

[there is] one event to the righteous and to the wicked; the same prosperous ones happen to one as to another, as riches, honour, health, wisdom and learning, fame and reputation: if Abraham was rich in cattle, gold, and silver, so was Nabal, and the rich fool in the Gospel; if Joseph was advanced to great dignity in Pharaoh’s court, so was Haman in the court of Ahasuerus; if Caleb was as hearty and strong at fourscore and five as ever, it is true of many wicked men, that there are no bands in their death, and their strength is firm to the last; if Moses, Solomon, and Daniel, were wise men, and of great learning, so were the idolatrous Egyptians, and so are many God is not pleased to call by his grace; if Demetrius had a good report of all men, so had the false prophets of old: and the same adverse things happen to one as to another as the instances of Job, Lazarus, and the good figs, the Jews carried into captivity, show; of whom the Midrash, and Jarchi from that, interpret this and the following clauses: “to the righteous and to the wicked”: to Noah the righteous, and to Pharaoh, not Necho, as Jarchi, but he whose daughter Solomon married, who, the Jews say, were both lame;

to the good, and to the clean, and to the unclean; who are “good”, not naturally, and in and of themselves, but by the grace of God; and who are “clean”, not by nature, nor by their own power, but through the clean water of divine grace being sprinkled on them, and through the blood and

righteousness of Christ applied to them; and who are “unclean”, through the corruption of nature, and the pollution of actual sins, they live in. Some understand this of a ceremonial cleanness and uncleanness. The above Jews apply these characters to Moses, who was good; to Aaron, who was clean; and to the spies, who were unclean; and the same thing happened to them all, exclusion from the land of Canaan;

to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: that serves and worships the Lord, and who does not, one branch of service and worship being put for all; and whether they offer themselves, their contrite hearts and spiritual sacrifices, or not. The Jews exemplify this Josiah, who sacrificed to the Lord; and in Ahab, who made sacrifice to cease; and both were slain with arrows;

as [is] the good, so [is] the sinner; alike in their outward condition and circumstances, whether as to prosperity or adversity;

[and] he that sweareth, as [he] that feareth an oath; the common swearer, or he that is perjured, and has no reverence of God, nor regard to truth, nor any concern to make good his oath; and he that is cautious about taking one does it with awe and reverence of the divine Being, and is careful of keeping, it, even to his own hurt. The Jews stance in Zedekiah and Samson; the former broke his oath with the king of Babylon, and the latter was a religious observer of an oath; and yet both had their eyes put out; but it does not appear that Samson ever took an oath: the opposition in the text seems to be between one that is ready to take an oath on every occasion, without considering the solemnity of one, and without due care of what he swore to; and one that is cautious about taking an oath, and chooses to be excused from taking one, on any account, could he be excused; preferring such advice as is given, (^{<41534}Matthew 5:34 ^{<50512}James 5:12), “swear not at all”; the counsel about swearing, which Isocrates^{f215} gives, seems worthy of notice;

“take an oath required on two accounts; either to purge thyself from a foul crime charged with, or to save friends in danger, and deliver them out of it; but on account of money (or goods) swear not by any deity, no, not even if thou canst take an oath safely; for by some thou wilt be thought to be perjured, and by others to be covetous.”

The word in Hebrew for swearing is always passive, because a man should not swear, unless obliged; and the same form of language is used by Latin writers^{f216}; and the Hebrew word for it comes from a root which signifies “seven”, in allusion, as some think, to seven witnesses required to an oath; the Arabians, when they swore, anointed “seven” stones with blood; and, while anointing them, called on their deities^{f217}; (see ^{<02E3>}Genesis 21:30). It may be observed, that all men are here divided into good and bad; this has been the distinction from the beginning, and continues, and ever will.

Ver. 3. *This [is] an evil among all [things] that are done under the sun, that [there is] one event unto all,* etc.] A very great evil, a very sore one, the worst of evils. Not an evil, as the providence of God is concerned with it, who does no evil; nor is there any unrighteousness in him; he is righteous in all his ways: but this is an evil, and distressing thing, to the minds of good men; (see ^{<07D>}Psalms 73:2,12-14) (^{<24E3>}Jeremiah 12:1); and is what bad men make an ill use of, to harden themselves in sin, and to despise religion as an unprofitable thing, (^{<8214>}Job 21:14,15);

yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil: they are naturally full of evil, of all unrighteousness and wickedness, what comes out of them show it; and because the same things happen to good and bad men, and the wicked pass with impunity, and are outwardly happy as others, or more so, their hearts are fully set in them to do evil, (^{<2081>}Ecclesiastes 8:11);

and madness is in their heart while they live; or “madnesses”^{f218}: every sin is madness; for who but a madman would stretch out his hand against God, and strengthen himself against the Almighty, and run upon him? who but a madman would rush into sin in the manner he does, and expose himself to dangers and death, even eternal death? Wicked men are mad upon their lusts, and mad against the saints, and all that is good; this insanity is in their hearts, and shows itself in their lives, and continues with them as long as they live, unless called by grace;

and after that [they go] to the dead; after all the madness of their lives, they die and go into the state of the dead, and are among which refers not so much to the interment of bodies in the grave, as the company with which their separate spirits are; they go not to the righteous dead, but to the wicked; (see ^{<01E3>}Proverbs 2:18 9:18); so Alshech; they go to the dead; not to the righteous, who, in their death, or when dead are called living, but, as Jarchi observes, at their end they go down to hell. The Targum is,

“after the end of a man, it is reserved for him that he be corrected with the dead, according to the judgment (or desert) of sins.”

Ver. 4. *For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope*, etc.] That is, who is among the living, is one of them, and, as long as he is, there is hope, if his circumstances are mean, and he is poor and afflicted, that it may be better with him in time; (see ^{<18147>}Job 14:7); or of his being a good man, though now wicked; of his being called and converted, as some are at the eleventh hour, even on a death bed; and especially there is a hope of men, if they are under the means of grace, seeing persons have been made partakers of the grace of God after long waiting. There is here a “Keri” and a “Cetib”, a marginal reading and a textual writing; the former reads, “that is joined”, the latter, “that is chosen”; our version follows the marginal reading, as do the Targum, Jarchi, Aben Ezra, the Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic versions: some, following the latter, render the words, “who is to be chosen”^{f219}, or preferred, a living, or a dead man? not a dead but a living man: “to all the living there is hope”; of their being better; and, as Jarchi observes, there is hope, while alive, even though he is a wicked man joined to the wicked; yea, there is hope of the wicked, that he may be good before he dies;

for a living dog is better than a dead lion; a proverbial speech, showing that life is to be preferred to death; and that a mean, abject, and contemptible person, living, who for his despicable condition may be compared to a dog, is to be preferred to the most generous man, or to the greatest potentate, dead; since the one may possibly be useful in some respects or another, the other cannot: though a living sinner, who is like to a dog for his uncleanness and vileness, is not better than a dead saint or righteous man, comparable to a lion, who has hope in his death, and dies in the Lord.

Ver. 5. *For the living know that they shall die*, etc.] Death is certain, it is the demerit of sin, the appointment of God and the time of it is fixed; it may be known that it will be, from the word of God that assures it, from all experience which confirms it, and from the decline of nature, and the seeds of death in men. This “the living” know that live corporeally, even the wicked themselves, though they put the evil day far from them; and so good men, that live spiritually, being quickened by the Spirit and grace of God, and live a life of faith and holiness; they know they shall die, though Christ died for them, and has abolished death, as a punishment and a curse,

and took away its sting, and made it a blessing; wherefore it is desirable to them, as being for their good: but there are some things about death they ordinarily know not; they do not know the time of their death; nor the place where they shall die; nor of what death they shall die; nor in what circumstances, both outward and inward: of these the Targum understands the passage;

“for the righteous know that if they sin, they shall be reckoned as dead men in the world to come, therefore they keep their ways, and sin not; but if they sin, they return by repentance;”

but the dead know not anything; this is not to be understood of their separate spirits, and of the things of the other world; for the righteous dead know much, their knowledge is greatly increased; they know, as they are known; they know much of God in Christ, of his perfections, purposes, covenant, grace, and love; they know much of Christ, of his person, offices, and glory, and see him as he is; they know much of the Gospel, and the mysteries of it; and of angels, and the spirits of just men, they now converse with; and of the glories and happiness of the heavenly state; even they know abundantly more than they did in this life: and the wicked dead, in their separate spirits, know there is a God that judgeth; that their souls are immortal; that there is a future state; indeed they know and feel the torments of hell, the worm that never dies, and the fire that is not quenched: but this is to be interpreted of their bodily senses now extinct, and of worldly things they have now nothing to do with; they know not any thing that is done in this world, nor how it fares with their children and friends they have left behind them; (see ^{<1812>}Job 14:21 ^{<2316>}Isaiah 63:16); nor therefore are they to be prayed unto, and used as mediators with God. The Targum is,

“and sinners know not any good, so that they do not make their works good while they live; and they know not any good in the world to come;”

neither have they any more a reward; not but that there will be rewards in a future state, in which everyone shall have his own reward; there will be a reward for the righteous; they will receive the reward of the inheritance, though it will be, not of debt, but of grace; and particularly in the millennium state, (^{<1881>}Psalms 58:11 ^{<5124>}Colossians 3:24) (^{<6212>}Revelation 22:12 11:18); and every transgression of the wicked will receive a just recompence of reward; to whom the reward of their hands will be given

them, (^{800D}Hebrews 2:2 ^{231B}Isaiah 3:11); but the sense is, that after death there will be no enjoyment of a man's labours; he will not have the use, profit, and advantage of them, but his heirs that succeed him, (^{200D}Ecclesiastes 4:9 2:18,19,21,22);

for the memory of them is forgotten; not the memory of the righteous with God, for whom a book of remembrance is written, and whose names are written in heaven; these are had in everlasting remembrance, and their memory blessed: but the memory of wicked men; who, though they take pains to perpetuate their names, which they give to their lands, yet the Lord causes their memory to cease, and they are forgotten in the place where they lived; not only among the righteous, as the Targum, but among others, (²³³⁴Isaiah 26:14 ²⁰⁸⁰Ecclesiastes 8:10); even among those that enjoy the fruit of their labour; they will scarce think of them any more, or, however, in a little time they will be quite forgotten by them.

Ver. 6. *Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished*, etc.] Not that the separate spirits of the dead are without their affections, or these unexercised; the spirits of just men made perfect will love God and Christ, and angels, and good men, and all that is good, more intensely; love will continue after this life, and be in its height, and therefore said to be the greatest grace, (^{463B}1 Corinthians 13:13); they will hate sin, Satan, and all the enemies of Christ, and be filled with zeal for his glory; so the word ^{f220}for envy may be rendered; (see ^{600D}Revelation 6:9,10); and the spirits of the wicked dead will still continue to love sin, and hate the Lord, and envy the happiness of the saints; and will rise again with the same spite and malice against them; (see ⁶²⁷Ezekiel 32:27 ⁶¹⁸Revelation 20:8,9); but this respects persons and things in this world; they no more love persons and things here, nor are loved by any; death parts the best friends, and the most endearing and loving relations, and puts an end to all their mutual friendship and affection; they hate their enemies no more, nor are hated by them; they no more envy the prosperity of others, nor are envied by others; all such kind of love and hatred, enmity and envy, active or passive, cease at death; out of the world, as the Targum adds;

neither have they any more a portion for ever in any [thing] that is under the sun: the worldly man's portion is only in this life, and when he dies, he carries nothing of it with him; whose ever his possessions will be at death, they are no more his, nor will he ever return to enjoy them any more; his houses, his lands, his estates, his gold and silver, and whatever of worth

and value he had, he has no more lot and part in them: but the good man has a portion above the sun; God is his portion, heaven is his inheritance for ever and ever. The Targum understands it of the wicked;

“and they have no good part with the righteous in the world to come; and they have no profit of all that is done in this world under the sun.”

Ver. 7. *Go thy way*, etc.] Thou righteous man, as Jarchi paraphrases it; and indeed epicures and voluptuous persons have no need of the following exhortation, and the reason annexed is not suitable to them; but the whole agrees better with religious persons, who under distressing views of Providence, and from gloomy and melancholy apprehensions of things, and mistaken notions of mortification, deny themselves the free and lawful use of the good things of life; and seeing there is no enjoyment of them in the grave, and after death, therefore let the following advice be taken, than which of worldly things nothing is better for a man to do;

eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; which includes all things necessary and convenient, and which should be used and enjoyed freely and cheerfully; not barely for refreshment, but recreation; not for necessity only, but for pleasure; yet with moderation, not to excess; and with thankfulness to God; and the rather joy and mirth should mix with these things, since to a good man they are in love. It may be observed that it is said “thy bread [and] thy wine”, thine own and not another’s; what is got by labour, and in an honest way, and not by rapine and oppression, as Alshech observes; what God in his providence gives, our daily food, what is convenient for us, or is our portion and allotment. The Targum interprets it figuratively of the joys of heaven;

“Solomon said, by a spirit of prophecy from the Lord, the Lord of the world will say to all the righteous, in the face of everyone, eat thy bread with joy, which is laid up for thee, for thy bread which thou hast given to the poor and needy that were hungry; and drink thy wine with a good heart, which is laid up for thee in paradise, for the wine which thou hast mingled for the poor and needy that were thirsty;”

(see ⁴²⁵⁴Matthew 25:34, 35);

for God now accepteth thy works; both the persons of righteous and good men are accepted of God in Christ, and their works done in faith and love,

and with a view to his glory; and since they are acceptable in his sight, as appears by his blessing on their labours, and bestowing the good things of life upon them, so it is well pleasing in his sight to make a free and cheerful use of them.

Ver. 8. *Let thy garments be always white*, etc.] That is, neat and clean, not vile and sordid; what is comely and decent, and suitable to a man's circumstances; this colour is particularly mentioned because much used in the eastern countries, and in Judea; hence we so often read of washing garments, and of fullers that whitened them; and especially on festival days and days of rejoicing, to which Horace^{f221} refers; and here it signifies that every day should be like a festival or day of rejoicing to a good man, to whom God has given the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, (^{<260B>}Isaiah 61:3); and though there may be times for mourning, and so of putting on other apparel, yet, in common and ordinarily, this should be the habit, decent and comely apparel. The ancient Jews in Aben Ezra, and so Jarchi, interpret it of an unblemished conversation; and Kimchi^{f222} of repentance and good works; and so the Targum,

“let thy garments be white (or washed) from all filth of sin;”

or be without any spot of sin, as Alshech; the conversation garments of the saints are made white in the blood of Christ, and his righteousness is fine linen, and white; and even eternal glory and happiness is signified by walking with him in white, (^{<6074>}Revelation 7:14 19:8 3:4,18);

and let thy head lack no ointment: which used to be poured plentifully on the heads of guests at feasts^{f223}, for the refreshment of them, which gave pleasure, and a sweet odour and fragrantcy, and was much in use in those hot countries; (see ^{<1276>}Psalm 23:5 ^{<1076>}Luke 7:46); and is opposed to a gloomy and melancholy carriage and deportment, (^{<4067>}Matthew 6:17); hence we read of the oil of joy and gladness, (^{<1947>}Psalm 45:7 ^{<2601>}Isaiah 63:1). The Jews before mentioned interpreted this of a good name better than ointment, (^{<2008>}Ecclesiastes 7:1). So the Targum,

“and a good name, which is like to anointing oil, get; that blessings may come upon thy head, and thy goodness fail not.”

Ver. 9. *Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest*, etc.] Or “see”, or “enjoy life”^{f224}: this is one of the ways of enjoying life comfortably, and one of the principal ones; that if a man has a wife whom he ought to love as himself as his own flesh, to take delight in her company, be pleasant with

her, and rejoice in her, (^{<2168>}Proverbs 5:18,19); and this here may be put for all that pleasure and satisfaction which may be lawfully had in the enjoyment of all other relations and friends; which adds no small part to the comfort of a man's life;

all the days of the life of thy vanity; a wife is for life, and not after a while to be divorced; and to be lived joyfully with, not for a short time only, but all the days of life;

which he hath given thee under the sun; that is, either which wife God has given thee; for a wife is the gift of God, (^{<0082>}Genesis 3:12); and which is a gift under the sun; for above it, or in heaven, and in a future state, there is no marrying nor giving in marriage, (^{<0235>}Luke 20:35); or which days he hath given thee, so the Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, and Arabic versions. It is added,

all the days of thy vanity; which is repeated, that it might be observed that the life of man is but a vain life, a vapour that soon vanishes away, and man in it, at his best estate, is vanity; and that notwithstanding all the enjoyments of life in the most comfortable manner here directed to, yet still the doctrine he set out with must be remembered, that all is vanity, (^{<2002>}Ecclesiastes 1:2);

for that [is] thy portion in [this] life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun; this is all the outward happiness of a man in this life, and all the use, profit, and advantage of his labours, to eat and drink cheerfully, to clothe decently, to debar himself of nothing of lawful pleasure, particularly to live joyfully with his wife, and enjoy his friends; this is the utmost of outward felicity he can partake of, and this he should not deny himself. Ben Melech restrains this portion to a wife, and joyful living with her; but it is best to include all that goes before.

Ver. 10. *Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do*, etc.] Not anything that is evil, which is near at hand, and easy to be found, and is in the power of men's hands to do, (^{<6021>}Romans 7:21 ^{<3000>}Micah 2:1); for this is forbidden of God, abominable to him, and hurtful to men; but whatsoever is good; so the Targum,

“to do good and alms to the poor;”

even all good works in general, which God requires of men, and it is their duty to do; though they are not meritorious of anything at his hands, nor is

there justification or salvation by them; yet should be done in obedience to the will of God, in gratitude to him for mercies received, and for his glory; as also for the profit of men, and for our own good; for the evidence of grace, and to preserve our characters from the insults and reproaches of men. Whatever is found written in the book of God should be done; not what is of a ceremonial kind, and now abolished, but everything of a moral nature, and of positive institution, under Gospel times; as all Gospel ordinances, and whatever falls within a man's calling: for every man has a work to do; in every station, as magistrates and subjects; in every relation, as husband and wife, parents and children, masters and servants; in every business of life men are called to; which they should attend, for the good of themselves and families, the relief of the poor, and the support of the interest of religion: and in religious things everyone has his work to do; the minister, in preaching and administering ordinances; the deacon, in taking care of the poor; private Christians, in praying in their closets and families, in hearing the word, making a profession of religion, and attending on ordinances; and, as opportunity serves, should do good to all men, especially to the saints, (^{<8160>}Galatians 6:10); and whatsoever is in the power of their hands, as this phrase signifies, (^{<8128>}Leviticus 12:8 ^{<8278>}1 Samuel 25:8). Aben Ezra refers it to the delights and pleasures of life, such as before mentioned; which may be allowed, when used in a lawful and moderate manner;

do [it] with thy might; or “strength”; for though men have no might or strength of their own to do good, which is lost by sin; yea, even good men, of themselves, and without Christ, his spirit and grace, can do nothing spiritually good; yet there is strength in him, and to be had from him; and who should be applied to for it, and who gives it, (^{<249>}Isaiah 40:29-31 45:24 ^{<1043>}Philippians 4:13); the phrase denotes intenseness of spirit, vigour of mind, activity and fervency; doing that which is good, cheerfully and diligently, and not in a negligent careless manner; see (^{<816>}Deuteronomy 6:5 ^{<2480>}Jeremiah 48:10);

for [there is] no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest; this, and not then, is our working time; good men at death cease from their labours in the grave, as the night in which no man can “work”, (^{<6443>}Revelation 14:13 ^{<800>}John 9:4); then the liberal man can no more “devise” liberal ways and means of doing good; his purposes of doing good are broken off; and no more plans can be laid, or designs formed, for the glory of God and the good of fellow creatures: and no

more “knowledge” of objects to do good unto; nor any improvement in any kind of knowledge, natural or spiritual: nor “wisdom” and prudence in the management of affairs, to answer some good ends and purposes; nor opportunity of attaining that wisdom by the Scriptures, and by the ministry of the word, which make men wise unto salvation: and now, since every man is going to the grave, his long home, the place appointed for all living, and this, is the way of all flesh; and every step he has taken, and does take, is a step to the grave; therefore it is incumbent on him to do all the good he can in life.

Ver. 11. *I returned, and saw under the sun*, etc.] The wise man returned to his former subject, concerning the same events happening to all sorts of persons, righteous and wicked, wise and unwise, (^{<2100>}Ecclesiastes 10:1,2); and enlarged upon it in his mind; and took notice of various things done under the sun, and made the following remarks: and whereas he had exhorted men to use all their might in doing the duties of their calling while they lived here; he suggests, that they should not depend upon, and promise themselves, anything from their own strength and wisdom; but have a regard to the providence of God, that superintends all affairs, and gives or withholds success as he pleases; since it may be observed,

that the race [is] not to the swift; swiftness oftentimes is of no service to a man to escape dangers, as may be seen in the case of Asahel and others, (^{<1018>}2 Samuel 2:18,23 ^{<1024>}Amos 2:14,15); so the Targum,

“men who are swift as eagles are not helped by running to escape from death in battle.”

