

## Ecclesiastes: The Teacher's Reflections – Part 2 (c. 937t–932t BC)

### Ecclesiastes 4–8

#### On the Oppressed and their Condition

4:1 I looked again, and I saw all the oppression that occurs under the sun.

I saw the tears of the oppressed—  
no one comforts them!

Those who oppress them are powerful—  
no one can comfort them!

2 So I deemed the dead who have already died  
more *fortunate* than the living who are still alive.

3 But better *off* than both of them is the one who has not yet been born  
and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.

#### On Labor and Gain

4 I also realized that all *of the* toil and all *of the* skillful work that is done—it *is* envy between one man and another. This also *is* vanity and chasing wind!

5 The fool refuses to work with his hands,  
so he has nothing to eat except his own skin!

6 Better *is* one handful with peace  
than two fists full with toil and chasing wind.

#### On Companionship and the Benefits of Combined Effort

7 I turned again and saw another vanity under the sun.

8 Sometimes a man is all alone with no companion; he also has neither son nor brother. Yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eye is not satisfied with wealth. *He laments*, “For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?” This also *is* vanity—it is an unhappy business!

9 Two *are* better than the one, for they enjoy a better reward for their toil.

10 For if one falls, his companion may help him up. But pity the one who falls and there is no one to help him up.

11 Also if two lie together, they can keep each other warm. But how can one person be warm?

12 Although an assailant may overpower one person, two may withstand him. A threefold cord is not easily broken!

#### On Power and Succession

13 A poor but wise youth *is* better than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to receive advice.

14 For he came out of the prison house to reign, since he was born poor in his kingdom.

15 I saw all the living who move about under the sun with the youth; the second who will stand in his place.

16 There is no end to all the people, to all who were before him. Yet the later generation will not rejoice in him, for this also *is* vanity and chasing wind!

#### On Vowing to God

5:1 Guard your steps when you go to the house of God;  
draw near to listen *rather* than to offer a sacrifice of fools,  
for they do not know that they are doing evil.

2 Do not be rash with your mouth,  
and do not let your heart be quick to utter a word before God.  
For God is in heaven, and you *are* on earth;  
therefore, let your words be few.

3 For a dream comes with many cares,  
and the voice of a fool with many words.

4 When you make a vow to God,  
do not delay in fulfilling it,  
for he takes no pleasure in fools.  
Fulfill what you vow!

5 It is better that you not vow  
than that you vow and not fulfill it.

6 Do not let your mouth lead your flesh into sin,  
and do not tell the messenger that it *was* a mistake.

Why anger God at your words,  
so that he destroys the work of your hands?

- 7 For with many dreams *come* vanities and numerous words.  
Therefore, fear God!

#### On Politics and Corruption

- 8 Do not be surprised if you see the poor being oppressed with violence  
or *do not see* justice and righteousness in the province.  
For one official is watched by a higher official,  
and *there are* even higher officials over them!
- 9 The produce of the land is exploited by everyone;  
even the king profits from the field *of the poor*!

#### On Wealth and Income

- 10 Whoever loves money is not satisfied *with* money,  
and whoever loves wealth *is* not *satisfied with* profit.  
This also *is* vanity!
- 11 When prosperity increases,  
those who consume it increase.  
So its owner gains nothing,  
except to see his wealth *before* it is spent.
- 12 The sleep of the laborer *is* pleasant, whether he eats little or much,  
but the wealth of the rich man does not allow him to rest.

- 13 There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun: wealth hoarded by its owner to his harm.  
14 That wealth was lost in a bad venture. Although he has borne a child, he has nothing to leave to him.  
15 Just as he came from his mother's womb naked, he will depart just as he came; he will take nothing with him for his toil.  
16 This also *is* a grievous illness. Exactly as he came, so he will go. What profit *does* he gain for all his toil for the wind?  
17 Also, he eats in darkness all his days; he is frustrated *in* much sickness and resentment.

#### On Finding Contentment in Pleasing God

- 18 Look! I have discovered what is good and fitting: to eat and to drink and to enjoy all *the fruit of* the toil with which one toils under the sun during the number of the days of his life that God gives to him—for this *is* his lot.  
19 This indeed is a gift of God: everyone to whom God gives wealth and possessions, he also empowers him to enjoy them, to accept his lot, and to rejoice in *the fruit of* his toil.  
20 For he does not remember the *brief* days of his life, for God keeps his heart preoccupied with enjoyment *of life*.

#### On Being Unable to Enjoy Wealth

- 6:1 Here is another misfortune that I have seen under the sun, and it *is* prevalent among humankind.  
2 God gives a man wealth, possessions, and honor, so that he lacks nothing his heart desires; yet God does not enable him to enjoy it—instead someone else ends up enjoying it. This *is* vanity—indeed, it *is* a grievous ill!  
3 Even if a man fathers a hundred *children* and lives many years so that the days of his years are many, if his heart is not satisfied with his prosperity and he does not receive a proper burial, I deem the stillborn better than him.  
4 For he comes into vanity and departs into darkness, and his name is shrouded in darkness.  
5 He has neither seen nor known the sun, yet he has more rest than him.  
6 Even if a man lives a thousand years twice, if he does not enjoy prosperity, both suffer the same fate!