Or the sense may be, that the swift are not always made use of in running a race; or, if they are, they do not always win the prize, something or other happens to hinder them; they fall, or become lame, when one more slow gets the advantage of them, (^{<1021>}1 Corinthians 9:24); and so in spiritual things, one that is ready to halt, as David says of himself, gets to heaven, and is saved, (^{<1087>}Psalm 38:17 ^{<1029>}Zephaniah 3:19); when others, at first starting or setting out in a profession, run well for a while, as the Galatians did, (^{<1017>}Galatians 5:7); but afterwards drop and fall short; for “it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God, that sheweth mercy”, (^{<1016>}Romans 9:16);

nor the battle to the strong: as not to the Midianites, nor to Goliath, nor to Abner, in whom Jarchi instances; victory is not always on the side of the

mighty and the many, but oftentimes on the side of the weak and few; (see ^{<444>}2 Chronicles 14:9-15 ^{<436>}Psalms 33:16,17); so in spirituals, such who go forth in their own strength against an enemy, trusting in it, fall; while weak believers, depending on the grace and strength of Christ, wrestle with principalities and powers, and come off victorious;

neither yet bread to the wise: the Targum adds, in a time of famine, when their wisdom cannot help them; but the sense rather is, that skilful artificers, in any trade or business, do not always get the best livelihood, yea, sometimes want the necessaries of life, or eat the bread of sorrow, when persons of meaner capacities shall thrive and flourish; and even the wisest of men sometimes have been obliged to others for bread, as was the case of David, (^{<426>}1 Samuel 21:3 25:8); and even of a wiser than he, our Lord himself, (^{<432>}Luke 8:2); and as for the wise men of this world, the bread of life, Christ Jesus, is neither enjoyed nor sought after by them;

nor yet riches to men of understanding; mention is afterwards made of a wise man that was poor, Jarchi instances in Job; and, on the other hand, sometimes fools are rich, as Nabal and others; and as for the riches of grace, and treasures of spiritual knowledge, they are not usually given to the wise and prudent (^{<412>}Matthew 11:25); Nor yet favour to men of skill; to men of knowledge and learning, whose genius and abilities might be thought sufficient to recommend them to the favour, affection, and applause of men, and yet oftentimes fall herein; such who have the art of address and persuasion are not always able to ingratiate themselves, and gain the esteem of men: Jarchi interprets it of the favour of God, and instances in Moses; than whom there was not a more knowing and understanding man in Israel, yet could not by his prayer find grace and favour to enter into the land: but the Targum is better;

“neither they that know understanding are helped by their knowledge to find favour in the eyes of a king;”

but time and chance happeneth to them all; to the swift and strong, the wise, understanding, and skilful; or to the swift and slow, to the strong and weak, to the wise and unwise; everything befalls them just as it is ordered by divine Providence; for there is a certain “time” fixed by the Lord for every event; and whatever seems casual and contingent to man, and which he is ready to call “chance”, is noticing but “decree” with God, firm and unalterable; Plato^{f225} has the same expression. The word signifies “occurrence”,^{f226} or event, which is under the wise direction and order of

the providence of God, with respect to whom nothing comes by chance; and it is rendered “occurrent”, (^{<1189>}1 Kings 5:4); and so it is here, by the Septuagint version, “occurrence” or “event”; and in the Targum, event by their star, which is fate: and Aben Ezra interprets it *hnwyl* [*hkr* [*mh*, the “superior ordination”; it is something we meet, or meets us, by divine appointment. Aben Ezra and Kimchi, who are followed by others, think that, from (^{<2108>}Ecclesiastes 10:4); to this, Solomon is speaking in the person of epicures and atheists; which is not likely, since it is not in character for such persons to talk of God’s acceptance of men’s works; of living joyfully with a wife; of this life being a life of vanity; and of death and the grave; and of diligence in working while the present life lasts.

Ver. 12. *For man also knoweth not his time*, etc.] Though it is fixed and settled by the Lord, yet times and seasons are kept in his own power, and not known by men; not the time of his death, nor of any calamity and distress coming upon him, nor the proper season and opportunity of doing himself good, and avoiding evil;

as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; as fishes are suddenly taken in a net, unhappy for them, which is at once east over them, while they are sporting and playing in the water, and catching at the bait; and as birds, being decoyed, are unawares taken in a snare; that is, both of them know not the time of their being caught;

so [are] the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them; they are no more able to guard against a time of adversity and calamity, and the evil of it, which comes at once upon them, than the poor fishes or silly birds are to avoid the net and snare; and are, like them, at such a time, in the utmost security, indulging themselves in ease and pleasure: so the day of death, and of judgment, will come like a thief in the night; or like a snare upon men, when they think nothing of it, but are giving up themselves to their lusts and pleasures; (see ^{<5182>}1 Thessalonians 5:2,3 ^{<4213>}Luke 21:34,35 17:26,30); for pleasure, as Plato says, is the bait of evils, with which men are caught, as fishes with the hook^{f227}.

Ver. 13. *This wisdom have I seen also under the sun*, etc.] Or, “this also I have seen under the sun, even wisdom”^{f228}: besides those things he had, just now observed, he took notice that there was such a thing as wisdom among men; though success did not always attend the wise, the understanding, and skilful; and though there was so much ignorance in

men, of their own time, and were so easily and suddenly ensnared in an evil time;

and it [seemed] great unto me; Solomon had a high value for wisdom, and he still retained the same sentiments of it he had before, in (²⁰¹³Ecclesiastes 2:13 7:11,12,19), of which he gives the following instance.

Ver. 14. [*There was] a little city, and few men within it*, etc.] Which some take to be a piece of history, a real matter of fact; that as the city of Abel, when besieged by Joab, was delivered by the counsel of a wise woman, (¹⁰¹⁵2 Samuel 20:15-22); so there was a city, which Solomon had knowledge of, which was delivered from the siege of a powerful king, by the wise counsel of a poor wise man: though others think it is only a fiction, fable, or parable; the moral of which is, that political wisdom, even in a poor mean person, is sometimes very useful and serviceable, though it does not meet with its proper merit. Many of the Jewish writers understand the whole allegorically and figuratively; so the Targum, by “the little city”, understands the body of man; by “few men in it”, the little righteousness there is in the heart of man; though, according to the Midrash, Jarchi, and Alshech, they are the members of the body; by “the great king”, the evil imagination, or corruption of nature, which is great to oppress, and besieges the heart to cause it to err; and by “the poor wise man”, the good imagination or affection, which prevails over the other, and subdues it, and delivers the body from hell, and yet not remembered; and so the Midrash, and the ancient Jews in Aben Ezra, though he himself understands it according to its literal sense. Some Christian interpreters explain it to better purpose, concerning the church attacked by Satan, and delivered by Christ, who, notwithstanding, is unkindly and ungratefully used: the church is often compared to a city, it is the city of God, and of which saints are fellow citizens; it is but a “little” one in comparison of the world, and, in some periods and ages of the world, lesser than in others; it is little and contemptible in the eyes of the world, and the inhabitants of it are mean and low in their own eyes; they are a little flock, (¹¹²³Luke 12:32); and “few” in number that are “within it”: some are only of it, but not in it, or are external members only, which sometimes are many; or outward, not inward, court worshippers; they are few, comparatively, that belong to the invisible church, that are chosen, redeemed, called, and saved, (¹⁰¹⁶Matthew 20:16 7:13,14 ¹¹⁰⁴Revelation 3:4) (¹¹²³Luke 13:23); there are but few able men, especially such as are capable of defending the church against its enemies.

and there came a great king against it; Satan, the prince of devils and of the posse of them in the air, the god and prince of the world of the ungodly, who works in their hearts, and leads them captive at his will who may be said to be “great” with respect to the numbers under him, legions of devils, and the whole world that lies in wickedness, or “in” or “under” the wicked one: and on account of the power he exercises, by divine permission, over the bodies and minds of men; and in comparison of the little city, and few men in it, being stronger than they, (^{<402>}Matthew 12:24 ^{<312>}John 12:31 ^{<2811>}Jeremiah 31:11); he comes from the region of the air, where his posse are; or from going to and fro in the earth; or from hell, into which he is cast down: he comes by divine permission; in the manner evil spirits do, by temptation; in a hostile way, against the church and people of God, to destroy and devour them, if possible;

and besieged it; surrounded it on all sides, as the Gog and Magog army trader him will encompass the camp of the saints, and the beloved city, (^{<610>}Revelation 20:9);

and built great bulwarks against it; such as are called strong holds, (^{<470>}2 Corinthians 10:4). Satan’s first attack was upon the elect of God, in Adam; when he brought them, through sin, under a sentence of condemnation and death, though then they were preserved in Christ; and ever since he has been attacking the church by persecution, in order to take it by storm; and by spreading errors and heresies, such as tend to raze the foundation, and to pull down the superstructure of grace; and by promoting schisms, and laying such large principles of church communion, as tend to take away ordinances and discipline, the fence of the city; and by throwing in hand grenades of strife and contention, to raise a civil war among the citizens themselves; and, by various temptations to sin, to gain deserters: these are some of his bulwarks, batteries, and engines.

Ver. 15. *Now there was found in it a poor wise man*, etc.] Christ, who is man, though not a mere man, but God as well as man; who was so in purpose, covenant, and promise, before his incarnation, since truly and really so; and “poor”, as it was foretold he should be, and who became so for the sake of his church and people, (^{<300>}Zechariah 9:9 ^{<470>}2 Corinthians 8:9); yet “wise”, even as man, being filled with wisdom, in which he increased, and gave such evident proofs of; on whom the spirit of wisdom rested, and in whom the treasures of it were hid, (^{<410>}Luke 2:40,46,47,52 ^{<310>}Isaiah 11:2) (^{<510>}Colossians 2:3); he was found here by God his Father,

who exalted one chosen out of the people, and made him Head over the church, who is the firstborn among many brethren, (~~3889~~ Psalm 89:19,20); Or “and”, or “but he found in it”^{f229}; that is, Satan, the great king, found him here, contrary to his expectation, and to his great regret;

and he by his wisdom delivered the city; the church, from all enemies; from Satan and all his principalities and powers; from the world, the men and things of it; from sin, and all its sad consequences; from the law, its curse and condemnation; and from the second death, ruin and destruction: and though this deliverance was both by power and by price, yet also by wisdom; for the deliverance and redemption of the church by Christ is the fruit of infinite wisdom; it is a wise scheme to glorify all the divine perfections; to mortify Satan, and save sinners, and yet condemn sin; (see ~~4007~~ Ephesians 1:7,8);

yet no man remembered that same poor man: before the deliverance wrought, as Aben Ezra and others; it never once entered into their thoughts that he could ever be their deliverer; they never imagined he had a capacity to advise, direct, or assist, in such service, or bring about such an affair: so Christ, when he appeared in the world, the Jews saw nothing that was promising in him; they could not believe that he was sent to be the Saviour and deliverer of them, and therefore rejected him, (~~2302~~ Isaiah 3:2, ~~6010~~ 3 John 1:10,11); Or, “after it”, so the Vulgate Latin version, “no man hereafter remembered”, etc. took no notice of him after he had wrought this deliverances; bestowed no honour upon him, nor returned him thanks for what he had done; but he continued to live and die in obscurity and meanness: thus Christ, though he ought to be remembered and spoken well of, and the glory of salvation should be ascribed unto him, and thanks should be given him for it; yet there are none comparatively, or; but a few, who, like the Samaritan, glorify him on account of it. But if any choose to understand these words of political wisdom, and the use of it, by which sometimes a mean and obscure person does more good than others can by their power and strength, though he meets with no reward for it, I am not averse to it; and which agrees with what follows.

Ver. 16. *Then said I, wisdom [is] better than strength*, etc.] Wisdom of mind, even in a poor man, is better than strength of body, even of the, most potent prince and powerful army, as may be concluded from the above instance; since the poor wise man could do more by his wisdom than the great king with his mighty army; who was obliged to break up the siege, in

consequence of the counsel given, or the methods directed to, or taken, by the poor man;

nevertheless, the poor man's wisdom [is] despised, and his words are not heard; notwithstanding such a flagrant instance and example as this just mentioned; yet men still retain their prejudices against a poor man, and despise his wise counsels and advice, for no other reason but because he is poor, and will not attend to what he says: or, "though the poor man's wisdom", etc.^{f230}, as Aben Ezra; Solomon drew the above conclusion from that instance; though this is usually the case, that men despise the wisdom of a poor man, and will not listen to his advice, this did not lessen the wise man's opinion of it. The words may be rendered, "even the poor man's wisdom despised, and his words not heard"^{f231}; these are better than outward force and strength, and more serviceable and useful; which the Septuagint version favours: the Vulgate Latin version renders it, "how is the poor man's wisdom despised!" etc. as wondering at it that so it should be, when so much profit and advantage arose to the city from it.

Ver. 17. *The words of wise [men are] heard in quiet*, etc.] That is, by some persons and at some times, though not by all persons and always; or they are to be heard, or should be heard, though they seldom be, even the words of wise men that are poor: these are to be heard quietly and patiently, without any tumult and contradiction; or should be heard, being delivered with a low and submissive voice, without any noise, or blustering pride, or passion, sedately and with great humility, submitting them to the judgment of others; which sense the comparison seems to require;

more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools; more than the noisy words of a foolish governor; or than the dictates of an imperious man, delivered in a clamorous and blustering way; by which he obtains authority among such fools as himself, who are influenced more by the pomp and noise of words than by the force of true wisdom and reason; but all right judges will give the preference to the former. The Targum interprets it of the silent prayer of the wise being received by the Lord, more than the clamour of the wicked.

Ver. 18. *Wisdom [is] better than weapons of war*, etc.] And does what they cannot do; of which the wisdom of the poor wise man is a full proof, which delivered the city from a potent prince, when weapons of war could not: (see ^{<2170>}Ecclesiastes 7:10);

but one sinner destroyeth much good: his own soul by his sins, and the souls of others by his counsels, example, and conversation, which corrupt good manners; so does one sinner in a family, neighbourhood, and town; as one poor wise man does much good, one sinner mars much; one Achan in a camp or army, one bad counsel for in a cabinet, one false teacher in the church, will do a great deal of mischief, as well as one debauchee in a town or city. The Vulgate Latin version is, “who sins in one”; offends or sins in one, as in (~~5120~~ James 2:10); so the Syriac version, “one sin destroys much good”, or many good things; and to the same purpose the Arabic version, “he that committeth one sin”.

CHAPTER 10

INTRODUCTION TO ECCLESIASTES 10

This chapter treats of the difference between wisdom and folly; and of the preferableness of the one, to the other, especially in civil government: folly is compared to a dead or deadly fly; a little of which as much hurts a wise man's reputation, as that does the most precious ointment, (^{2100B}Ecclesiastes 10:1). A wise man and a fool differ in the situation of their heart; which is in the one on the right hand, in the other on the left, (^{2100B}Ecclesiastes 10:2); the folly of the latter lies not only in his heart, but betrays itself throughout the whole of his conversation, (^{2100B}Ecclesiastes 10:3). And it is one part of wisdom in a subject to bear patiently the anger of his prince, and not in a passion and at once leave his service, (^{2100B}Ecclesiastes 10:4). And, among the follies of princes, this is a great one; to bestow their honours and favours on improper persons, to the neglect of such as are deserving, (^{2100B}Ecclesiastes 10:5-7). And several proverbial expressions are used, as cautions to a wise man against plotting mischief to others; breaking in upon the constitution and laws of a commonwealth; weakening the strength of the state by an methods, and making discord in it, and carrying thin by mere strength and force; when, if wisdom used, it would direct to proper ways and means, by which things would be managed to the best advantage, (^{2100B}Ecclesiastes 10:8-10). Then the babbling of fools against a government is exposed, which is like the secret bite of a serpent, (^{2100B}Ecclesiastes 10:11); and the difference between the words of wise men, which express grace and kindness, and are amiable and acceptable to men; and those of fools, which destroy themselves, begin in folly, and end in mischief; are noisy, and without meaning; do not direct to things most plain and easy, but wearisome and fatiguing to themselves and others, (^{2100B}Ecclesiastes 10:12-15). Next the unhappiness of a land is observed, when the governors of it are childish, intemperate, slothful, and prodigal; the happiness of a country when it is the reverse, (^{2100B}Ecclesiastes 10:16-19); and the chapter is concluded with advice not to curse a king, or any great personage; no, not in the most private and secret manner; since, by one means or another, it will be discovered (^{2100B}Ecclesiastes 10:20).

Ver. 1. *Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour*, etc.] Such, as Jarchi observes, are in the winter season, which are weak and near to death, and get into precious ointment, prepared after the best manner, where they die, and corrupt and spoil it: or, “flies of deaths”^{f232}; deadly ones, which have something in their nature poisonous and pernicious; which, when they light upon the most sweet and savoury ointment, give it an ill smell;

[so doth] a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom [and] honour; a good name is like precious ointment, valuable and fragrant; sin, which is folly, is like a dead fly; not only light and mean, and base and worthless, but hurtful and pernicious, deadly, and the cause of death; and what may seem little, a peccadillo, or, however, one single act of sin, may injure the character of a wise and honourable man, and greatly expose him to shame and contempt, and cause him to stink in the nostrils of men, (^{<0133>}Genesis 36:20); and to be reproached by men, and religion and government to be reproached for his sake. Thus the affair of Bathsheba and Uriah, what a slur did it bring on the character of David, so famous for wisdom and honour, for religion and piety? and the idolatry of Solomon, the wisest of men; Jehoshaphat, that good king, entering into affinity with Ahab; and pious Josiah going to war with the king of Egypt, contrary to the word of the Lord; with many other instances. This teaches how careful men eminent for gifts and grace should be of their words and actions; since the least thing amiss in them is easily discerned, and soon taken notice of, as the least speck in a diamond, or spot in fine linen, clean and white; and there are wicked and envious persons enough watching for their halting, glad to have an occasion against them, and improve everything to the uttermost: this is a caution to wise magistrates, honourable ministers of the word, and eminent professors more especially. The Targum is,

“evil concupiscence, which dwells at the gates of the heart, is as a fly, and is the cause of death in the world; and corrupts a good name, which was before like to anointing oil, perfumed with spices:”

and to the same purpose the Midrash. One of the names of Satan is Beelzebub, the lord of a fly; who, by his temptations, solicits to sin and folly, which produce the effect here mentioned, and therefore to be shunned as a deadly fly in the ointment, (^{<0124>}Matthew 12:24). Gussetius^{f233} renders it,

“that which is precious and worthy of honour “proceeds” from wisdom; and folly “comes” from glory, “worldly glory”, in a little time.”

Ver. 2. *A wise man’s heart [is] at his right hand*, etc.] This is not designed to express the direct position and situation of the heart of man, wise or foolish, which is the same in both; and which, according to anatomists, is in the middle of the body, inclining to the left side; but the understanding and wisdom of men, as Aben Ezra observes; which, with a wise man, is ready a hand to direct and assist him in any affair; and which under the influence of it, he goes about with great readiness and dexterity, and performs it with great ease and facility, without sinister ends and selfish views; it inclines him to pursue the true way to honour, heaven, and happiness, which lies to the right; to seek things that are above, at the right hand of God; and, in all, his honour and glory;

but a fool’s heart [is] at his left; he is at a loss for wisdom and understanding to direct him, when he has an affair of any moment upon his hand; which he goes about in an awkward manner, as left handed persons do, and has sinister ends in what he does; and he is to every good work reprobate and unfit, and seeks earth and earthly things, which lie to the left, and in all himself. The Targum is,

“the heart of a wise man is to get the law, which was given by the right hand of the Lord; and the heart of a fool to get the goods of gold and silver:”

so Jarchi,

“his wisdom is ready to incline him (the wise man) to the right hand way for his good; but the heart of a fool to pervert him from it.”

The ancients^{f234} used to call things wise and prudent the right hand and things foolish the left hand.

Ver. 3. *Yea also, when he that is a fool walketh by the way*, etc.] The king’s highway, the common road; as he passeth along the streets, going to any place, or about any business:

his wisdom faileth [him]; or “his heart”^{f235}; he appears by his gait, his manner of walking, to want a heart, to be a fool; walking with a froward mouth, winking with his eyes, speaking with his feet, and teaching with his

fingers; all which shows the frowardness and folly of his heart, (^{216B}Proverbs 6:12-14); or he discovers it throughout his conversation, in all the actions of it, in whatsoever business he is concerned, and in all the affairs of life. The Targum is,

“when he walketh in a perplexed way;”

then his wisdom fails him; he does not know which way to take, whether to the right or left: this can never be understood of the highway of holiness, in which men, though fools, shall not err, (^{238B}Isaiah 35:8);

and he saith to everyone [that] he [is] a fool; his folly is manifest to all; he betrays it, by his words and actions, to every man he has to do with; his sins and transgressions, which are his folly, he hides not, they are evident to all; and, as the Targum expresses it,

“all say he is a fool:”

though indeed he himself says this of every other man, that he is a fool; for, according to the Vulgate Latin version, he, being a fool himself, thinks everybody else is so.

Ver. 4. *If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee*, etc.] The wrath of the civil magistrate, the chief ruler of the land, the sovereign prince or king, to whom men are and should be subject: if his wrath on any occasion breaks out in a furious manner, and, like a storm and tempest, is very blustering and threatening:

leave not thy place; at court; thine office under the prince, do not throw it up in a passion, and quit his service upon it; and much less forget thy duty and allegiance to him, and go into disloyalty and rebellion; (see ^{200B}Ecclesiastes 8:3);

for yielding pacifieth great offences; bearing his anger patiently, submitting to his displeasure quietly, making no returns, or at least giving soft answers, and behaving in a modest and humble manner; in time his wrath will subside, and he will be pacified, and forgive the offences committed; or be convinced that there were none, or however not so great as to require such resentment; (see ^{215B}Proverbs 15:1 25:15). The Targum is,

“if a spirit of evil concupiscence rules over thee; thy good place, in which thou wert used to stand, leave not:”

some understand this of a man's having a spirit of rule and government coming upon him, or of his being advanced to power and authority, that then he should not forget the low estate in which he had been. Jarchi interprets it of the spirit of the governor of the world, strictly inquiring into the actions of men; and healing their sins by chastisements, which cause them to leave them.

Ver. 5. *There is an evil [which] I have seen under the sun*, etc.] Which Solomon had observed in the course of his life, practised in some kingdoms and by some princes on earth, under the sun; for there is nothing of the like kind, as after mentioned, done in heaven, above the sun;

as an error [which] proceedeth from the ruler; from the supreme ruler of a nation, the king of it; and it is not only as an error, or like one, a seeming one; but it is a real error, bestowing places of honour and profit on undeserving persons: which error proceeds from ignorance of the persons; or from affection to them, and from friendship cultivated with them in the younger time of life, being educated with them; or through the misrepresentation and imposition of those about him, who have ends to serve by their promotion; or through his own lusts and passions, which these men indulge him in. It may be understood of God, the supreme ruler, who suffers such things to be; and which may seem to some an error in providence, though it is not: but the other sense is best.

Ver. 6. *Folly is set in great dignity*, etc.] Or "in great heights"^{f236}; in high places of honour and trust; even foolish and wicked men; men of poor extraction, of low life, and of mean abilities and capacities; and, which is worse, men vile and vicious, as Doeg the Edomite, Haman the Amalekite, and others;

and the rich sit in low places; men not only of fortune and estates, and above doing mean and little actions, and so more fit for such high places; but men rich in wisdom and knowledge, of large capacities and of great endowments of mind, and so abundantly qualified for posts in the administration of government; and, above all, men rich in grace, fearing God, and hating covetousness, as rulers ought to be, (^(~~Q~~R)Exodus 18:21); and yet these sometimes are neglected, live in obscurity, who might otherwise be very useful in public life. The Targum interprets this and the following verse of the Israelites in exile and poverty among the Gentiles for their sins; so Jarchi.

Ver. 7. *I have seen servants upon horses*, etc.] Which being scarce in Judea, were only rode upon by princes and great personages, or such as were in affluent circumstances; and therefore it was an unusual and disagreeable sight to see servants upon them, which was a token of their being advanced upon the ruin and destruction of their masters; a reigning servant is not only uncomely, but one of the things by which the earth is disquieted, and it cannot bear, (~~<38P>~~ Proverbs 30:21,22); the Parthians and Persians distinguished their nobles and the vulgar, freemen and servants, by this; the servants went on foot, and the freemen rode on horses^{f237};

and princes walking as servants upon the earth; degraded from their honour; banished from their thrones and palaces, or obliged to leave them, and reduced to the lowest state and condition: so David, when his son rebelled against him, and he was forced to flee from him, and walk on foot, (~~<1850>~~ 2 Samuel 15:30); Alshech thinks it may be a prophecy of the captivity of Israel, when they walked as servants on the earth, and the Gentiles rode on horses.

Ver. 8. *He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it*, etc.] This and the three following clauses are proverbial expressions, teaching men to be wise and cautious, lest by their conduct they bring mischief upon themselves; as it often is, the one that digs a pit for another, falls into it himself, as the wise man's father before him had observed, (~~<3975>~~ Psalm 7:15,16 9:15,16); as kings that lay snares for their people, and subjects that plot against their sovereign; or courtiers that form schemes for the ruin of those that are in their way; or any man that devises mischief against another, frequently so it is, that the same befalls them; as Haman, who prepared a gallows for Mordecai, was hanged on it himself;

and whoso breaketh an hedge a serpent shall bite him; which often lies hid in fences, in old walls, and rotten hedges^{f238}, (~~<3159>~~ Amos 5:19 ~~<408>~~ Acts 28:3); so he that breaks down the hedges and fences of kingdoms and commonwealths, and breaks through the fundamental laws of a civil constitution, and especially that transgresses the laws of God, moral or civil, may expect to smart for it. Jarchi interprets this hedge of the sayings of their wise men, which those that transgress shall suffer death by the hand of heaven: but it would be much better to apply it to the doctrines contained in the word of God, which are a hedge and fence to the church of God, and whoever transgress them will suffer for it; (see 2 John 8,9); The Targum, by the "serpent", understands an ungodly king, who bites like

a serpent, into whose hands such transgressors shall be delivered: and some have thought of the old serpent the devil, as Alshech, who deceived Adam and Eve.

Ver. 9. *Whoso removeth stones shall be hurt therewith*, etc.] That carries them from the quarry, where they are dug; or takes them from a heap, where they lie; or that attempts to pull them out of a building, where they are put; or removes them from places, where they are set as boundaries and landmarks; all which is troublesome, and by which men get hurt; the stones fall upon them, or are too heavy for them, or they do what they should not do, and so bring themselves into trouble; as do all such persons who are for removing the boundaries of commonwealths and communities, and for changing laws, and altering constitutions;

[and] he that cleaveth wood shall be endangered thereby; of cutting himself: so he that soweth discord among brethren, that makes divisions in families, neighbourhoods, kingdoms, and churches; (see ^{<1136>}Proverbs 6:16,19) (^{<518>}Romans 16:18). Jarchi renders it, “shall be warmed” or “heated”, according to the sense of the word, as he thinks, in (^{<100>}1 Kings 1:2); though he understands it of being profited by studying in the law and the commandments; of which he interprets the clause; and Ben Melech observes, that the word so signifies in the Arabic language; and Mr. Broughton renders it, “shall be heated thereby”. The Targum paraphrases it,

“shall be burnt with fire, by the hand of the Angel of the Lord:”

or, however, he may be overheated and do himself hurt, as men, that kindle the flame of contention and strife, often do.

Ver. 10. *If the iron be blunt*, etc.] With which a man cleaves wood: the axe, made of iron:

and he do not whet the edge; with some proper instrument to make it sharper, that it may cut the more easily;

then must he put to more strength; he must give a greater blow, strike the harder, and use more force; and yet it may not be sufficient, or; it may be to no purpose, and he himself may be in the greatest danger of being hurt; as such are who push things with all their might and main, without judgment and discretion;

but wisdom [is] profitable to direct; this is the “excellency” of wisdom, that it puts a man in the right way of doing things, and of doing them right; it directs him to take the best methods, and pursue the best ways and means of doing things, both for his own good and the good of others; and so it is better than strength, (²⁰⁹⁶Ecclesiastes 9:16,18).

Ver. 11. *Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment*, etc.] See (²¹⁸⁷Jeremiah 8:17). Or rather, “without a whisper”,^{f239}; without hissing, or any noise, giving no warning at all: so the Vulgate Latin version renders it, “in silence”; some serpents bite, others sting, some both; see (²¹³²Proverbs 23:32); some hiss, others not, as here;

and a babbler is no better; a whisperer, a backbiter, a busy tattling body, that goes from house to house, and, in a private manner, speaks evil of civil governments, of ministers of the word, and of other persons; and; in a secret way, defames men, and detracts from their characters: such an one is like a venomous viper, a poisonous serpent or adder; and there is no more guarding against him than against such a creature that bites secretly.

Ver. 12. *The words of a wise man’s mouth [are] gracious*, etc.] Or “grace”^{f240}. He speaks kind and good things in favour of the characters of men, and not as the babbling detractor: he speaks well of civil magistrates and rulers in the state; of the ministers of the word in the church; and of all his fellow creatures, as far as can with truth be said: and a truly good and gracious man, who is Solomon’s wise man, in opposition to a fool and wicked man; his discourse will run upon the grace of God, upon the doctrines of grace, and upon the experience of the truth of grace on his heart: upon the grace of God the Father, in loving and choosing men; in contriving their salvation; in making a covenant of grace with them in Christ; in sending him to die for them, and in accepting his satisfaction and righteousness for them: and on the grace of the Son, in becoming their surety; assuming their nature, dying in their room and stead, interceding for them, taking care of them, and supplying them with grace out of his fulness: and on the grace of the Spirit, in regeneration and sanctification; working in them faith, hope, and love; applying precious promises to them, and sealing them up to the day of redemption: of these things they speak often one to another, and cannot but talk of the things they have felt and seen: and such words and discourses are gracious, graceful, and grateful to truly pious souls, and minister grace unto them; and are also well pleasing

and acceptable to God and Christ, as well as gain them favour among men; (see ^{1221b}Proverbs 22:11 ⁴⁰⁴³Ephesians 4:29);

but the lips of a fool swallow up himself; his words are not only able and displeasing to others, but bring ruin upon himself; by talking too freely of rulers and others, he brings himself into trouble, and plunges himself into difficulties, out of which he cannot easily get; yea, is swallowed up in them, and destroyed. Or, his “lips swallow up him”^{f241}; the wise man, whose words are gracious; and, by his calumny and detraction, his deceit and lies, brings him into disgrace and danger: or, “swallows it up”, or “that”^{f242}; the grace of the wise man, or his gracious words; and hinders the edification of others by them, and the good effects of them. Though the first sense seems best.

Ver. 13. *The beginning of the words of his mouth [is] foolishness*, etc.] As soon as ever he opens his mouth, he betrays his folly; the first word he speaks is a foolish one; or it is from the abundant folly in his heart that he speaks, which is the source and spring of all his foolish talk;

and the end of his talk [is] mischievous madness; to himself and others; as he goes on, he appears more and more foolish, and yet more confident of his own wisdom; and is resolutely set on having his own way and will; grows warm, and is violently hot, to have his own words regarded; and, if contradicted, is like a madman, scattering arrows, firebrands, and death; his talk from first to last is a circle of folly; and, though it begins with something weak, and may seem innocent, yet it ends and issues in wickedness and madness, in rage and wrath, in oaths and curses.

Ver. 14. *A fool also is full of words*, etc.] Or, “multiplies words”^{f243}. Is very talkative, says the same thing over and over again; uses an abundance of waste words, that have no meaning in them; utters every thing that comes uppermost, without any order or judgment; affects to talk on every subject, whether he knows anything of it or not; and will engross all the conversation to himself, though of all in company the most unfit for it;

a man cannot tell what shall be; and what shall be after him who can tell him? what the fool is talking of; what is the drift of his discourse; or where it will end, and what he will bring it to, it is so noisy, confused, and incoherent: or no man can tell future things, or what will come to pass; nor can any man inform another of future events; and yet a fool boasts and brags of what he shall do, and what he shall have, as if he was master of

the future, and knew for certain what would come to pass, which the wisest of men do not.

Ver. 15. *The labour of the foolish wearieth everyone of them*, etc.] The labour of fools, both in speaking and doing, weary those who have any concern with them, and themselves likewise, since all their labour is vain and fruitless;

because he knoweth not how to go to the city; to any city, the road to which is usually broad, and plain and easy to be found, and yet cannot be found by the foolish man; showing, that he that talks of abstruse things, things too high and wonderful for him, which he affects to know, must needs be a stranger to them, since things the most easy to be understood he is ignorant of, and wearies himself to find; or he does not know how to behave himself in a city, among citizens, in a civil and polite manner. The Targum is,

“he learns not to go to the city, where wise men dwell, to learn instruction from it.”

Some interpret it of the city of Jerusalem, where were the temple, sanhedrim, synagogues, schools, etc. but it may be better applied to the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem, which fools or wicked men know not the way unto, nor do they seek after it; (see ^{<19471>}Psalm 107:7 ^{<10713>}Matthew 7:13,14); so Alshech interprets it of heaven.

Ver. 16. *Woe to thee, O land, when thy king [is] a child*, etc.] Not so much in age; though it is sometimes an unhappiness to a nation to be governed by a minor, especially if the young king has not good tutors, guardians, ministers, and counsellors, about him; but, if otherwise, a nation may be very happy under a minority, or the government of a young prince; such were Solomon, Joash, Uzziah, Josiah, and our Edward VI: but it rather respects one that is a child in understanding and judgment, in manners and conduct; that minds his pleasures, as children their play; is fickle and changeable, passionate and self-willed, unskilful in government, and yet will not be advised. The Targum applies this to the land of Israel, and instances in wicked Jeroboam, who made the morning sacrifice to cease; (see ^{<3182>}Isaiah 3:12). From considering the bad effects of folly in men in general, in private persons and in subjects, the wise man proceeds to observe the ill consequences of it to a nation, in kings and princes, in civil magistrates: Jerom or Bede interprets this allegorically: Woe to the

land whose king is the devil, who is always desirous of new things, (~~1001~~2 Corinthians 4:4);

and thy princes eat in the morning; as soon as they are up, children like; and not only eat, which may be convenient and lawful to do; but eat to excess, in a riotous and intemperate manner, and so unfit themselves for any service all the day: the “morning” is particularly observed, because the fittest time for consultation about the affairs of government; and was the usual time of sitting in judgment and trying causes, (~~3012~~Jeremiah 21:12); and also for acts of religion and devotion. And so the Targum,

“and thy princes eat bread before they offer the daily morning sacrifice.”

Sad is the case of a nation, when not only their king is a minor, or a foolish one; but when his tutors and guardians, or his ministers of state and counsellors, give up themselves to sensual pleasures, and neglect public affairs; and, instead of being in the council chamber, or in a court of judicature, or at their early devotions, are indulging themselves in riotous eating and drinking.

Ver. 17. *Blessed [art] thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles,* etc.] Or “heroes”^{f244}, called “Hhorim” in the Hebrew, which signifies “white”; either from the white garment they wore, or rather from the purity and ingenuity of their minds and manners; being illustrious persons, not only by birth and education, but in their lives and actions. Now a land is happy when it is governed by a king that is not only descended from a race of heroes and illustrious men, and has a princely and liberal education; but that imitates his ancestors, and treads in their steps, and is famous himself for wisdom, virtue, and real piety, in which true nobility consists; and so the Vulgate Latin version renders it, “whose king is noble”; who is of an ingenuous mind, has princely virtues and qualifications; who is wise and prudent, skilful in the affairs of government, and assiduous and industrious therein; for as, on the one hand, kings may, as they commonly do, descend from illustrious progenitors, and yet be base and wicked, ignoble and infamous, in their administration; and, on the other hand, persons may be raised from a low estate to royal dignity, as David and others, and yet behave with great prudence and ingenuity. The Targum applies this to the land of Israel also, and instances in Hezekiah, a man mighty in the law;

and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness; that is, eat their meals at proper times, and that after they have been at business; to refresh nature, and recruit their strength, that they may be fit for further service; and do not indulge themselves, and spend their time, in rioting and drunkenness; which would render them very unfit for public business, to sit in council, or in any court of judicature: according to the Targum, the time was four o'clock, that is, ten o'clock in the morning. Or, "not unto drinking" or "drunkenness"^{f245}; they do not eat so as to cause an appetite, or eager desire for drinking to excess: or, not "with drinking"^{f246}; their eating is not attended with excessive drinking; they eat and drink moderately. The Egyptians had a law, which fixed such a measure of wine to be allowed their kings daily, and no more^{f247}; and it was Solon's law, given to the Athenians, that if a prince was found drunk, death was his punishment^{f248}; and, with the Indians, if a woman killed a drunken king, her reward was to marry his successor^{f249}: all which show how odious drunkenness was with the Heathens, and especially in their kings and princes; (see ~~2104~~ Proverbs 31:4,5). So Plato observes^{f250}, that

"drunkenness ought to be abstained from; and rather it should be allowed to any than to a keeper, (that is, of a city and its laws, a Civil magistrate), for it would be ridiculous for a keeper to need a keeper."

Jerom, as before observed, interprets this figuratively, "blessed is the land", of the church; whose "King" is Christ, the son of nobles, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and whose "princes" are the apostles, who seek not pleasure in this world, but shall eat in the world to come.

Ver. 18. *By much slothfulness the building decayeth,* etc.] Or, "by slothfulnesses"^{f251}, The word is in the dual number, and so may signify the slothfulness of the hands, as Aben Ezra, of both hands, and of both feet; or the various kinds of slothfulness, as the Arabic version, slothfulness both of body and mind; or of all sorts of persons, superiors and inferiors, princes and subjects; and with respect to all things present and future: and, as through slothfulness a material building decays; or a "beam", as the word signifies, the raftering of a house, the roof, which consists of rafters and beams joined together when the tiling is decayed by winds and rains, or any breaches made in the rafters, and no care taken to repair, the whole falls in, and the house is in ruins: so figurative buildings, families, churches, and kingdoms, come to nothing, through the sluggishness of masters of

families, ministers of the word, and civil magistrates; to the latter of which more especially this is to be applied, who give up themselves to luxury and sloth;

and, through idleness of the hands, the house droppeth through; or, “through the letting” or “hanging down of the hands”^{f252}; the remissness of them, as is to be observed in idle persons, who will not lift them up to work; particularly to repair a breach in a house, by means of which the rain drops through it, and makes it uncomfortable and unsafe being in it; and, in process of time, that itself drops to the ground: and this expresses the same thing, how, through the neglect of the civil magistrate, a commonwealth comes to nothing; or, however, the members of it become wretched and miserable.

Ver. 19. *A feast is made for laughter*, etc.] Or, “who make bread for laughter”^{f253}. Not bakers, who make bread for common use, and for all sorts of persons, sorrowful ones as others; but luxurious men, particularly such princes as are before described; they “make bread”, that is, a feast, as the phrase is used, (^{<2000>}Daniel 5:1); not for mere refreshment, but to promote mirth and gaiety to an excessive degree; being attended with rioting and drunkenness, chambering and wantonness, with revellings and dancing;

and wine maketh merry; or, “and [they prepare] wine”^{f254}; which is provided in plenty at feasts; and which is sometimes put for a feast itself, and called a banquet of wine, (^{<2000>}Esther 7:2); which wine makes merry, and men drink of it till they become drunk with it, at such profuse feasts: or, “which maketh life cheerful”^{f255}; as it does, when moderately used: “cheers the living”; so Aben Ezra;

but money answereth all [things]; is in the room of all things, and by it men obtain everything they want and wish for; it answers the requests of all, and supplies them with what they stand in need of, or can desire: particularly such expensive feasts, and sumptuous entertainments, are made by means of money; and, in this luxurious way, the coffers of princes are drained, and they are obliged to raise new levies, and impose new taxes upon their subjects, to the oppression of them. Or else the sense may be, that princes should consider, and not be so profuse in their manner of living, but be more frugal and careful of the public money, and lay it up against a time of need; since it is that that answers all things, is the sinew of war when that arises, and will procure men and arms, to secure and protect

them from their enemies, and obtain peace and safety for them and their subjects, which otherwise they cannot expect.

Ver. 20. *Curse not the king; no, not in thy thought*, etc.] Though he is a child, and unskilful in government, gives himself to his passions and pleasures, and neglects the affairs of the kingdom; yet be so far from rebelling against him, and doing him any injury, or speaking ill of him, as not even to wish him any ill; or, within thine own breast, imprecate any evil upon him, but rather pray for him, wish him well, and do everything to promote the welfare of his person and government, and this both for the Lord's sake, and for conscience's sake; and therefore curse him not "in thy conscience"^{f256}, as some render it. Jarchi interprets this of God the King of the world; (see ~~RB~~ Job 2:9); and Jerom of Christ; who should not be blasphemed, lest the angels, that go about the earth, should carry it to heaven;

and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber; subordinate rulers and magistrates, the king's ministers and counsellors, who are commonly rich; even those luxurious princes, before described, who give up themselves to eating and drinking, and spend the public money in profuse feasts and entertainments: yet a man should be careful how he speaks against them; and not only be cautious of what he says about them, in a vilifying way, in companies and clubs where disaffected persons speak their minds freely; but even in his own house, where his servants may hear him; nay, even in his bedchamber where only his wife and children are;

for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter; an hyperbolical expression; showing that, by some strange and unthought of ways and means, treason, though so very secret, should be brought to the knowledge of the king and his ministers; as if a bird, sitting at the window, or flying by at the same time, should hear and carry it to them: sometimes this is by means of spies and informers, that kings have in all places, to bring them news of the behaviour and sentiments of men, of whom such understand the passage; or by means of such, that bear an ill will to them, or are faithful subjects to the king. With the Persians were certain officers, called the king's ears, and the emperor's eyes; by means of whom the king was believed to be a god, since, by the ears and eyes of others, through those spies, he knew all that was done everywhere^{f257}. Some interpret it of angels, good or bad: Jarchi, of the soul of man, which at last flies to heaven, which he thinks is the bird of the air;

and of an angel that is associated to him, his guardian angel; meant, as he supposes, by that which hath wings, or “the master of wings”^{f258}.

CHAPTER 11

INTRODUCTION TO ECCLESIASTES 11

This chapter begins with an exhortation to liberality to the poor, enforced by several reasons and arguments, and the objections to it removed; and the whole illustrated by various similes, (²¹¹⁰Ecclesiastes 11:1-6); and then it is observed, that a life attended with outward prosperity and inward peace, and spent in doing good, is very delightful, and very desirable it is to have it continued; yet it should be remembered this will not be always, that many days of darkness in the grave will come; and after all the whole of a man's life is vanity, as is often inculcated, (²¹¹¹Ecclesiastes 11:7,8); and the chapter is closed with an ironic address to young men, designed to show them the folly and danger of sinful courses, to reform them from them, and to put them in mind of a future judgment, (²¹¹²Ecclesiastes 11:9,10).

Ver. 1. *Cast thy bread upon the waters*, etc.] As the wise man had often suggested that nothing was better for a man than to enjoy the good of his labour himself, he here advises to let others, the poor, have a share with him; and as he had directed in the preceding chapter how men should behave towards their superiors, he here instructs them what notice they should take of their inferiors; and as he had cautioned against luxury and intemperance, he here guards against tenacity and covetousness, and exhorts to beneficence and liberality: that which is to be given is “bread”, which is put for all the necessaries of life, food and raiment; or money that answers all things, what may be a supply of wants, a support of persons in distress; what is useful, profitable, and beneficial; not stones or scorpions, or what will be useless or harmful: and it must be “thy” bread, a man's own; not independent of God who gives it him; but not another's, what he owes another, or has fraudulently obtained; but what he has got by his own labour, or he is through divine Providence in lawful possession of; hence alms in the Hebrew language is called “righteousness”: and it must be such bread as is convenient and fit for a man himself, such as he himself and his family eat of, and this he must cast, it must be a man's own act, and a voluntary one; his bread must not be taken and forced from him; it must be given freely, and in such a manner as not to be expected again; and

bountifully and plentifully, as a man casts seed into the earth; but here it is said to be “upon the waters”; bread is to be given to such as are in distress and affliction, that have waters of a full cup wrung out unto them, whose faces are watered with tears, and foul with weeping, from whom nothing is to be expected again, who can make no returns; so that what is given thorn seems to be cast away and lost, like what is thrown into a river, or into the midst of the sea; and even it is to be given to such who prove ungrateful and unthankful, and on whom no mark or impression of the kindness is made and left, no more than upon water; yea, it is to be given to strangers never seen before nor after, like gliding water; so the Vulgate Latin version renders it, “passing waters”: or else to such who may be compared to well watered ground, or “moist ground”, as Mr. Broughton renders it; where the seed cast will grow up again, and bring forth fruit, and redound to the advantage of the sower, as what is given to the poor does; they are a good soil to sow upon, especially Christ’s poor, who are partakers of his living water, grace; (see ²¹²⁰Isaiah 32:20); though it may be the multitude of persons to whom alms is to be given are here intended, which are sometimes signified by waters, (⁴⁶⁷¹⁵Revelation 17:15); as (²¹¹⁰Ecclesiastes 11:2) seems to explain it. The Targum is,

“reach out the bread of thy sustenance to the poor that go in ships upon the thee of the water;”

and some think the speech is borrowed from navigation, and is an allusion to merchants who send their goods beyond sea, and have a large return for them;

for thou shalt find it after many days; not the identical bread itself, but the fruit and reward of such beneficence; which they shall have unexpectedly, or after long waiting, as the husbandman for his seed; it suggests that such persons should live long, as liberal persons oftentimes do, and increase in their worldly substance; and if they should not live to reap the advantage of their liberality, yet their posterity will, as the seed of Jonathan did for the kindness he showed to David: or, however, if they find it not again in temporal things, yet in spirituals; and shall be recompensed in the resurrection of the just, and to all eternity. So the Targum,

“for after the time of many days, then thou shall find the reward of it in this world (so it is in the king’s Bible), and in the world to come;”

(see ^{<412D>}Luke 12:12-14). Jarchi instances in Jethro. Noldius^{f259} renders it “within many days”, even before many days are at an end; for seed sown by waters in hot climates soon sprung up, and produced fruit; see (^{<271D>}Daniel 11:20).

Ver. 2. *Give a portion to seven, and also to eight*, etc.] Or, a “part”^{f260}; not the whole of a man’s substance, for he must have to support himself and his family; he that does not take care of that is worse than an infidel; a man may bestow all his goods on the poor, and not have charity; though no doubt there was true charity, or love, in the poor widow that threw in all her substance into the treasury, which was an extraordinary case, (^{<508B>}1 Timothy 5:8 ^{<461D>}1 Corinthians 13:2 ^{<41244>}Mark 12:44); but a man is to give of such things that he has, ordinarily, and not all that he has, (^{<2144>}Luke 11:41); he is to give according to his ability, and what he can spare from the service of himself and family; and this is to be distributed, and given in parts to the poor, according to their necessities; not all to one, but something to everyone, “to seven, and also to eight”: if seven persons apply, give them everyone a part; and, if an eighth person comes, send him not away empty; give to every one that asketh, (^{<461D>}Luke 6:30); compare with this phrase (^{<308B>}Micah 5:5); Some think this respects time, so Aben Ezra; that a man should give constantly and continually, should be daily giving, all the seven days of the week, and when the eighth day comes, or the week begins again, go on in the same course. The Targum is,

“put a good part of seed in thy field in Tisri (the seventh month), and do not cease from sowing even in Casleu,”

the eighth month;

for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth; what calamities shall come upon it, which may sweep away all a man’s substance; it may be destroyed by fire, or washed away by a deluge of water, or plundered by an enemy; or, however, the day of death may quickly come, as it certainly shall, and then it will be no longer in a man’s power to do good with what he has. Moreover, the arguments which covetous men use against liberality, the wise man uses for it; they argue that bad times may come, and they may sustain great losses; or have a greater charge upon them, a growing family; or they may live to old age, and want it themselves: be it no, these are reasons why they should give liberally while they can; that when these things they fear shall come upon them, they may be relieved and supplied by others; for those that show mercy shall find mercy; and this

is the way to make themselves friends in a time of need, and against it; (see ^{<219>}Luke 16:9).

Ver. 3. *If the clouds be full of rain, they empty [themselves] upon the earth*, etc.] They do not retain it; sad would it be for the earth if they did; but they let it down softly and gently, in plentiful showers upon each of the parts of the earth without distinction, by which it is refreshed, and made fruitful; nor are they losers by it, for they draw up great quantities again out of the ocean, and so constantly answer the ends for which they are appointed. And so rich men, who are full of the good things of this world, should not keep them to themselves, and for their own use only; but should consider they are stewards under God, and for others, and should be like the full clouds, empty themselves; and give to those who want of what God has given them, freely and cheerfully, bountifully and plentifully, and that without respect of persons, imitating their God and Creator, who sendeth rain upon the just and the unjust, (^{<155>}Matthew 5:45); and such in the issue are no losers, but gainers; they fill again as fast as they empty;

and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be; where the seed falls, and it grows up into a plant, and to a tree, there it continues, whether to the north or to the south; and so accordingly brings forth fruit, and such as it is men partake of it; to which purpose Jarchi, and who applies it to the disciple of a wise man, who is profitable in the place where he is, not only in life, but after death: or where the fruit of a tree fall, “there they are”, so Aben Ezra reads the last clause in the plural number; that is, there are persons enough to gather the fruit; and so where a rich man is, there are poor enough about him to partake of his bounty: or as when a tree is cut down, let it fall where it will, there it abides, and is no more fruitful; so when a man is cut off by death, as he was then, so he remains; if a gracious and good man, and has done good, he is like a tree that falls to the south, he enters into the paradise of God, the joys of heaven; and if not a good man, and has not done good, he is like a tree that falls to the north, he goes into a state of darkness, misery, and distress; (see ^{<621>}Revelation 22:11,14,15); or however, be this as it will, he is no more useful in this world; and therefore it becomes men to do all the good they can in health and life, for there is none to be done in the grave where they are going: or else the sense is, that as when a tree falls, whether it be to the south or to the north, it matters not to the owner, there it lies, and is of the same advantage to him; so an act of beneficence, let it be done to what object soever, a worthy or an

unworthy one, yet being done with a view to the glory of God and the good of men, it shall not lose its reward: and so this is an answer to the objection of some against giving, because they do not know whether the object proposed is deserving: though some think the same thing is intended by these metaphorical expressions, as is suggested in the latter part of (²¹¹¹⁰Ecclesiastes 11:2), that evils or calamities may come upon men like heavy showers of rain, which wash away things; or like storms and tempests of rain, thunder and lightning, which break down trees, and cause them to fall to the north or to the south; and thus in like manner by one judgment or another men may be stripped of all their substance, and therefore it is right to make use of it while they have it.

Ver. 4. *He that observeth the wind shall not sow*, etc.] Who before he sows his seed is careful to observe where the wind is, from what corner it blows, and forbears sowing until it is down or changes, lest it should be troublesome unto him in sowing, or blow away his seed, and waits for a better season; such a man may lose his seedtime and never sow at all, and his grain in his barn may be devoured by vermin, or be destroyed by one accident or another, and so he may lose both his seed and his crop;

and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap; which are uncertain signs of weather; and if a man gives heed to them, and puts off his sowing from time to time, for the sake of better weather, as he may never sow, so it is impossible that he should reap; and if he sows, and when his grain is ripe and forbears to reap because of the clouds, lest his grain should be wet, may never reap at all: and so it is with respect to liberality; if a man will raise difficulties, and make objections, and attend unto them; if he puts off giving till such an affliction is removed from him and his family, or that is grown up; or such an estate is obtained, or he has got to such an amount of riches, or till more proper and deserving objects present, with twenty things more of the like kind; if he defers giving on such accounts, or through fear of want, which may possess his mind for various reasons, he may never give nor get, yea, never do any good work; for, if nothing is done till all difficulties are removed, no good thing will ever be done.

Ver. 5. *As thou knowest not what [is] the way of the spirit*, etc.] If indeed a man could foresee and be assured of seasonable weather for sowing and reaping, or a proper opportunity for doing good, all circumstances agreeing, it would be right to wait for it, and take it; but as these things are not in our power, nor within the compass of our knowledge, we should

take the first opportunity of doing good, and leave the issue to divine Providence: as in many things in nature we are and should be content to be ignorant of them, and leave them with God, who brings them about by his secret power and providence: as, for instance, we know not “the way of the spirit”, or “of the wind”^{f261}, as some render it; from whence it comes and whither it goes, where and when it will subside, or what wind will blow next; or of the spirit or soul of man, how it enters into the body. So the Targum,

“how the spirit of the breath of life goes into the body of an infant:”

whether it is by traduction, as some, which is not likely; or by transfusion, or by creation out of nothing, or by formation out of something pre-existent, and by an immediate infusion of it: or, “what is the way of the breath”; of the breath of a child in the womb, whether it breathes or not; if it does, how? if not, how does it live? or what is the way of the soul out of the body, how it goes out of it when the body dies;

[nor] how the bones [do grow] in the womb of her that is with child; or is “full”, pregnant, big with child: or “in the womb that is full”^{f262}; full of liquids, and yet bones are separated from them, grow out of them, and in them, and are hardened; all which how it should be is unknown: “bones” are mentioned because they are the more solid and substantial parts of the body, the basis and strength of it; and because it may seem more difficult how any part of the seed should harden into them, while other parts are converted into skin and flesh;

even so thou knowest not the works of God, who maketh all; the Targum adds, in wisdom; as men are ignorant of many of the works of nature, so of those of Providence, especially which are future; as whether men shall be rich or poor, have days of prosperity or adversity; what their latter end will be, whether they shall not stand in need of the assistance of others, it may be of them or theirs to whom they now give; or what will be the issue of present acts of beneficence and liberality; these, with many other things of the like kind, should be left with God. Some understand this of the work of grace and conversion, which is a secret and difficult work, only wrought by the power and grace of God; and may be begun, or shortly will, in a poor person, judged an unworthy object of charity for supposed want of it, a thing unknown.

Ver. 6. *In the morning sow thy seed*, etc.] Do all good works early and diligently, which is expressed by sowing in righteousness, (²⁸⁰¹²Hosea 10:12); particularly alms deeds, often signified by sowing seed, (¹⁸³¹³Psalms 112:9) (⁴⁷⁰¹⁶2 Corinthians 9:6-10); this should be in the morning of youth, that persons may be inured to it betimes as Obadiah was; and in the morning of prosperity, as soon as ever Providence smiles on men, and puts it into the power of their hands, who should honour the Lord with the firstfruits of their increase;

and in the evening withhold not thine hand; from sowing seed, from doing good, particularly acts of charity, in the evening of old age, as Jarchi, like old Barzillai; an age in which men are apt to be more tenacious and covetous, and withhold more than is meet; yea, in the evening of adversity do not leave off doing good as much as can be; but do as the Macedonian churches, whose deep poverty abounded to the riches of their liberality in a great trial of affliction, (⁴⁸⁰²2 Corinthians 8:2); in short, good is to be done at all times, as opportunity offers, throughout the whole of life, and in all conditions and circumstances;

for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that; the seed sown in the morning or in the evening, which good work shall best succeed; therefore do both, try all ways, make use of all opportunities;

or whether they both [shall be] alike good; acceptable to God, and useful to men; and if so, a man will have no occasion to repent of what he has done both in youth and old age.

Ver. 7. *Truly the light [is] sweet*, etc.] Here begins a new subject, as most think; and some here begin the twelfth and last chapter, and not improperly. This is true of natural light, which is exceeding pleasant, useful, and beneficial; by which men discern objects, behold the things of nature with pleasure, walk in the way without stumbling, and do the work and business of life: and also of civil light or prosperity; for, as afflictions are expressed by darkness, and adversity by night; so the comforts and good things of life by light and day, which are very desirable and delectable: and here "life" itself may be meant, for light is sometimes put for life, which is the light of the living; and what sweeter and more desirable than that, especially a life attended with prosperity and peace? (see ¹⁸³³⁸Job 33:28,30 3:20 2:4 ⁴⁸⁰¹²Psalms 34:12). The Targum and Jarchi interpret it of the light of the law; and which is indeed a light, and so is the whole word of God, (²⁰¹⁶³Proverbs 6:23 ¹⁹³⁰⁵Psalms 119:105) (⁶⁰⁰¹⁹2 Peter

1:19); but may be better applied unto the Gospel, which is a great and glorious light, (²³⁰²Isaiah 9:2 ~~404~~ 2 Corinthians 4:4); and a means of enlightening dark minds; not only of showing men their sinfulness, as the law does; but the insufficiency of their righteousness, of all their own goodness and good works to justify; it reveals Christ, and the glories of his person; it sets him forth evidently, as crucified and slain, for the worst of sinners; it makes manifest his fulness, ability, and willingness, as a Saviour; righteousness, peace, pardon, and salvation by him; it makes known things not to be discerned by the light of nature, even things wonderful and marvellous, as well as what is the way a man should walk in: and this light is sweet and pleasant, not to a blind and carnal man, who despises it, and reckons it foolishness, but to those who are enlightened by the Spirit of God; and to these it is very delightful, even to all their senses; it is sweet to their taste, a joyful sound to their ears, and beautiful to their sight are the feet of them that bring its good tidings. The light of grace, which appears in first conversion, and comes from God suddenly, which at first is small, but increases, is exceeding pleasant, strikes the soul with delight and wonder; it is marvellous light, (~~4119~~ 1 Peter 2:9); and so is the light of joy and gladness to believers, when it arises to them after a time of darkness, or the light of God's countenance, (³⁹⁴⁶Psalm 4:6,7); and such will be the light of the latter day glory, and more especially the light of the heavenly state;

and a pleasant [thing it is] for the eyes to behold the sun; the natural sun, shining at noon day, which is a luminous and glorious body, communicating light and heat to all the world: which is so glorious and so pleasant to behold, that Anaxagoras, the philosopher, being asked what he was born for, answered,

“to see the heavens, the sun, and the moon^{f263};”

and Eudoxus, another philosopher, said,

“he could be content to perish, could he get so near to the sun as to learn the nature of it^{f264}.”

To “see the sun”, in the language of this book, is to live in this world, and to enjoy the light of the sun, and the comforts of life; see (²⁰⁷¹Ecclesiastes 7:11); and now a life, attended with outward prosperity and inward peace, that is spent in doing and enjoying good, is a very desirable and delightful one; though such a man should not think of living always, but of death, and

the days of darkness, as in (²¹¹⁰⁸Ecclesiastes 11:8). This may he applied to Christ, the sun of righteousness, (⁴⁸⁴¹¹Psalm 84:11 ³⁰⁴¹²Malachi 4:2); the fountain of all spiritual light and heat; the brightness of his Father's glory; and who is superior to angels and men; and is to be beheld by faith, and in his own light, as the sun is; and whom to look upon with an eye of faith is exceeding pleasant and delightful, and fills with joy unspeakable and full of glory, (⁶¹⁰⁰⁸1 Peter 1:8).

Ver. 8. *But if a man live many years*, etc.] Enjoying light and life, and beholding the sun with much delight and pleasure. The days of men on earth, or under the sun, are but few at most; but some live many days, in comparison of others; they come to a good old age, as Abraham did; and to their graves like a shock of corn fully ripe; and arrive to, or beyond, the common term of human life;

[and] rejoice in them all; in and throughout the many years he lives, even all his days; that is, is blessed with a plentiful portion of the good things of life, and enjoys them in a free and comfortable manner, with moderation and thankfulness; partakes of the good of his labour, and rejoices in his works, in the fruit and effects of them, through the blessing of divine Providence; not only is blessed with many days, but those days good ones, days of prosperity: such a man is in a happy case; and especially if he is possessed of spiritual joy, of joy in the Holy Ghost; if he rejoices in Christ, and in what he is to him, and has done for him; and having professed him, and submitted to his ordinances, goes on his way, rejoicing. Some render it, "let him rejoice in them all"^{f265}; a good man has reason to rejoice always, throughout the whole course of his life; because of the goodness of divine Providence to him; because of the blessings of grace bestowed on him; and because of his good hope of eternal glory and happiness. The Targum is,

"in all these it becomes him to rejoice, and to study in the law of the Lord;"

yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many; or, "they may be"^{f266}; meaning either, that though persons may live long, and enjoy much health and prosperity; yet, in the midst of all, they should consider, that it is possible that days of adversity and distress may come upon them, and continue; and therefore should not please themselves, as Job did, that they shall die in their nest in the height their prosperity, since they know not what days of evil may come, and how long they will last; or, however, they should remember the night of death, that is hastening, the

land of darkness, and the shadow of death, they are going to; the dark grave, they will soon be laid in, where they will remain many days; many more than those in which they have lived, enjoying the light of the sun, even till the heavens shall be no more; though these days will not be infinite, they will have an end, and there will be a resurrection from the dead: and particularly if a man is a wicked man, that has lived a long and prosperous life, he should not only remember the above things; but also that outer darkness, that blackness of darkness reserved for him, the darkness of eternal death, which will be his portion for evermore. The Targum is,

“he shall remember the days of the darkness of death, and shall not sin; for many are the days that he shall lie dead in the house of the grave.”

All that cometh [is] vanity; Aben Ezra interprets this of every man that comes into the world, as in (²¹⁰⁰Ecclesiastes 1:2,4); whether high or low, rich or poor, in prosperity or adversity; man, at his best estate, is vanity: let a man therefore be in what circumstances he will, he should not take up his rest here; all that comes to him, everything that befalls him, is vanity. The wise man keeps in view the main thing he proposed, to prove that is vanity, all in this life; for what is to come hereafter, in a future state of happiness, cannot come under this name and character.

Ver. 9. *Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth*, etc.] This advice may be considered as serious; and either as relating to natural, corporeal, and temporal delight and pleasure, under due limitations; that as mirth and cheerfulness, or a free use of the creatures of God, with moderation and temperance, is allowable to all men in common, and is spoken of throughout this book as commendable, and is healthful and profitable to men; so it is particularly suitable to the youthful age, whose natural desires may be enjoyed, and their outward senses may be gratified, in a lawful way, so far as is consistent with the fear of God, and the expectation of a future judgment: or it may be considered with respect to religious and spiritual exercises; as young men should remember their Creator in the days of their youth, as it follows; so they should rejoice in God their Maker, (²¹¹⁰Psalm 149:2); they should rejoice not to do evil, to which human nature is inclined, especially in youth, but to do good; should rejoice, not in the ways of sin, but in the ways of wisdom; not in any outward attainment of beauty, wit, strength, or riches, but in the grace of God; not in themselves,

or their boastings, but in Christ, his person, righteousness, and salvation; not in the things of time and sense, but in hope of the glory of God;

and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth; here is a different word for youth than the former, which Alshech distinguishes thus; the first designs the time to the age of thirteen, and this from thence to twenty. Or, “let thine heart do thee good”, so the Septuagint. The Targum is,

“and let thine heart be good in thee.”

Symmachus renders it, “and let thine heart be in good”; the thoughts of thine heart be employed about that which is good, spiritual, heavenly, and divine; the affections of thine heart set thereon; and the will and desires of thine heart be drawn out after such things: let thine heart prompt and put thee on doing that which is good, with delight and pleasure; but, in order, to all this, the heart must be made good by the spirit and grace of God;

and walk in the ways of thy heart; being created a clean one, sprinkled, purged, and purified by the blood of Christ; in which the fear of God is put; the laws of God are written; where Christ is formed, and his word dwells richly, and he himself by faith, where the Spirit of God and his graces are: and then to walk in the ways of such a heart is to walk in the fear of God, according to his word, as Christ is an example; and to walk after the spirit, and not after the flesh. The Septuagint and Arabic versions are, “and walk in the ways of thine heart unblamable”: the Targum,

“and walk in humility in the ways of thine heart:”

which all agree with the sense given: so Alshech interprets the ways of the heart; of the ways of the good imagination of good men;

and in the sight of thine eyes; as enlightened by the Spirit of God, directing and guiding in the way in which a man should walk; looking unto Jesus, all the while he is walking or running his Christian race; and walking in him, as he has received him; pressing towards him, the mark, for the prize of the high calling. The Targum is,

“and be cautious of the sight of thine eyes, and look not upon evil.”

The Septuagint and Arabic versions insert the negative; “and not in the sight of thine eyes”. Most interpreters understand all this its an ironic concession to young men, to indulge themselves in carnal mirth, to take their swing of sinful pleasures, to do all their corrupt hearts incline them to;

and to gratify their outward senses and carnal lusts to the uttermost; even the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye and the pride of life, which young men are most addicted to: do all this, as if it was said, and see what will be the issue of it; or, do all this if you can, with this one thing bore in mind, a future judgment; like those expressions in (^{<11215>}1 Kings 22:15 ^{<4185>}Matthew 26:45 ^{<2181>}Lamentations 3:21); and to this sense the following clause is thought most to incline: and the rather, as the above phrases are generally used in a bad sense;

but know thou, that for all these [things] God will bring thee into judgment; not temporal, but eternal; not in this present life, but in the world to come; the judgment that will be after death, the last and awful judgment; and which is certain, may be known; of which a man may be assured from the light of nature, and from divine revelation; (see Gill on “^{<21817>}Ecclesiastes 3:17”); into which all men will be brought, even whether they will or not; and every work shall be brought into it, good or bad, open or secret, (^{<2124>}Ecclesiastes 12:14). Wherefore “these things” may respect either; and the consideration of a future judgment should influence the lives of men, and engage them both to perform acts of piety and religion in youth, and throughout the whole of life, and to shun and avoid everything that is evil. Herodotus^{f267} speaks of a custom among the Egyptians, at their feasts; that, just at the close of them, one carries about in a coffin the image of a dead man, exactly like one, made of wood, the length of a cubit or two, showing it to all the guests; saying, look upon it, drink, and take pleasure, for such shalt thou be when dead.

Ver. 10. *Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart,* etc.] Worldly sorrow, as opposed to lawful mirth and cheerfulness, and especially to spiritual joy: or “anger”^{f268}, as the word may be rendered, and often is; either at the providence of God, or at the correction of friends; all perturbations of the mind; all fierceness of spirit, and fiery passions, to which youthful age is subject: or all those things, as Jarchi observes, that provoke God to anger; sinful lusts and pleasures, the end and issue of which also is sorrow to men; and which agrees with our version;

and put away evil from thy flesh; or body; such as intemperance and uncleanness, to which young men are addicted: the advice is much the same, in both clauses, with that of the apostle’s, “flee youthful lusts”, (^{<1122>}2 Timothy 2:22). Jarchi interprets this of the evil concupiscence;

for childhood and youth [are] vanity; which quickly pass away; come into manhood, and soon slide into old age, and are gone presently, and all things within that compass: all actions done in that age are for the most part vain and foolish; and all the delights, joys, and pleasures thereof, vanishing and transitory. The last word^{f269}, used to express the juvenile age, either is akin to a word which signifies the “morning”; youth being the morning and dawn of man’s age, and increases as that; and as soon as it is peep of day with him, or he enters into life, he possesses vanity: or as having the signification of “blackness”; because, as Jarchi observes, the head of a young man is black: and so the Targum,

“childhood, and the days of blackness of hair, are vanity;”

whereas the hair of an aged man is gray.

CHAPTER 12

INTRODUCTION TO ECCLESIASTES 12

This chapter begins with advice to young men, which is continued from the preceding; and particularly to remember their Creator in the days of their youth; enforced from the consideration of the troubles and inconveniences of old age, (²¹¹⁷Ecclesiastes 12:1); which, in an allegorical way, is beautifully described, (²¹¹⁷Ecclesiastes 12:2-6); and from the certainty of death, when it would be too late, (²¹¹⁷Ecclesiastes 12:7). And then the wise man returns to his first proposition, and which he kept in view all along, that all is vanity in youth or old age, (²¹¹⁸Ecclesiastes 12:8); and recommends the reading of this book, from the diligence, pains and labour, he used in composing it; from the sententious matter in it; from the agreeable, acceptable, and well chosen words, in which he had expressed it; and from the wisdom, uprightness, truth, efficacy, and authority of the doctrines of it, (²¹¹⁹Ecclesiastes 12:9-11); and from its preference to other books, which were wearisome both to author and reader, (²¹²⁰Ecclesiastes 12:12). And it is concluded with the scope and design, the sum and substance of the whole of it, reducible to these two heads; the fear of God, and obedience to him, (²¹²³Ecclesiastes 12:13); and which are urged from the consideration of a future judgment, into which all things shall be brought, (²¹²⁴Ecclesiastes 12:14).

Ver. 1. *Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth*, etc.] Or “Creators”^{f270}; as “Makers”, (³⁸⁵⁰Job 35:10 ⁴⁹⁴⁰Psalms 149:2 ²⁵⁴⁵Isaiah 54:5); for more than one were concerned, as in the creation of all things in general, so of man in particular, (⁰⁰¹²⁵Genesis 1:26); and these are neither more nor fewer than three; and are Father, Son, Spirit; the one God that has created men, (³¹²⁰Malachi 2:10); the Father, who is the God of all flesh, and the Father of spirits; the former both of the bodies and souls of men, (²⁶¹⁷Jeremiah 31:27) (³⁸¹⁹Hebrews 12:9); the Son, by whom all things are created; for he that is the Redeemer and husband of his church, which are characters and relations peculiar to the Son, is the Creator, (²³⁰¹Isaiah 43:1 54:5); and the Holy Spirit not only garnished the heavens, and moved upon the face of the waters, but is the Maker of men, and gives them life,

(~~18304~~ Job 33:4). Now this God, Creator, should be “remembered” by young men; they should remember there is a God, which they are apt to be forgetful of; that this God is a God of great and glorious perfections, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, holy, just, and true; who judgeth in the earth, and will judge the world in righteousness, and them also; and that he is in Christ a God gracious, merciful, and pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin: they should remember him under this character, as a “Creator”, who has made them, and not they themselves; that they are made by him out of the dust of the earth, and must return to it; that he has brought them into being, and preserved them in it, and favoured them with the blessings of his providence, which are all from him that has made them: and they should remember the end for which they are made, to glorify him; and in what state man was originally made, upright, pure, and holy; but that he now is a fallen creature, and such are they, impure and unrighteous, impotent and weak, abominable in the sight of God, unworthy to live, and unfit to die; being transgressors of the laws of their Creator, which is deserving of death: they should remember what God their Creators, Father, Son, and Spirit, must have done or must do for them, if ever they are saved; the Father must have chosen them in Christ unto salvation; must have given his Son to redeem, and must send his Spirit into their hearts to create them anew; the Son must have been surety for them, assumed their nature, and died in their room and stead; and the Spirit must regenerate and make them new creatures, enlighten their minds, quicken their souls, and sanctify their hearts: they should remember the right their Creator has over them, the obligations they are under to him, and their duty to him; they should remember, with thankfulness, the favours they have received from him, and, with reverence and humility, the distance between him, as Creator, and them as creatures: they should remember to love him cordially and sincerely; to fear him with a godly fear; to worship him in a spiritual manner; to set him always before them, and never forget him. And all this they should do “in the days [their] youth”; which are their best and choicest day in which to serve him is most desirable by him, acceptable to him; who ordered the first of the ripe fruits and creatures of the first year to be offered to him: and then are men best able to serve him, when their bodies are healthful, strong, and vigorous; their senses quick, and the powers and faculties of their souls capable of being improved and enlarged: and to delay the service of him to old age, as it would be very ungrateful and exceeding improper, so no man can be sure of arriving to it; and if he should, yet what follows is enough to determine against such a delay;

while the evil days come not; meaning the days of old age; said to be evil, not with respect to the evil of fault or sin; so all days are evil, or sin is committed in every age, in infancy, in childhood, in youth, in manhood, as well as in old age: but with respect to the evil of affliction and trouble which attend it, as various diseases; yea, that itself is a disease, and an incurable one; much weakness of body, decay of intellects, and many other things, which render life very troublesome and uncomfortable^{f271}, as well as unfit for religious services;

nor the years draw nigh, when thou shall say, I have no pleasure in them; that is, corporeal pleasure; no sensual pleasure; sight, taste, and hearing, being lost, or in a great measure gone; which was Barzillai's case, at eighty years of age: though some ancient persons have their senses quick and vigorous, and scarce perceive any difference between youth and age; but such instances are not common: and there are also some things that ancient persons take pleasure in, as in fields and gardens, and the culture of them, as Cicero^{f272} observes; and particularly learned men take as much delight in their studies in old age as in youth, and in instructing others; and, as the same writer^{f273} says,

“what is more pleasant than to see an old man, attended and encircled with youth, at their studies under him?”

and especially a good man, in old age, has pleasure in reflecting on a life spent in the ways, work, and worship of God; and in having had, through the grace of God, his conversation in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity; as also in present communion with God, and in the hopes and views of the glories of another world: but if not religious persons, they are strangers to spiritual pleasure, which only is to be had in wisdom's ways; such can neither look back with pleasure on a life spent in sin; nor forward with pleasure, at death and eternity, and into another world; (see ^{<1095>}2 Samuel 19:35 ^{<1900>}Psalm 90:10).

Ver. 2. *While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened*, etc.] The wise man proceeds to describe the infirmities of old age, and the troubles that attend it; in order to engage young men to regard God and religion, before these come upon them, which greatly unfit for his service. This the Targum and Midrash, and, after them, Jarchi, interpret of the splendour of the countenance of man, of the light of his eyes, and the beauty of his cheeks, and other parts of his face; which decrease and go off at old age, and paleness and wrinkles succeed: and others of the adversities

and calamities which attend persons at such years; which are sometimes in Scripture signified by the darkening of the sun, moon, and stars, (^{<23130>}Isaiah 13:10); but some choose to understand this, more literally, of the dimness of sight in old men; by whom the light of the sun, moon, and stars, is scarcely discerned: but as this infirmity is afterwards described, I rather think with others, that by the “sun”, “light”, and “moon”, are meant the superior and inferior faculties of the soul, the understanding, mind, judgment, will, and affections; and, by the “stars”, those bright notions and ideas raised in the fancy and imagination, and fixed in the memory; all which are greatly impaired or lost in old age: so Alshech interprets the sun and moon of the soul and spirit, and the stars of the senses; “light” is not in the Syriac version;

nor the clouds return after the rain; which some understand of catarrhs, defluxions, and rheums, flowing at the eyes, nose, and mouth, one after another, which frequently attend, and are very troublesome to persons in years; but may be more generally applied to the perpetual succession of evils, afflictions, and disorders, in old age; as soon as one is got over, another follows, billow after billow; or, like showers in April, as soon as one is gone, another comes. The Targum paraphrases it of the eyebrows distilling tears, like clouds after rain.

Ver. 3. *In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble*, etc.] By the “house” is meant the human body; which is a house of clay, the earthly house of our tabernacle, in which the soul dwells, (^{<3049>}Job 4:19) (^{<4701>}2 Corinthians 5:1). The Targum interprets the keepers of the house, of the knees and the trembling of them; but the Midrash and Jarchi, much better, of the ribs; man being fenced with bones and sinews, as Job says, (^{<3011>}Job 10:11); though trembling cannot be well ascribed to them, they being so fixed to the backbone: rather therefore, as Aben Ezra, the hands and arms are meant; which work for the maintenance of the body, and feed it with food, got and prepared by them; and which protect and defend it from injuries; for all which they are fitted, and made strong by the God of nature. The Arabic version renders it, “both keepers”; and, doubtless, respects both hands and arms; and which, in old age, are not only wrinkled, contracted, and stiff, but attended with numbness, pains, and tremor. Some, not amiss, take in the head; which is placed as a watchtower over the body, the seat of the senses; which overlooks, guards, and keeps it, and which often through paralytic disorders, and even the weakness of old age, is attended with a shaking;

and the strong men shall bow themselves; it is strange the Targum and Midrash should interpret this of the arms, designed in the former clause; Jarchi and Aben Ezra, more rightly, of the thighs; it takes in thighs, legs, and feet, which are the basis and support of the human body; and are strengthened for this purpose, having stronger muscles and tendons than any other parts of the body; but these, as old age comes on, are weakened and distorted, and bend under the weight of the body, not being able, without assistance, to sustain it;

and the grinders cease because they are few; the Targum is,

“the teeth of the mouth:”

all agree the teeth are meant; only the Midrash takes in the stomach also, which, like a mill, grinds the food. There are three sorts of teeth; the fore teeth, which bite the food, and are called “incisores”: the eye teeth, called “canini”, which bruise and break the food; and the double teeth, the hindermost, which are called “dentes molares”, the grinding teeth; and which being placed in the upper and nether jaw, are like to millstones, broad and rough, and rub against each other and grind the food, and prepare it for the stomach: these, in old age, rot and drop out, and become few and straggling, one here and another there; and, not being over against each other, are of no use, but rather troublesome;

and those that look out of the windows be darkened; the eyes, as the Targum and Ben Melech; and all agree that those that look out are the eyes, or the visive rays: the “windows” they look through are not spectacles; for it is questionable whether they were in use in Solomon’s time, and, however, they are not parts of the house; but either the holes in which the eyes are, and so the Septuagint and Vulgate Latin versions render it, to which the Targum agrees, paraphrasing it, the strong bounds of the head; and which are no other than what oculists call the orbits of the eye: or else the eyelids, which open and shut like the casement of a window, and through which, being opened, the eyes look; or the humours of the eye, the watery, crystalline, and glassy, which are transparent, and through which the visive rays pass; or the tunics, or coats of the eye, particularly the “tunica aranea” and “cornea”; as also the optic nerves, and especially the “pupilla”, or apple of the eye, which is perforated or bored for this purpose: now these, in old age, become weak, or dim, or thick, or contracted, or obstructed by some means or another by which the sight is greatly hindered, and is a very uncomfortable circumstance; this was

Isaac's case, (^{<0120>}Genesis 27:1); but Moses is an exception to the common case of old men, (^{<0540>}Deuteronomy 34:7).

Ver. 4. *And the doors shall be shut in the streets*, etc.] The Midrash and Jarchi interpret these of the holes of the body; in which they are followed by our learned and ingenuous countryman, Dr. Smith; who, by them, understands the inlets and outlets of the body; and, by the "streets", the ways and passages through which the food goes, and nourishment is conveyed; and which may be said to be shut, when they cease from their use: but it seems much better, with Aben Ezra and others, to interpret them of the lips; which are sometimes called the doors of the mouth, or lips, (^{<0910>}Psalms 141:3 ^{<0305>}Micah 7:5); which are opened both for speaking and eating; but, in aged persons, are much shut as to either; they do not choose to speak much, because of the disagreeableness of their voice, and difficulty of speech, through the shortness of breath, and the loss of teeth; nor do they open them much to eat, through want of appetite; and while eating, are obliged, for want of teeth, to keep their lips close, to retain their food from falling out; they mumble with their lips both in speaking and eating; and, particularly in public, aged persons care not to speak nor eat, for the reason following: though some understand it, more literally, of their having the doors of their houses shut, and keeping within, and not caring to go abroad in the streets, because of their infirmities so the Targum,

"thy feet shall be bound from going in the streets;"

when the sound of the grinding is low; which the above Jewish writers, and, after them, Dr. Smith, understand of the stomach, grinding, digesting, and concocting food, and of other parts through which it is conveyed, and the offices they perform; but sound or voice does not seem so well to agree with that; rather therefore this is to be understood, as before, of the grinding of the teeth, through the loss of which so much noise is not heard in eating as in young men, and the voice in speaking is lower; the Targum is,

"appetite of food shall depart from thee;"

and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird; that is, the aged person, the least noise awakes him out of sleep; and as he generally goes to bed soon, he rises early at cock crowing, or with the lark, as soon as the voice of that bird or any other, is heard; particularly the cock, which crows very early,

and whose voice is heard the most early, and is by some writers^{f274} emphatically called the bird that calls men to their work;

and all the daughters of music shall be brought low; either those that make music, and are the instruments of it, as the lungs, the throat, the teeth, mouth, and lips, so the Targum and Midrash; or those that receive music, as the ears, and the several parts of them, the cavities of them, particularly the tympanum and auditory nerve; all which, through old age, are impaired, and become very unfit to be employed in making music, or in attending to it: the voice of singing men and singing women could not be heard with pleasure by old Barzillai, (^{<4098>}2 Samuel 19:36). These clauses are expressive of the weakness which generally old age brings on men; very few instances are there to the contrary; such as of Caleb, who, at eighty five years of age, was as strong as at forty; and of Moses, whose natural force abated not at an hundred and twenty; nor indeed as of Cyrus, who, when seventy years of age, and near his death, could not perceive that he was weaker then than in his youth^{f275}.

Ver. 5. *Also when they shall be afraid of [that which is] high*, etc.] Not of the most high God, before whose tribunal they must shortly appear, as some; but rather of high places, as high hills, mountains, towers, etc. which aged persons are afraid to go up, because of the feebleness and weakness of their limbs, their difficulty of breathing, and the dizziness of their heads;

and fears [shall be] in the way; they do not care: to go abroad, being afraid of every little stone that lies in the way, lest they should stumble at it, and fall: some understand this of their fears of spirits, good or bad; but the former sense is best;

and the almond tree shall flourish; which most interpret of the hoary head, which looks like an almond tree in blossom; and which, as it comes soon in the spring, whence it has its name of haste in the Hebrew language; (see ^{<4011>}Jeremiah 1:11,12); and is a sure sign of its near approach; so gray hairs, or the hoary head, sometimes appear very soon and unexpected, and are a sure indication of the approach of old age; which Cicero^{f276} calls “aetas praecipitata”,

“age that comes hastily on;”

though the hoary head, like the almond tree, looks very beautiful, and is venerable, especially if found in the way of righteousness, (^{<4092>}Leviticus 19:32 ^{<4061>}Proverbs 16:31);

and the grasshopper shall be a burden; meaning either, should a grasshopper, which is very light, leap upon an aged person, it would give him pain, the least burden being uneasy to him; or, should he eat one of these creatures, the locusts being a sort of food in Judea, it would not sit well, on his stomach: or the grasshopper, being a crumpled and lean creature, may describe an old man; his legs and arms emaciated, and his shoulders, back, and lips, crumpled up and bunching out; and the locust of this name has a bunch on its backbone, like a camel^{f277}: Bochart^{f278} says, that the head of the thigh, or the hip bone, by the Arabians, is called “chagaba”, the word here used for a locust or grasshopper; which part of the body is of principal use in walking, and found very troublesome and difficult to move in old men; and Aben Ezra interprets it of the thigh: the almond tree, by the Rabbins, as Jarchi says, is interpreted of the hip bone, which stands out in old age: and the Targum, of this and the preceding clause, is,

“and the top of thy backbone shall bunch out, through leanness, like the almond; and the ankles of thy feet shall be swelled.”

Some, as Ben Melech observes, understand it of the genital member, and of coitus, slighted and rejected, because of the weakness of the body; all desires of that kind being gone, as follows;

and desire shall fail; the appetite, for food, for bodily pleasures, and carnal delights; and particularly for venery, all the parts of the body for such uses being weakened, The Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, Syriac, and Arabic versions, render it, “the caper tree shall be dissipated”, or “vanish”, or “[its fruit] shall shrink”; so Dr. Smith, who understands it of the decrease of the fluids, as he does the former clause of the solid parts of the body; and the berries of this tree are said to excite both appetite and lust^{f279}: and so Munster^{f280} interprets the word of the berries of the caper tree;

because man goeth to his long home; the grave, as the Targum, the house appointed for living, where he must lie till the resurrection morn; his eternal house, as Cicero calls it^{f281}; and so it may be rendered here, “the house of the world”, common to all the world, where all mankind go: or, “to the house of his world”^{f282}; whether of bliss or woe, according as his state and character be, good or bad: Theognis^{f283} calls it the dark house of “hades”, or the invisible state; and then this must be understood with respect to his separate soul, and the mansion of it; and Alshech says, every righteous man has a mansion to himself; (see ^{<B44>}John 14:2);

and the mourners go about the streets; the relations of the deceased; or those that go to their houses to comfort them; or the mourning men and women, hired for that purpose.

Ver. 6. *Or ever the silver cord be loosed*, etc.] As the above are the symptoms and infirmities of old age; these in this verse are the immediate symptoms of death, or what attend it, or certainly issue in it. Some by “the silver cord” understand the string of the tongue; and to this purpose is the Targum,

“before thy tongue is dumb from speaking;”

and it is observed^{f284} in favour of this sense, that the failing of the tongue is no fallacious sign of death, of which there is no mention at all in this account, unless here; and the tongue may not unfitly be called a “cord”, both from the notation of the word because it binds, and because it scourges like a cord, (~~כֶּבֶד~~ Job 5:21); and is compared to silver, (~~כֶּבֶד~~ Proverbs 10:20), and in this verse rather the head than the back is treated of. But best, the bond of union between soul and body is meant: the Midrash and Jarchi, and the Jewish writers in general, interpret it of the “spina dorsi”, or backbone; or rather of the marrow of it, which descends like a cord from the brain through the neck, and down the backbone to the bottom of it; from whence spring the nerves, fibres, tendons, and filaments of the body, on which the life of it much depends: this spinal marrow may be called a “cord” for the length of it, as well as what arise from it; and a silver cord, from the colour of it^{f285}, this being white even after death; and for the excellency of it: and this may be said to be “loosened” when there is a solution of the nerves, or marrow; upon which a paralysis, or palsy, follows, and is often the immediate forerunner of death;

or the golden bowl be broken; the Targum renders it the top of the head; and the Midrash interprets it the skull, and very rightly; or rather the inward membrane of the skull, which contains the brain, called the “pia mater”, or “meninx”, is intended, said to be a bowl, from the form of it; a “golden” one, because of the preciousness of it, and the excellent liquor of life it contains, as also because of its colour; now when this “runs back”, as the word^{f286} signifies, dries, shrinks up, and breaks, it puts a stop to all animal motion, and hence death;

or the pitcher be broken at the fountain; not the gall at the liver, as the Targum, which the ancients took to be the fountain of blood; but by the

“fountain” is meant the heart, the fountain of life, which has two cavities, one on the right side, the other on the left, from whence come the veins and arteries, which carry the blood through the whole body; and here particularly it signifies the right ventricle of the heart, the spring and original of the veins, which are the pitcher that receives the blood and transmits it to the several parts of the body; but when thee are broke to shivers, as the word^{f287} signifies, or cease from doing their office, the blood stagnates in them, and death follows;

or the wheel broken at the cistern; which is the left ventricle of the heart, which by its “diastole” receives the blood brought to it through the lungs, as a cistern receives water into it; where staying a while in its “systole”, it passes it into the great artery annexed to it; which is the wheel or instrument of rotation, which, together with all the instruments of pulsation, cause the circulation of the blood, found out in the last age by our countryman Dr. Harvey; but it seems by this it was well known by Solomon; now, whenever this wheel is broken, the pulse stops, the blood ceases to circulate, and death follows. For this interpretation of the several preceding passages, as I owe much to the Jewish writers, so to Rambachius and Patrick on these passages, and to Witsius’s “Miscellanies”, and especially to our countryman Dr. Smith, in his “Portrait of Old Age”, a book worthy to be read on this subject; and there are various observations in the Talmud^{f288} agreeable hereunto.

Ver. 7. *Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was*, etc.] The body, which is made of dust, and is no other in its present state than dust refined and enlivened; and when the above things take place, mentioned in (^{<2116>}Ecclesiastes 12:6), or at death, it returns to its original earth; it becomes immediately a clod of earth, a lifeless lump of clay, and is then buried in the earth, where it rots, corrupts, and turns into it; which shows the frailty of man, and may serve to humble his pride, as well as proves that death is not an annihilation even of the body; see (^{<0089>}Genesis 3:19 ^{<802>}Job 1:21);

and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it; from whom it is, by whom it is created, who puts it into the bodies of men, as a deposit urn they are entrusted with, and are accountable for, and should be concerned for the safety and salvation of it; this was originally breathed into man at his first creation, and is now formed within him by the Lord; hence he is called the God of the spirits of all flesh; (see ^{<0004>}Genesis 2:4 ^{<802>}Zechariah

12:1 ^{f282}Numbers 16:22). Now at death the soul, or spirit of man, returns to God; which if understood of the souls of men in general, it means that at death they return to God the Judge of all, who passes sentence on them, and orders those that are good to the mansions of bliss and happiness, and those that are evil to hell and destruction. So the Targum adds,

“that it may stand in judgment before the Lord;”

or if only of the souls of good men, the sense is, that they then return to God, not only as their Creator, but as their covenant God and Father, to enjoy his presence evermore; and to Christ their Redeemer, to be for ever with him, than which nothing is better and more desirable; this shows that the soul is immortal, and dies not with the body, nor sleeps in the grave with it, but is immediately with God. Agreeably to all this Aristotle^{f289} says, the mind, or soul, alone enters *ψυραψεν*, from without, (from heaven, from God there,) and only is divine; and to the same purpose are the words of Phocylides^{f290},

“the body we have of the earth, and we all being resolved into it become dust, but the air or heaven receives the spirit.”

And still more agreeably to the sentiment of the wise man here, another Heathen^{f291} writer observes, that the ancients were of opinion that souls are given of God, and are again returned unto him after death.

Ver. 8. *Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher*, etc.] The wise man, or preacher, set out in the beginning of the book with this doctrine, or proposition, which he undertook to prove; and now having proved it by an induction of particulars, instanced in the wisdom, wealth, honours, pleasures, and profit of men, and shown the vanity of them, and that the happiness of men lies not in these things, but in the knowledge and fear of God; he repeats it, and most strongly asserts it, as an undoubted truth beyond all dispute and contradiction, that all things under the sun are not only vain, but vanity itself, extremely vain, vain in the superlative degree;

all [is] vanity; all things in the world are vain; all creatures are subject to vanity; man in every state, and in his best estate, is altogether vanity: this the wise man might with great confidence affirm, after he had shown that not only childhood and youth are vanity, but even old age; the infirmities, sorrows, and distresses of which he had just exposed, and observed that all issue in death, the last end of man, when his body returns to the earth, and his soul to God the giver of it.

Ver. 9. *And moreover*, etc.] Or “besides”^{f292} what has been said; or “as to what remains”^{f293}; or “but what is better”, or “more excellent”^{f294}, is to “hear the conclusion of the whole matter”, the sum and substance of the whole book in a few words, (^{<21213>}Ecclesiastes 12:13); to which (^{<21120>}Ecclesiastes 12:9-12); are a preface; and in which the wise man recommends the reading of this book, and other writings of his, and of other wise men inspired of God; and his own he particularly recommends, from his character as wise and industrious, in this verse; and from the subject matter of them, their nature, use, and excellency, and their efficacy and authority, in the two next;

because the preacher was wise; he was a “preacher”, a royal one, an extraordinary preacher, and to be regarded; he urges not his title as a king, but his character as a preacher, to recommend what he had written: every good preacher should be regarded; not such who are ignorant preachers of the law, but faithful ministers of the Gospel, who are sent of God, and have felt and experienced what they deliver to others; and especially who are wise as well as faithful, as Solomon was; he had much wisdom given him at first, (^{<11812>}1 Kings 3:12 4:29-31); and in which he improved; and though he turned to folly in his old age, he recovered from that, and gained more wisdom through his fall, and to which he here seems to have reference; for “Koheleth”, which some render the “gatherer”, because he gathered much wisdom, and much people to hear it; others render “gathered”, that is, into the flock and fold again, the church of God, from which he had strayed; (see Gill on “^{<21001>}Ecclesiastes 1:1”); and having seen through the follies and vanities of life, and being recovered and restored, was a fitter person to teach and instruct others; (see ^{<15112>}Psalms 51:12,13 ^{<12213>}Luke 22:32);

he still taught the people knowledge; or “again”, as the Targum; after his fall and recovery he was communicative of his knowledge; he did not hide his talent in the earth, nor in a napkin; but having freely received he freely gave, and kept back nothing from his people, the people of the house of Israel, as the Targum, that might be profitable to them; he taught them the knowledge of themselves, as fallen men, impure, impotent, and unrighteous; the knowledge of the creatures, and the vanity of them, of riches, honours, and pleasures; and of works of righteousness to save men; the knowledge of Christ the Wisdom of God, the antiquity of his person, his glories, excellencies, and beauties, as in the books of Proverbs and Canticles; the knowledge of God, his fear and worship, mind and will; and the knowledge of a future state, and of the general judgment, as in this

book; and in proportion to his own knowledge so he taught: for thus the words with the preceding may be rendered, that “the more that the preacher was wise, the more he taught the people knowledge”^{f295}; he taught according to the abilities he had received, as preachers should; the more he grew in grace and knowledge, the more largely he shared with others; and this he did “daily”, as Aben Ezra renders the words, constantly, continually, incessantly, in season and out of season, as faithful Gospel ministers do;

yea, he gave good heed; to what he heard and to what he read, to which the apostle’s advice agrees, (^{504E}1 Timothy 4:13); or he caused others to hear, and give good heed to what is said, as Aben Ezra; he engaged their attention by his enlivening discourses; or, as Kimchi, he weighed things in his own mind, and in the balance of the sanctuary; and thoroughly considered and digested them before he delivered them to others;

and sought out; was very diligent in investigating truth, he searched into the mines of knowledge for it, the sacred writings, as one would for gold and silver, and as he himself directs, (^{210B}Proverbs 2:4,5);

[and] set in order many proverbs; three thousand of them, (^{104E}1 Kings 4:32); particularly those which are in the book of that name, penned by him; he selected the most choice, pithy, and sententious sayings, of his own and others; and these he huddled not up, or threw them together in a disorderly and confused manner; but put them together in proper order and method, under proper heads, as well as in a correct style, that they might be more received, and more easily retained. The Targum is,

“he attended to the voice of the wise men, and searched the books of wisdom; and by a spirit of prophecy from the Lord composed books of wisdom, and very many proverbs of understanding.”

Ver. 10. *The preacher sought to find out acceptable words*, etc.] Not mere words, fine and florid ones, the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, an elegant style, or eloquent language; not but that it is proper for a preacher to seek out and use words suitable and apt to convey right ideas to the minds of men of what he says; but doctrines are rather here meant, “words of desire”, “delight”, and “pleasure”^{f296}, as the phrase may be rendered; even of God’s good will and pleasure, so Alshech; for the same word is sometimes used of God in this book and elsewhere: (see ^{210B}Ecclesiastes 3:1 8:6 ²⁶³⁰Isaiah 53:10); and so may take in the doctrine of God’s

everlasting love to his people, and his delight and pleasure in them; of his good will towards them in sending Christ to suffer and die for them, and save them; in pardoning their sins through his blood, in which he delights; in regenerating and calling them by his grace, and revealing the things of the Gospel to them, when he hides them from others, which is all of his own will and pleasure, and as it seems good in his sight: or words and doctrines, which are desirable, pleasing, and acceptable unto men; not that Solomon did, or preachers should, seek to please men, or seek to say things merely for the sake of pleasing men, for then they would not be the servants of Christ; nor are the doctrines of the Gospel pleasing to carnal men, but the reverse: they gnash their teeth at them, as Christ's hearers did at him; the preaching of a crucified Christ is foolishness, and the things of the Spirit of God are insipid things, to natural men; they are enemies to the Gospel: but to sensible sinners they are very delightful, such as peace, pardon, righteousness, and salvation, by Christ, (^{<5015>}1 Timothy 1:15); for the worth of them, they are more desirable to them than gold and silver, and are more delightful to the ear than the best of music, and more acceptable to the taste than honey or the honeycomb, (^{<3990>}Psalm 19:10 119:72,103);

and [that which was] written [was] upright; meaning what was written in this book, or in any other parts of Scripture, which the preacher sought out and inculcated; it was according to the mind and will of God, and to the rest of the sacred word; it was sincere, unmixed, and unadulterated with the doctrines and inventions of men; it showed that man had lost his uprightness, had none of himself, and where it was to be had, even in Christ; and was a means of making men sound, sincere, and upright at heart; and of directing them to walk uprightly, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in the world;

[even] words of truth; which come from the God of truth, that cannot lie, as all Scripture does; of which Christ, who is the truth, is the sum and substance; and which are inspired by the Spirit of truth, and led into by him, and made effectual to saving purposes; and which holds good of the whole Scripture, called the Scripture of truth, (^{<2706>}Daniel 10:1); and of the Gospel, which is the word of truth, and of every doctrine of it, (^{<4877>}John 17:17 ^{<4013>}Ephesians 1:13).

Ver. 11. *The words of the wise [are] as goads,* etc.] As the goad teacheth the ox; so the Targum. Not the words of the wise philosophers of that age,

or of ages before, or since; but of the inspired penmen of the Scriptures, as Moses, David, Solomon, and of others since; and of all good men, whose doctrines are agreeably to them; these are like “goads” or “pricks”, sharp pointed sticks or staves, with which men push and prick their cattle, when driving them from place to place, or ploughing with them: and of a similar use are the doctrines of the word, when attended with a divine efficacy; these are a means of pricking sinners to the heart; and of laying open their vileness and sinfulness to them; and of repentance and contrition; and of awakening them from a sleep in sin to a sense of their danger; and even of killing them, as to their own sense and apprehension of things, and, with respect to their hopes of life, by their own works; as the Philistines were slain by Shamgar with an ox goad, (~~<ORSE>~~ Judges 3:31); see (~~<HESE>~~ Acts 2:37 ~~<HRE>~~ Hosea 6:5); and these are also of use to the saints, as goads, to stir them up, when slothful, to the discharge of duty; and to awaken them, when drowsy, out of their carnal security; and to correct them for their faults, by sharp reproofs and rebukes; as well as to excite them to go on to perfection, who are apt to sit still and lie down; and to direct them to walk straight on, without turning to the right hand or left;

and as nails fastened [by] the masters of assemblies; like these are the truths and doctrines of the word, when they have a place in the heart, and become the “ingrafted word” there; when they are “planted”^{f297} in the soul, as the word signifies; when they are fixed in the mind and memory, and dwell and abide there: and when as nails, driven into anything, fasten what they are drove into; so these are the means of fastening souls; of causing them to cleave to God and Christ; to the church, and his people, and to one another; and to the Gospel, and their profession of it; hence they are not like children, tossed to and fro, wavering and unstable: of all which “the masters of the assemblies” are the instruments; that is, ministers and pastors of churches. As there were assemblies for religious worship under the law, in which the prophets, priests, and Levites, assisted; so there are assemblies or churches under the Gospel dispensation, which are gathered and meet together for the service of God, and over these the ministers of the word preside; these are set over the churches in the Lord, and have the rule of them; though they are not to lord it over God’s heritage, or have the dominion over their faith; but are helpers of their joy, and useful in the above things, through their ministry. Some choose to render “masters of collections”, or “gatherings”^{f298}; and think it may respect their gathering truths out of the sacred writings, as the bee gathers honey out of the

flowers; in allusion to those that gathered together the choice and pithy sentences and sayings of others, like the men of Hezekiah, (^{<2051>}Proverbs 25:1); or to undershepherds, gathering the sheep into the fold^{f299}, by the order of the principal one; who made use of goads, to drive away thieves or wild beasts; and nails, to preserve the sheepfold whole. And others think that not the words, but the of the assemblies themselves, are compared to “nails”, and read them, “and the masters of the assemblies [are] as nails fastened”^{f300}; are well established, firm and sure; (see ^{<2023>}Isaiah 22:23); and others take it to be no other than an epithet of the nails themselves, and render it, “as nails fixed, which are binders”; that is, great binding nails, which, being fixed in boards, bind, compact, and hold them together; to which the words of the wise may be compared, being the means of compacting and holding together the church of God, comparable to a sheepfold; hence mention is made of the shepherd in the next clause: or of fixing the attention of the minds of men unto them, and of retaining them in memory, and to which they speak of as first principles, and never swerve from them^{f301}; but, that not ministers, the instruments, but the principal and efficient cause, may have the glory, is added,

[which] are given from one Shepherd; not Zerubbabel, as Grotius; nor Moses, as the Targum, Jarchi, and Alshech; but Christ, the one Shepherd, set over the flock; and under whom the masters of assemblies, or pastors of churches, are, (^{<4573>}Ezekiel 37:23 ^{<3106>}John 10:16); from whom they have their gifts and qualifications, their mission and commissions; and are given to the churches, as pastors and teachers, to feed them, (^{<4040>}Ephesians 4:10,11 ^{<2485>}Jeremiah 3:15); and from whom they have their food, the Gospel and the doctrines of it, to feed the flocks with, assigned to their care, (^{<4378>}John 17:8 21:15-17); though this is to be understood not to the exclusion of God, the Father of Christ, by whom all Scripture is inspired; nor of the Spirit, by whom holy men of God spake as they were moved, (^{<5816>}2 Timothy 3:16 ^{<6021>}2 Peter 1:21).

Ver. 12. *And further, by these, my son, be admonished*, etc.] Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, may be intended, for whose sake, more especially, this book might be written; though it may take in every hearer of this divine preacher, every disciple of this teacher, every subject of his kingdom, as well as every reader of this book, whom he thus addresses, and for whom he was affectionately concerned as a father for a son; that they might be enlightened with divine knowledge, warned of that which is evil, and admonished and advised to that which is good; “by these” words and

writings of his own, and other wise men; and by these masters of assemblies, who, and their words, are from the one and chief Shepherd; to these they would do well to take heed, and to these only or chiefly. It may be rendered, “and what is the more excellent of these, he admonished”,^{f302}; to observe what is mentioned in (²¹²³Ecclesiastes 12:13), and lies in a few words, “Fear God”, etc. and especially Jesus Christ, the “Alpha” and “Omega”, the sum and substance of the whole Bible; of what had been written in Solomon’s time, and has been since: he is the most excellent part of it; or that which concerns him, in his person, offices, and grace: or thus; “and what is above”, or “more than these, beware of”,^{f303}; do not trouble thyself with any other writings; these are sufficient, all that is useful and valuable is to be found in them; and as for others, if read, read them with care and caution, and only as serving to explain these, and to promote the same ends and designs, or otherwise to be rejected;

of making many books [there is] no end; many books, it seems, were written in Solomon’s time; there was the same itch of writing as now, it may be; but what was written was not to be mentioned with the sacred writings, were comparatively useless and worthless. Or the sense is, should Solomon, or any other, write ever so many volumes, it would be quite needless; and there would be no end of writing, for these would not give satisfaction and contentment; and which yet was to be had in the word of God; and therefore that should be closely attended to: though this may be understood, not only of making or composing books, but of getting them, as Aben Ezra; of purchasing them, and so making them a man’s own. A man may lay out his money, and fill his library with books, and be very little the better for them; what one writer affirms, another denies; what one seems to have proved clearly, another rises up and points out his errors and mistakes; and this occasions replies and rejoinders, so that there is no end of these things, and scarce any profit by them; which, without so much trouble, may be found in the writings of wise men, inspired by God, and in which we should rest contented;

and much study [is] a weariness of the flesh; the study of languages, and of each of the arts and sciences, and of various subjects in philosophy and divinity, particularly in writing books on any of these subjects; which study is as fatiguing to the body, and brings as much weariness on it, as any manual and mechanic operation; it dries up the moisture of the body, consumes the spirits, and gradually and insensibly impairs health, and brings on weakness, as well as weariness. Some render it, “much reading”,

as Jarchi, and so Mr. Broughton; and Aben Ezra observes, that the word in the Arabic language so signifies: the Arabic word “lahag” signifies to desire anything greedily, or to be greedily given and addicted to anything^{f304}; and so may denote such kind of reading here, or such a person who is “helluo”, a glutton at books, as Cato is said to be. And now reading books with such eagerness, and with constancy, is very wearisome, and is to little advantage; whereas reading the Scripture cheers and refreshes the mind, and is profitable and edifying. Gussetius^{f305} interprets it of much speaking, long orations, which make weary.

Ver. 13. *Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter*, etc.] Or “the end”^{f306} of it. The sum and substance of it, what it all tends to and issues in; even the whole of what is contained in this book, and in all offer divinely inspired writings of Solomon or others; of all that were now written, or before, or since: this the preacher calls upon himself, as well as his hearers, to attend unto. Or it may be rendered, “the end of the whole matter is heard”^{f307}; here ends this book; and you have heard the whole of what deserves regard, and it lies in these few words,

fear God, and keep his commandments: “the fear of God” includes the whole of internal religion, or powerful godliness; all the graces of the Spirit, and the exercise of them; reverence of God, love to him, faith in him, and in his Son Jesus Christ; hope of eternal life from him; humility of soul, patience and submission to his will, with every other grace; so the Heathens call religion “metum Deorum”^{f308}, the fear of God: and “keeping of the commandments”, or obedience to the whole will of God, is the fruit, effect, and evidence of the former; and takes in all the commands of God, moral and positive, whether under the former or present dispensation; and an observance of them in faith, from a principle of love, and with a view to the glory of God;

for this [is] the whole [duty] of man; or, “this is the whole man”^{f309}; and makes a man a whole man, perfect, entire, and wanting nothing; whereas, without this, he is nothing, let him have ever so much of the wisdom, wealth, honour, and profits of this world. Or, “this is the whole of every man”^{f310}; either, as we supply it, the duty, work, and business of every man, of every son of Adam, be he what he will, high or low, rich or poor, of every age, sex, and condition; or this is the happiness of every man, or that leads to it; this is the whole of it; this is the “summum bonum”, or chief happiness of men: Lactantius^{f311} says, the “summum bonum” of a man lies

in religion only; it lies in this, and not in any outward thing, as is abundantly proved in this book: and this should be the concern of everyone, this being the chief end of man, and what, as Jarchi says, he is born unto; or, as the Targum, such should be the life of every man. The Masorettes begin this verse with a larger letter than usual, and repeat it at the end of the book, though not accentuated, to raise the attention of the reader^{f312}; that he may make a particular observation of what is said in it, as being of the greatest moment and importance.

Ver. 14. *For God shall bring every work into judgment*, etc.] Not in this life, but in the day of the great judgment, as the Targum explains it; that is, whatever has been done by men, from the beginning of the world, or will be to the end; all being observed and taken notice of by the omniscient God, who has registered them in the book of his remembrance, and, being Judge, will be able to bring them all into account at that awful day: which is here given as a reason why men should fear God, and keep his commandments;

with every secret thing; that has been committed in secret by men, and is unknown to others, even every secret thought of the heart; see (~~404~~1 Corinthians 4:5); or, “with every secret” or “hidden man”^{f313}; whose works are hidden from men, and are not known to be what, they are, and who thought to hide themselves from, God; but these, with their works, shall be brought into open court in judgment;

whether [it be] good, or whether [it be] evil: it shall then be examined according to the rule of the word, and be judged, and declared to be what it truly is, good or evil; and so be either rewarded in a way of grace, or punished: or, “whether [the man, the hidden man, be] good or evil”^{f314}, so Alshech; all mankind, everyone, will he bring into judgment, whether he be good or evil. This is the last end of all things, and in which every man will be concerned. This shows, as well as many other things in this book. Solomon’s belief of a future state and judgment; and that there is nothing in it to encourage the epicure and atheist: which being observed by the ancient Jews, they readily admitted it into the canon of Scripture.

FOOTNOTES

- ft1 -- Misn. Yadaim, c. 3. s. 5. T. Bab. Megilia, fol. 7. 1.
- ft2 -- T. Bab. Sabbat, fol. 30. 2.
- ft3 -- Midrash Kohelet, fol. 60. 4. Vajikra Rabba, s. 28. “in principio”, fol. 168. 4.
- ft4 -- Maimon. Moreh Nevochim, c. 28. p. 262.
- ft5 -- T. Bab. Sabbat, ut supra. (fol. 30. 2.)
- ft6 -- R. Gedaliah in Shalshelt. Hakabala, fol. 55. 1. R. Moses Kimchi & alii.
- ft7 -- T. Bab. Bava Bathra, fol. 15. 1.
- ft8 -- Peskita Rabbati apud Yalkut in Kohelet, l. 1. Shirhashirim Rabba, fol. 2. 3. Seder Olam Rabba, c. 15. p. 41. R. Gedaliah in Shalshelt Hakabala, fol. 8. 2.
- ft9 -- Shirhashirim Rabba, fol. 2. 3. Midrash Kohelet, fol. 60. 3.
- ft10 -- **tl hq** “Kohleth”, Broughton, Pagninus, Montanus, Cocceius. Rambachius.
- ft11 -- **η θυχη η επισυναγομενη**, “anima congregata”, Cocceius,
- ft12 -- “Collector”, Arabic version; “congregator, q. d. sapientia congregatrix”, Amama, Rambachius; “the gathering soul, either recollecting itself, or by admonitions gathering others”, Lightfoot, vol. 2. p. 76.
- ft13 -- Shirhashirim Rabba, fol. 2. 3. & Jarchi, Aben Ezra, & Baruch in loc. Pesikta Rabbati apud Yalkut, ut supra. (in Kohelet, l. 1.)
- ft14 -- “Concionatrix anima”, Vatablus, Piscator.
- ft15 -- **wl m[l kb ^wdty hm** “quid habet amplius homo?” V. L. “quid residui?” Vatablus, Piscator, Mercerus, Gejerus, Rambachius; “quantum enim homini reliquum est, post omnem saum laborem?” Tigurine version.
- ft16 -- “Nihil enim semper floret, aetas succedit aetati”, Cicero. Orat. Philip. 11.

- ft17 -- Iliad. 6. v. 146, etc. So Musaeus apud Clement. Stromat. l. 6. p 649. "Ut silvae foliis", etc. Horat. de Arte Poctica, v. 60.
- ft18 -- Apud R. Joseph. Titatzak in loc.
- ft19 -- pawç "anhelus", Montanus, Tigurine version; "anhelat", Drusius, Piscator, Cocceius, Amama; "anhelaus est", Rambachius; "doth he breathe", Broughton.
- ft20 -- "Placebits anhelat", Claudian. Epigrarm. "Equis oriens afflavit anhelis", Virgil. Georgic. l. 1. v. 250. Aeneid, l. 5.
- ft21 -- Apud R. Joseph. Titatzak in loc. Midrash Kohelet in loc.
- ft22 -- Jarchi, Alshech, and Titatzak, interpret it of the sun; so Mercerus, Varenius, Gejerus; accordingly Mr. Broughton renders it "he walketh to the south."
- ft23 -- Definition. p. 1337. Ed. Ficin.
- ft24 -- Nat. Quaest. l. 3. c. 4.
- ft25 -- Deuteronomy Rerum Natura, l. 6.
- ft26 -- Iliad. 21. v. 193, etc.
- ft27 -- Olymp. Ode 5. v. 4.
- ft28 -- "Omnia sub magna", etc. Georgic. l. 4. v. 366, etc.
- ft29 -- Meterolog. l. 1. c. 13.
- ft30 -- Deuteronomy Orig. Error. l. 2. c. 6.
- ft31 -- μυ[gy "laboriosae", Pagninus, Vatablus, Mercerus, Gejerus, Schmidt.
- ft32 -- Deuteronomy Orig. Error. l. 2. c. 6.
- ft33 -- μυ[gy "laboriosae", Pagninus, Vatablus, Mercerus, Gejerus, Schmidt.
- ft34 -- Vid. R. Alshech in loc.
- ft35 -- "Nullum est jam dictum, quod non dictum sit prius", Terent Prolog. Eunuch. v. 41.
- ft36 -- rbd cy "est quidpiam", Pagninus, Mercerus, Gejerus; "est res", Drusius, Cocceius, Rambachius.

- ft37 -- [r ^yn[“occupationem malam”, Junius & Tremellius, Piscator, Drusius, Amama, Gejerus.
- ft38 -- twn[l “ad affligendum”, Montanus, Gejerus; “ut affligent se in ea”, Vatablus, Rambachius; “ut ea humlies redderet”, Tigurine version.
- ft39 -- j wr tw[r “afflictio spiritus”, V. L. Junius & Tremellius; “contritio spiritus”, so some in Vatablus.
- ft40 -- νομη ανεμου, Aquila; “pastio venti”, Mercerus, Piscator, Gejerus, Amama.
- ft41 -- μl ϙwry l [“super Jerusalem”, Montanus, Cocceius, Schmidt; “qui praefuerit ante me Jeruschthalamis”, Junius & Tremellius.
- ft42 -- Comment. Heb. p. 604.
- ft43 -- t [dw hmkj hbrh har “vidit multum sapientiae et scientiae”, Montanus, Amama; “vidit plurimam sapientiam et scientiam”, Tigurine version.
- ft44 -- In Timaeo, p. 1084.
- ft45 -- s[k br “multa ira”, Pagninus, Montanus; “indignatio”, V. L. Tigurine version, Vatablus, Drusius; “multum indignationis”, Junius & Tremellius, Piscator.
- ft46 -- an hkl “age, quaeso”, Tigurine version, Vatablus, Rambachius.
- ft47 -- bwj b harw “et vide in bonum”, Montanus; “et vide bonum”, Vatablus, Mercerus, Cocceius, Gejerus; “fraere bono”, Junius & Tremellius, Piscator, Drusius, Amama, Rambachius.
- ft48 -- l l whm ytrma qwj ϙl “risui dixi, insanis”, Mercerus, Drusius, Amama; “vel insanus es”, Piscator, Schmidt, Rambachius.
- ft49 -- yrϙb ta ^yvb Æwϙml “ut diducerem vino carnem meam”, Piscator; “ut protraherem, et inde distenderem carnem meam”, Rambachius.
- ft50 -- hmkj b ghen ybl w “et cor meam ducens in sapientia”, Montanus; “interim cor meum ducens in sapientiam”, Drusius.
- ft51 -- Sueton. Vit. Domitian. c. 3. Aurel. Victor. De. Caesar. & Epitome.
- ft52 -- Theatrum Terrae Sanctae, p. 170.

- ft53 -- Thevenot's Travels, B. 2. ch. 47. p. 202.
- ft54 -- Journey from Aleppo to Jerusalem, p. 88. edit. 7.
- ft55 -- Ibid. p. 90.
- ft56 -- Travels, part 3. ch. 22. p. 322. Vid. Egmont and Heyman's Travels, vol. 1. p. 367, 368.
- ft57 -- Antiqu. l. 8. c. 7. s. 13.
- ft58 -- Ut supra, p. 50, 51. (Journey from Aleppo to Jerusalem, edit. 7.)
- ft59 -- Agreement of Customs between the East Indians and Jews, Art. 21. p. 78.
- ft60 -- Var. Hist. l. 2. c. 14.
- ft61 -- Targum Sheni in Esther vi. 10.
- ft62 -- Plutarch. in Alexandro, p. 686. Vid. Homer. Iliad. 24. v. 224-234.
- ft63 -- Vid. A. Geli. Noct. Attic. l. 19. c. 9. Homer. Odys. 8. v. 62, 73, 74. & 9. v. 5-7.
- ft64 -- Homer. Odys. 21. v. 430.
- ft65 -- Vid. Gutberleth. Conjectanea, etc. p. 162, etc.
- ft66 -- Vid. Gusset. Comment. Heb. p. 832.
- ft67 -- Hierozoic. par. 2. l. 6. c. 13. col. 847.
- ft68 -- Buxtorf. in voce **ddç**, See Weemse's Christian Synagog. p. 144.
- ft69 -- Vid. Noldii Concordant. Partic. Ebr. p. 404,
- ft70 -- **whwç [rça** "qui fecerunt eum", vid. Ebr. Comment. p. 605.
- ft71 -- **yt [ryw** "sed agnovi", Junius & Tremellius, Piscator; "sed cognovi", Rambachius; "but I saw", Broughton.
- ft72 -- "Rape, congere, aufer, posside, relinquendum est." Martial. Epigr. l. 8. Ep. 43.
- ft73 -- **ytwbsw** "versus sum", Montanus; "et ego verti me", Vatablus, Mercerus, Gejerus.
- ft74 -- R. Joseph Titatzak in loc.
- ft75 -- **bwj ya** "non est igitur bonum", Vatablus.

- ft76 -- “Non est bonum penes hominem”, Junius & Tremellius, Gejerus, Gussetius.
- ft77 -- In Tishbi, p. 109.
- ft78 -- Vid. Rambachium in loc.
- ft79 -- **bj l kl** “omni voluntati”, Montanus, Mercerus, Cocceius; i.e. “rei proprie capitae ac desideratae”, Drusius
- ft80 -- “Stat sua cuique dies, breve et irreparabile tempus omnibus est vitae”; Virgil. Aeneid. l. 10.
- ft81 -- **qj rl t [** “tempus elongandi se”, Pagninus, Montanus; “tempus longe fieri”, V. L.
- ft82 -- “Optatos dedit amplexus”, Virgil. Aeneid. 8. v. 405.
- ft83 -- **çqbl t [** “tempus quaerendi”, Pagninus, Montanus, Tigurine version, Piscator, Mercerus, Gejerus, Rambachius.
- ft84 -- **ωρη μεν πολων μψων, ωρη δε και υπνου**, Homer. Odys. 11. v. 378.
- ft85 -- **wb twl [l** “ad affligendum se in ea”, Montanus; “ut eos adfligat in ea, sc. per eam”, Rambachius; “ut ea redderet humiles”, Tigurine version.
- ft86 -- **wt [b hpy hç [l kh ta** “haec omnia facit pulcher in tempore suo, i.e. Messias”; so some in Rambachius.
- ft87 -- Vid. Schultens de Defect. Hod. Ling. Heb. s. 180.
- ft88 -- Miphalot Elohim Tract. 8. c. 7. fol. 57. 4.
- ft89 -- Tikkune Zohar Correct. 69. fol. 104. 2.
- ft90 -- **Pdrn ta çqby μyhl aw** “Deus quaerit propulsum, seu quod persecutionem veluti passum est”, Gejerus, Schmidt.
- ft91 -- **μdah ynb trbd l [** “super verbum filiorum Adam”, Montanus; “verbis hominum”, Arabic and Syriac versions.
- ft92 -- **μrbl οτι διακρινει αυτους** “ut discernat illos”, Cocceius; “quia delegit eos”, some in Vatablus; so Aben Ezra and Ben Melech.
- ft93 -- “Ut ipsi expurgent Deum”, Anglic. in Reinbeck; some in Rambachius render it thus, “ut seligant ipsi (homines) Deum”; so Varenius.

- ft94 -- Cisteilaria, Act. 4.
- ft95 -- “Magna parens terra est”, Ovid. Metamorph. l. 1. Fab. 7.
- ft96 -- $\mu\gamma\kappa\zeta[h$ “oppressos”, Montanus, Junius & Tremellius, Drusius, Schmidt, Rambachius, so Broughton; “fraudatos”, Cocceius.
- ft97 -- $t[md$ “lachryma”, Montanus, Tigurine version, Cocceius, Rambachius.
- ft98 -- $j k \mu\eta\gamma\kappa\zeta[dymw$ “et quia deest facultas se vindicandi e manu opprimentium ipsos”, Tigurine version; “aut evadendi e manu opprimentium se virtus”, Junius & Tremellius; “nec vires ad evadendum a manu opprimentium ipsos”, Piscator.
- ft99 -- “Stulte, quid est semnus gelidae nisi mortis imago?” Ovid. Plato in Ciceron. Tuscul. Quaest. l. 1. c. 58.
- ft100 -- Iliad. 16. v. 672, 682. Vid. Pausan. Laconica, sive l. 3. p. 195.
- ft101 -- $hrhmb$ “in festinatio”, Montanus; “in celeritate”, Vatablus; “in festinatione”, Rambachius.
- ft102 -- $dw[rhzhl [dy al$ “non novit moneri adhuc”, Montanus; “nescit admoneri amplius”, Junius & Tremellius, Piscator, Drusius, Rambachius.
- ft103 -- Ebr. Comment. p. 553.
- ft104 -- $\mu\gamma yk$ “quamvis etiam”, Gejerus.
- ft105 -- “Nam etiam”, Tigurine version, Cocceius; “quia etiam”, Pagninus, Montanus, Schmidt, Rambachius, so Aben Ezra.
- ft106 -- So the Tigurine version, Vatablus, Cocceius, Gejerus.
- ft107 -- Concord. Part. Ebr. No. 1023.
- ft108 -- Meander apud Joseph. Contr. Apion. l. 1. s. 18.
- ft109 -- “Observant ubi festa mero pede sabbata reges”, Satyr. 6. v. 158.
- ft110 -- Lexic. Pentaglott. col. 1692.
- ft111 -- $bwrq$ “propinquus”, Montanus; “propinquior”, Mercerus, Schmidt.
- ft112 -- $\mu\gamma[dwy \mu\eta\gamma a$ “non ipsi scientes”, Montanus; “nesciunt”, Pagninus, Mercerus, Cocceius; “scire nolunt”, Schmidt.

- ft113 -- [r twç] l “facere voluntatem ejus”, Pagninus, Mercerus.
- ft114 -- “Ohe jam desine deos obtundere---Ut nihil credas intelligere, nisi idem dictum eat centies.” Terent. Heautont. Act. 5. Sc. 1. v. 6, 8.
- ft115 -- ab yk “ut prodit somnium”, Junius & Tremellius; “nam ut venit”, Piscator; “quia sicut venit”, Mercerus, Ramabachius, so Broughton.
- ft116 -- rdt rçak “si quid vovisti”, V. L.
- ft117 -- So Luther, Broughton, Junius & Tremellius, Piscator, Gejerus.
- ft118 -- þj h l [“super voluntate”, Montanus, Cocceius; “de divina volantate”, Pagninus, Mercerus; “divinam voluntatem”, Tigurine version; “de ista voluntate”, Junius & Tremellius, Gejerus.
- ft119 -- rmç “custodiens”, Montanus; “custodit”, Pagninus; “custos”, Tigurine version.
- ft120 -- “Observat”, Junius & Tremellius, Piscator, Mercerus, Gejerus; “observans, observator est”, Rambachius.
- ft121 -- Tikkune Zohar Correct. 69. fol. 114. 1.
- ft122 -- ayh l kb ða `wrtyw “et praestantia terrae in omnibus ipsa”, Montanus; “porro excellentia terrae prae omnibus est”, Vatablus; “et praecellentia terrae in omnibus est”, Gejerus.
- ft123 -- db [n hdçl æl m “rex agro sit servus”, Montanus, Piscator, Gejerus; “rex agro servit”, Mercerus, so some in Drusius.
- ft124 -- Vid. Martin. Sinic. Histor. l. 2. p. 36. & l. 4. p. 92. & l. 3. p. 287.
- ft125 -- Xenophon. Oeconom. p. 482.
- ft126 -- Homer. Iliad. 18. v. 550-558.
- ft127 -- Flor. Hist. Roman. l. 1. c. 11.
- ft128 -- So Schmidt Rambachius.
- ft129 -- hawbt al “non erit proventus illi”, Vatablus, Mercerus, Gejerus; “nullum fructum percipit”, Tigurine version.
- ft130 -- “Qui amat copiam, sc. multitudinem ex qua non est sperandus profectus”, Schmidt, so Gussetius.
- ft131 -- Cyropaedia, l. 8. c. 26.

- ft132 -- **db[h του δουλου**, Sept. “servi”, Arab. “i.e. agricolae”, Drusius, Rambachius; “qui par regi famuloque venis”, Senec. *Hercul. Fur.* v. 1073.
- ft133 -- “Somnus agrestium lenis”, etc. Horat. *Carmin.* l. 3. Ode 1. v. 21, 22.
- ft134 -- “Nehemiah noctu, nec diu quietus unquam eam”, Plauti *Aulularia*, Act. 1. Sc. 1. v. 23. “Aurea rumpunt tecta quietem”, Senec. *Hercul. Oet.* v. 646.
- ft135 -- **hl wj h[r** “morbus malus”, Tigurine version, Vatablus.
- ft136 -- **[r ^yn[b** “occupatione, negotio, vel casu malo”, Gejerus.
- ft137 -- **hbrh s[kw** “et irascitur multum”, Vatablus, Drusius; “et indignatus fuit, vel indignatur multum”, Piscator, Rambachius.
- ft138 -- **wyl j w** “et agritudo ei fuit, vel est”, Piscator, Drusius; “vel fuerit”, Gejerus.
- ft139 -- “Bonum est, cum qui pulcher est, edere et bibere, h. e. Christo per fidem frui; nova et singularis expositio”, Rambachius.
- ft140 -- **wj yl çh** “eumque dominari eum fecerit”, Tigurine version; “imperare fecit eum”, Gejerus; “dominari eum fecerit”, Rambachius.
- ft141 -- “Di tibi divitias dederunt, artemque fruendi”, Horat. *Ep.* l. 1. Ep. 4. v. 7.
- ft142 -- **rkzy hbrh al yk** “quod si non multum recordabitur dierum vitae suae”, Junius & Tremellius.
- ft143 -- **µdah l [ayh hbrw** “et multum ipsum super hominem”, Montanus; “et magaum est illud super hominem istum”, Rambachius.
- ft144 -- “Cum furor dubius”, etc. Satyr. 14. v. 136. exposed by Persius, *Sat.* 6. v. 69, etc. “unge puer caules”, etc.
- ft145 -- **ab yk** “quamvis venit”, Drusius.
- ft146 -- **Æçj b** “in tenebrositatem”, Montanus; “in tenebras”, Tigurine version, Mercerus, so Broughton.
- ft147 -- **[dy al w** “ueque expertus est”, Junius & Tremellius, Piscator, Rambachius, so Broughton.

ft148 -- Mela tie Situ Orbis, l. 3. c. 9.

ft149 -- Nat. Hist. 1. 7. c. 2.

ft150 -- **al mt al çpnh** “anima non implebitur”, Pagninus, Montanus; “anima non expletur”, Mercerus, Gejerus; “non impletur”, Cocceius, so Broughton; “non satiatur”, Drusius.

ft151 -- **l xk µç[yw** “et facit eos at umbram”, Cocceius.

ft152 -- **wl bh yyj ymy rpsm** “numero dierum vitae”, (“vitarum”, Montanus), “vanitatis suae”, Pagninus, Rambachius.

ft153 -- So Schmidt, and some in Vatablus.

ft154 -- Herodot. Terpsichore, sive l. 5. c. 4. Valer. Maxim. l. 2. c. 6. s. 12. Alexander ab Alex. Genial. Dier. l. 2. c. 25.

ft155 -- **qwj çm s[k bwj** “melior est ira risu”, Pagninus, Mercerus; “melior est indignatio risu”, Tigurine version, Junius & Tremellius.

ft156 -- **µyl ysk ryç [mç çyam** “quam vir audiens canticum stultorum”, Montanus, Mercerus; “prae viro audiente canticum stultorum”, Rambachius.

ft157 -- **hntm bl ta dbayw** “et frangit cor dotibus praeclaris ornatum”, Tigurine version; so some Jewish writers in Mercerus.

ft158 -- Isocrates ad Nicoclem, p. 36.

ft159 -- “In pectoribus ira considit”, Petronius; “iram sanguinei regio sub pectore cordis”, Claudian. de 4. Consul. Honor. Panegy. v. 241.

ft160 -- **hl j n µ[** “aeque ac haereditas”, Gejerus, Schmidt.

ft161 -- Sententiae, v. 1153.

ft162 -- **hyj t hmkj h t[d ^wrtyw** “et praestantia scientiae sapientiae vivificabit”, Montanus.

ft163 -- **hbwj µwyb** “in die bono”, Pagninus, Montanus, Mercerus, Gejerus.

ft164 -- **bwj b hyh** “esto in bono”, Pagninus, Montanus, Mercerus, Cocceius, Gejerus, Rambachius.

ft165 -- **h[r µwyb** “in die mala”, Pagninus, Montanus, Mercerus.

- ft166 -- **har** “praecave”, V. L. “praevide, aut provide ac prospice”, Drusius; so Gussetius, p. 766.
- ft167 -- **l k ta** “illa omnia”, Junius & Tremellius, Piscator, Tigurine version, Gejerus; “omnia haec”, Mercerus; “universa haec”, Rambachius.
- ft168 -- Terent. Heautont. Act. 4. Sc. 4.
- ft169 -- Deuteronomy Defect. Hod. Ling. Heb. s. 230.
- ft170 -- **µmwçt hml** “ut quid obstupesces?” Vatablus, Amama; “cur obstupesces?” Mercerus; “cur in stuporem te dares?” Cocceius; “qua te ipsum stupidum facies?” Tigurine version; “ne obstupescas”, V. L. so Sept. and Syriac versions.
- ft171 -- “Nehemiah quid desolaberis?” Pagninus, Montanus; “quare desolationem tibi accerseres?” Junius & Tremellius, Piscator, Gejerus.
- ft172 -- **[çrt l a** “ne paveas”, Pagninus; “ne te occupes multum, aut distrahas te, sive inquietes”, some in Vatablus; so Aben Ezra and Ben Melech.
- ft173 -- “Ante diem”, Virgil. Aeneid. 4. prope finem. Vid. Servium in ib. Ovid. Metamorph. l. 1. Fab. 4.
- ft174 -- So Broughton, Rambachius, and others.
- ft175 -- **yk** “quamvis”, Junius & Tremellus, Amama, so Broughton; “attamen”, Grotius.
- ft176 -- Sophoclis Antigone, v. 1140.
- ft177 -- **Æbl ˆtt l a** “ne des tuum cor”, Montanus.
- ft178 -- **hyhç hm qwj r** “remotum (est) illud quod fuit”, Montanus, Mercerus, Vatablus, Drusius, Gejerus.
- ft179 -- **ybl w yna ytwbs** “circuivi ego et cor meum”, Pagninus, Montanus, Mercerus, Gejerus.
- ft180 -- **ˆwbçj** “estimationem rerum”, Mercerus.
- ft181 -- Musaeus, v. 166. Vid. Barthii ad Claudian. de Nupt. Honor. v. 70.
- ft182 -- Epidicus, Act. 2. Sc. 2. v. 32. “Illecebrosius nihil fieri potest”, ib. Bacchides, Sc. 1. v. 55. Truculentus, Act. 1. Sc. 1. v. 14-21.

- ft183 -- **μyhl ah ynpl bwj** “bonus coram Deo”, Pagninus, Mercerus, Drusius, Amama, Rambachius; “qui bonus videtur coram Deo ipso”, Junius & Tremellius.
- ft184 -- “Vir bonus et sapiens, qualem vix reperit unum, millibus e multio hominum, consultus Apollo.” Auson. Idyll. 16. v. 1, 2.
- ft185 -- Theaeteto, p. 129.
- ft186 -- **μybr twnbçj** “cogitationes magnatum”, Deuteronomy Dieu; “ratiocina multarum, magnarumque rerum”, so some in Rambachius; see Luke x. 41, 42.
- ft187 -- **rbd** “verbi”, V. L. Pagninus, Montanus.
- ft188 -- **wynp ryat** “illustrati”, Vatablus, Junius & Tremellius, Piscator, Mercerus; “illuminat”, Cocceius, Gejerus, Rambachius, so Broughton.
- ft189 -- “Adde quod ingenuas didicisse fideliter artes, emollit mores, nec sinit esse feros”, Ovid. de Ponto, l. 2. Eleg. 9.
- ft190 -- **anwçy** “duplicatur”, Junius & Tremellius, Varenius; “instauratur”, Cocceius, Gejerus.
- ft191 -- Ebr. Comment. p. 595. so the Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic versions.
- ft192 -- **rmç Æl m yp** “os regis observes”, Tigurine version, Pagninus, Mercerus; “observa”, Montanus, Vatablus, Junius & Tremellius, Piscator, Cocceius, Gejerus, Rambachius.
- ft193 -- **μyhl a t[wbç trbd l [w** “sed, ita quod ad Deum attinent, observes rationem juramenti Dei”, Varenius; “attamen, supra serve verbum juramenti Dei”, Gussetius, p. 605.
- ft194 -- **l hbt l a** “ne consterneris”, Gejerus, and some in Rambachius.
- ft195 -- **ˆwj l ç** “imperium”, Montanus, Rambachius; “dominatio”, Vatablus, Junius & Tremellius, Piscator, Drusius.
- ft196 -- **[dy al** “non cognoscet”, Vatablus, Mercerus, Gejerus, Rambachius, Cocceius.
- ft197 -- **j pçmw t[w καιρον κρισεως**, Sept. so some in Drusius.
- ft198 -- **hyhç hm** “quod futurum est”, Pagninus, Montanus.

- ft199 -- **hyhy rçak** “quo modo”, Junius & Tremellius, Gejerus, Rambachius, so Broughton.
- ft200 -- **awl kl** “ut coerceat”, Piscator; “ad coercendum”, Cocceius.
- ft201 -- **ˆwj l ç** “dominatio”, Junius & Tremellius, Vatablus; “dominium”, Rambachius.
- ft202 -- **hmj l mb tj l çm ˆya** “non est missio ad illud praelium”, Varenius apud Gejerum.
- ft203 -- **wyl [b ta** “dominos suos”, Drusius.
- ft204 -- **µdah** “homo”, Pagninus, Montanus, Tigurine version, Junius & Tremellius, etc.
- ft205 -- **wl [rl** “in ipsus perniciem”, Tigurine version; “in noxam ipsi”, Cocceius.
- ft206 -- **ˆkbw** “et vere”, Vatablus.
- ft207 -- **wkl hy çwdq µwqmmw waby** “et venerunt, immo ex ipso etiam loco sancti itabant”, Rambaschius.
- ft208 -- So Piscator, Mercerus, Cocceius, Gejerus, Rambachius.
- ft209 -- **[r twç[l al m** “plenum ad faciendum malum”, Pagninus, Montanus; “praegnano ad faciendum malum”, Gussetius, p. 469.
- ft210 -- **wl ˆyram** “et prolongans ei”, Montanus; “et prolongat in Deus dies”, Pagninus; so Mercerus, Junius & Tremellius, supply it; “et prorogat dei Deus poenam”, Piscator; “et differt Deus iram suam propter illium”, Vatablus.
- ft211 -- **rwbl** “purgare”, Gejerus, Gouge.
- ft212 -- **hanç µg hbha µg** “etiam amor, etiam odium”, i.e. “in manu Dei”, Deuteronomy Dieu, Gouge, Gussetius, p. 150, 873.
- ft213 -- **µhynpl l kh µdah [dwy ˆya** “non norunt homines quicquam eorum quae ante se sunt”, Deuteronomy Dieu; “non est homo quisquam qui cognoscat omnes qui sunt coram ipsi”, Gussetius, p. 873.
- ft214 -- Deuteronomy scipso, l. 2. c. 11.
- ft215 -- Paraenes Demonic. p. 10.

- ft216 -- “Juratus sum”, Plauti Corculio, Act. 3. v. 88. “Fui juratus”, ib. Act. 4. Sc. 4. v. 10. “Non tu juratus mihi es? juratus sum”, ib. Rudens, Act. 5. Sc. 3. v. 16, 17.
- ft217 -- Herodot. Thalia, sive l. 3. c. 8.
- ft218 -- **twl l wh** “insaniae”, Montanus, Mercerus, Drusius, Amama, Gejerus, Rambachius; “omnis insania”, Junius & Tremellius.
- ft219 -- **rj by rça ym** “quisquis eligatur”, Montanus, so Gejerus.
- ft220 -- **µtanq** “aemulatio ipsorum”, Cocceius, Gejerus; “aelus eorum”, Drusius, Amana, Rambachius.
- ft221 -- “Ille repotia natales aliosque dierum, festos albatu celebrat”. Satyr. l. 2. Sat. 2. v. 60, 61. “Cum ipse epuli Dominus albatu esset”, Cicero in Vatin. c. 13.
- ft222 -- Comment. in Isa. lxx. 13.
- ft223 -- “Coronatus nitentes malabathro Syrio capillos”, Horat. Carmin. l. 2. Ode 7. v. 7, 8. “et paulo post: funde capacibus unguenta de conchis”, v. 22, 23. “Unguentum (fateor) bonum dedisti convivis”, Martial. l. 3. Epigr. 11.
- ft224 -- **µyyj har** “vide vitam”, Pagninus, Vatablus, Drusius, Mercerus, Cocceius; “vel vitas”, Montanus; “perfruere vita”, V. L. “fracre vita”, Junius & Tremellius, Piscator, Gejerus, Rambachius; so Broughton.
- ft225 -- **µετα ψευδ τυχη και καιροσ**, Plato de Leg. l. 4. p. 827.
- ft226 -- **[gp** “occursus”, Montanus; “sive eventus”, Mercerus, Rambachius; “occurrent”, Broughton,
- ft227 -- Apud Ciceronem de Senectute, c. 12. “Hic ubi saepe occultum visus decurrere piscis ad hamum”, Horat. Epist. l. 1. Ep. 8. v. 73, 74.
- ft228 -- **çmçh tj t hmkj ytyar hz µg** “Hoc etiam vidi sub sole, nempe sapientiam”, Tigurine version; “etiam hoc vidi, sapientiam sub sole”, Cocceius; “etiam hoc vidi, videlicet, sapientiam sub sole”, Gejerus.
- ft229 -- **hb axmw** “et invenit in ea”, Mercerus, Drusius, Amama; “sed invenit in ea”, Rambachius.
- ft230 -- **tmkj w** “quamvis sapientia”, Junius & Tremellius, Piscator, Mercerus, Gejerus, Amama; “etsi”, Drusius.

- ft231 -- “Et pauperis sapientiam contemptam”, etc. Tigurine version.
- ft232 -- **twm ybwbz** “muscae mortis”, Montanus, Vatablus, Drusius, Amama, Cocceius, Rambachius.
- ft233 -- Ebr. Comment. p. 344.
- ft234 -- Suidas in voce **δεξια**.
- ft235 -- **wbl** “cor ejus”, Pagninus, Montanus, etc.
- ft236 -- **μybr μyμwγrmb εν υθεσι μεγαλοις**, Sept. “in celsitudinibus amplis”, Piscator, Amama, Gejerus; “in sublimitatibus amplis”, Cocceius; “in altitudinibus magnis”, Rambachius; “in great height”, Broughton.
- ft237 -- Justin. e Trogo, l. 41. c. 3. Alex. ab Alex. Genial. Dier. l. 5. c. 19.
- ft238 -- Nicander apud Bochart. Hierozoic. par. 1. l. 1. c. 4. col. 26.
- ft239 -- **çj l al b** “absque susurro”, Pagninus; “absque sibilo”, Tigurine version.
- ft240 -- **ˆj** “gratia”, Montanus, Mercerus, Drusius, Cocceius, Rambachius.
- ft241 -- **wn[l bj** “deglutiet eum”, Montanus; “absorbent eum”, Piscator, Rambachius.
- ft242 -- “Illam”, Munster, Cocceius; “quam labia stulti velut absorbendo sufferunt”, Tigurine version.
- ft243 -- **hbry** “multiplicabit”, Pagninus, Montanus; “multiplicat”, Vatablus, Mercerus, Drusius, Amama, Gejerus, Rambachius, Cocceius.
- ft244 -- **μyrywj** “heroum”, Montanus.
- ft245 -- **ytçb al w** non “autem ad computationem”, Junius & Tremellius, Piscator, Drusius, Gejerus, Rambachius; so Broughton.
- ft246 -- “Non cum ingurgitatione”, Cocceius; “non eum computatione”, Schmidt.
- ft247 -- Plutarch. de Iside & Osir. “in principio”. Vid. Alex. ab Alex. Genial. Dier. l. 3. c. 11.
- ft248 -- Laert. Vit. Solon. p. 38.
- ft249 -- Strabo. Geograph. l. 15. p. 488.

- ft250 -- Deuteronomy Republic. l. 3. p. 621.
- ft251 -- **μytl x[b** “in pigritiis”, Montanus; “per duplicem pigritiam”, Tigurine version; “pigritia amborum”, Junius & Tremellius.
- ft252 -- **twl qçb** “per remissionem”, Tigurine version; “demissione”, Junius & Tremellius, Piscator, Gejerus; so Cocceius, Rambachius.
- ft253 -- **μj l μyç[qwj çl** “ad risum facientes panem”, Montanus; “faciunt panem”, Paganinus, Mercerus, Piscator.
- ft254 -- **ˆyyw** “et vinum, repete, parant”, Piscator.
- ft255 -- **μyyj j mçy** “et vitam exhilaret”, Tigurine version; “exhilarare solet vitam”, Mercerus; “quod exhilarare debebat vitam”, so some in Rambachius.
- ft256 -- **Æ[dmb εν συνειδησει σου**, Sept. “in conscientia tua”, Junius & Tremellius, Piscator, Drusius, Cocceius, Gejerus.
- ft257 -- Apuleius de Mundo.
- ft258 -- **μypgkh l [b** “dominus alarum”, Piscator.
- ft259 -- Ebr. Concord. Partic. p. 155. No. 704.
- ft260 -- **ql j** “partem”, Pagninus, Montanus, Munster, Vatablus, Drusius, Junius & Tremellius, Piscator, etc.
- ft261 -- **j wrh** “venti”, Pagninus, Montanus, Junius & Tremellius, Piscator, Drusius, Mercerus, Amama, Cocceius, Gejerus, Rambachius; so Broughton, and the Syriac and Arabic versions.
- ft262 -- **hal mh ˆj bb** “in utero pleno”, Mercerus, Gejerus, Gussetius, p. 936. “in ventre pleno”, Cocceius, so Aben Ezra.
- ft263 -- Laert. in Vita Anaxag. p. 95. Lactant. de Fals. Sap. l. 3. c. 9.
- ft264 -- Plutarch, vol. 2. p. 1094.
- ft265 -- **j mçy μl kb** “in eis omnibus laetetur”, Junius & Tremellius, Mercerus, Cocceius, Gejerus.
- ft266 -- **hyhy hbrh yk** “quia multi sint”, Amama, so some in Drusius; “quod multi futuri sint”, Piscator, Gejerus, Rambachius.
- ft267 -- Euterpe, sive l. 2. c. 78.

- ft268 -- s[k “iram”, Pagninus, Montanus, Mercerus; “indignationem”, Junius & Tremellius, Piscator, Gejerus; “God’s anger”, Broughton.
- ft269 -- twrj çh “ortus” Junius & Tremellius; “aurora”, Cocceius, Gejerus, so Aben Ezra and Ben Melech; “dies nigredinis pili”; so the Targum, and Abendana.
- ft270 -- Æyarwb “Creatorum tuorum”, Drusius, Gejerus, Rambachius; so Broughton.
- ft271 -- Plautus in Aulular. Act. 1. Sc. 1. v. 4. Menaechm. Act. 5. Sc. 2. v. 6. calls old age, “mala aetas”; and the winter of old age, Trinummus, Act. 2. Sc. 3. v. 7. And Pindar, γηρας ουλομενον, Pyth. Ode 10. so Theognis, v. 272, 776, 1006. And Homer, γηρας λυτρος, Iliad. 10. v. 79. & 23. v. 644. “Tristis senectus”, Virgil. Aenid. 6.
- ft272 -- Deuteronomy Seuectute, c. 14, 15.
- ft273 -- Ibid. c. 8.
- ft274 -- “Inque suum miseris excitat ales opus”, Ovid. Amorum, l. 1. Eleg. 6. v. 66. “Cristatus ales”, ib. Fast. l. 1. v. 455.
- ft275 -- Cicero in Catone Majore, sive de Senectute, c. 8.
- ft276 -- Fam. Epist. l. 11. Ep. 58.
- ft277 -- R. Sol. Urbin. Ohel Moed, fol. 83. 1.
- ft278 -- Hierozoic. par. 2. l. 4. c. 8. col. 494.
- ft279 -- Avicenna spud Schindler. Lexic. col. 10.
- ft280 -- Dictionar. Chaldaic. p. 13.
- ft281 -- Tusculan. Quaest. l. 2. prope finem.
- ft282 -- wml [tyb l a “ad domum seculi sui”, Pagninus. Montanus, Vatablus, Mercerus.
- ft283 -- γνωμαι v. 1008. vid. v. 244.
- ft284 -- Vid. Castel. Lexic. Hept. col. 3662.
- ft285 -- Vid. Waser. de Num. Heb. l. 1. c. 13.
- ft286 -- ðt “recurrat”, V. L. “excurrit”, Junius & Tremellius.
- ft287 -- rbçt.
- ft288 -- T. Bab. Sabbat, fol. 151. 2. & 152. 1.

- ft289 -- Deuteronomy Generat. Animal. l. 2. c. 3.
- ft290 -- **σωμα γαρ εκ γαιης**, etc. Poem. Admon. v. 102, 103. So Lucretius l. 2. “cedit item retro de terra”, etc.
- ft291 -- Macrob. Saturnal. l. I. c. 10.
- ft292 -- **rtyw** “praeterea”, Tigurine version, Vatablus, Schmidt.
- ft293 -- “Quod reliquum est”, Piscator, Gejerus, Amama.
- ft294 -- “Quamobrem potius”, Junius & Tremeillius; “and this is a matter of excellency”, Broughton,
- ft295 -- Mercerus and Cocceius.
- ft296 -- **bj yrbd** “verba complacentiae vel beneplaciti”, Vatablus; “verba desiderii”, Amama, Rambachius; “verba delectabilia”, Junius & Tremellius, Piscator, Drusius, Mercerus, Gejerus; so Broughton; “verba voluptatis”, Cocceius.
- ft297 -- **my[wj n** “plantati”, Pagninus, Montanus, Tigurine version, Rambachius.
- ft298 -- **twpsa yl [b** “auctores, vel dominos collectionum”, Montanus, Vatablus, Mercerus, Gejerus.
- ft299 -- Vid. Lightfoot, vol. 2. p. 575.
- ft300 -- “Veluti clavi. infixi sunt domini, vel magistri congregationum”, Schmidt.
- ft301 -- Vid. Deuteronomy Dieu & Cocceium in loc. & Vitringam de Synag. Vet. l. 1. par 2. c. 8. p. 377. & Hyde Not. in Peritzol. Itinera Mundi, p. 94.
- ft302 -- **hmhm rtyw** “potius inquam ex istis”, Junius & Tremellius; “quod potissimum ex istis”, Gejerus.
- ft303 -- “Et amplius his, fili mi, cave”, Mercerus.
- ft304 -- Vid. Castell. Lexic. col. 1874. who gives an instance of the use of this word in, the following sentence; **ghl w** “he that reads with mouth, but his heart is not with it”; and so Kimchi, in Sepher Shotash, fol. 74. fol. 2. explains the word here, “learning without understanding”.
- ft305 -- Ebr. Comment. p. 431.

- ft306 -- I kh rbd Pws “finis verbi omnis”, Pagninus, Montanus, Mercerus; “finis universi negotii”, Tigurine version, so Vatablus.
- ft307 -- [mçn “auditus est”, Pagninus, Montanus, Vatablus, Tigurine version, Mercerus.
- ft308 -- Horat. Carmin. l. 1. Ode 35. v. 36.
- ft309 -- µdah I k hz “hoc (est) omnis homo”, Pagninus, Montanus, Vatablus, Mercerus; “omnium hominum perfectio”, Tigurine version; “hoc est totus homo”, Cocceius; “this is all the man”, Broughton.
- ft310 -- “Hoc est omnium hominum”, Piscator, Gejerus; “hoc est totum hominis”, Junius & Tremellius.
- ft311 -- Deuteronomy Fals. Sap. l. 3, c. 10.
- ft312 -- Vid. Buxtorf. Tiberius, c. 14. p. 38.
- ft313 -- µI [n I k I [“super omnem occultum, sc. hominem”, Schmidt.
- ft314 -- “Sive bonus fuerit, sive malus”, Schmidt.