#### On Contentment

- 7 All of a man's toil *is* for his mouth—  
yet his appetite is never satisfied.
- 8 So do the wise *really* have an advantage over fools?  
Can the poor *really* gain anything by knowing how to act in front of others?
- 9 Better to be content with what your eyes see  
than for your soul to constantly crave more.  
This also *is* vanity and chasing wind!
- 10 Whatever *is*—it was already determined,  
what will be—it has already been decided.  
As for man, he cannot argue

against what is more powerful than him.

- 11 Increasing words only multiplies futility,  
how does that profit anyone?

12 For who knows what *is* good for a man in his life during the few days of his fleeting life, which are fleeting as a shadow? For who can tell anyone what will happen in the future under the sun?

### On Death and Sorrow

- 7:1 A good name *is* better than precious ointment,  
and the day of death *is better* than the day of one's birth.
- 2 Better to go to the house of mourning  
than to go to the house of feasting,  
for *death is* the end of every person,  
and the living should take *it* to his heart.
- 3 Sorrow *is* better than laughter,  
for by sadness of countenance the heart is made good.
- 4 The heart of the wise *is* in the house of mourning,  
but the heart of fools *is* in the house of mirth.

### On Fools

- 5 Better to listen to *the* rebuke of *the* wise  
than for a man to listen to *the* song of fools.
- 6 Like the sound of thorns under a pot,  
so also the laughter of fools.  
This also *is* vanity!
- 7 Surely oppression makes a fool of the wise,  
and a bribe corrupts the heart.
- 8 The end of a matter *is* better than its beginning;  
better to be slow to anger than hot-headed.
- 9 Do not be quick in your spirit to anger,  
for anger lodges in the bosom of fools.

### On Wisdom

- 10 Do not say, "Why were the former days better than these?"  
For *it is* not from wisdom *that* you ask this.
- 11 Wisdom *is* good with an inheritance;  
it benefits the living.
- 12 For wisdom offers protection like money offers protection.  
But knowledge *has* an advantage—wisdom restores life to its possessor.

### On Good Times and Bad Times

- 13 Consider the work of God.  
For who is able to make straight what he made crooked?
- 14 In the day of prosperity, rejoice!  
But in the day of adversity, consider!  
For God made one in place of another  
so that mortals cannot find out what will happen in the future.

### On Living a Balanced Life

- 15 I have seen all these things in my vain life:  
Sometimes a righteous man perishes in *spite of* his righteousness,  
and sometimes a wicked man lives a long life in *spite of* his evil.
- 16 Do not be excessively righteous,  
and do not act excessively wise, lest you destroy yourself.
- 17 Do not act excessively wicked,  
and do not be a fool, lest you die before your time.
- 18 *It is* good to take hold of the one and also must not let go of the other;  
for whoever fears God will hold both of them secure.

**On Wisdom and Speech**

- 19 Wisdom gives more strength to the wise  
than ten rulers who are in the city.
- 20 Surely there is no one righteous on the earth  
who *continually* does good and never sins. [cf. [Rom 3:10](#)]
- 21 Do not pay attention to everything people say,  
lest you hear your own servant curse you.
- 22 For your heart knows  
that you also have cursed others many times.

**On Understanding Life**

- 23 All this I have tested with wisdom. I said, “I will be wise!” but it was beyond my grasp.
- 24 Whatever is—it is far beyond comprehension. Who can discover it?
- 25 I set my mind to try to seek wisdom and the plan, and to know that wickedness *is* foolishness and that folly *is* delusion.
- 26 I myself found *that* more bitter than death *is* the woman who *is* a trap, whose heart *is* a snare, and whose hands *are* bonds. The one who pleases God escapes from her, but the sinner is caught by her.
- 27 “Look! I found this,” said the Teacher, “while trying to find how the plan fits together.
- 28 What my heart sought, I did not find. Although I found one righteous man among one thousand, I did not find one *upright* woman among all these.
- 29 Look! This alone I found: God made mankind upright, but they have devised many schemes.”

**On Kings and Authority**

- 8:1 Who *is* like the sage?  
Who knows *the* interpretation of a thing?  
A man’s wisdom makes his face shine,  
and the hardness of his face is changed.
- 2 Keep *the* command of *the* king  
because of your oath to God.
- 3 Do not be terrified of his presence!  
Go at once and do not delay when a matter *is* unpleasant,  
for he can do anything that he desires.
- 4 Since the word of the king *is* supreme,  
no one can say to him, “What are you doing?”
- 5 Whoever obeys *his* command will not suffer disaster.  
The wise mind knows the *proper* time and the right *procedure*.
- 6 For there is a *proper* time and right *procedure* for every matter,  
even though the trouble of man *weighs* heavy upon him.

**On the Uncertainty of Life**

- 7 Surely no one knows what will be,  
so who can tell anyone what will happen?
- 8 Just as no one can control the wind to restrain the wind,  
so also no one can control the day of his death.  
Just as no one is discharged in time of war,  
so wickedness will not deliver the wicked.

**On Tyranny and Hypocrisy**

- 9 I saw all this as I applied my heart to all the deeds done under the sun: sometimes those in authority harm others.
- 10 Meanwhile, I saw the wicked being *honorably* buried, but those who came and went from the holy place were forgotten in the city, even though they had done so. This also *is* vanity!

**On Crime and Punishment**

- 11 Because sentence against an evil deed is not carried out quickly, the heart of humans fills up within them to do evil.
- 12 Although the sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I also know that it will be good for those who fear God—because they fear his presence.
- 13 But it will not go well with the wicked, and they will not prolong *their* days, like the shadow; because there is no fearing God’s presence.

**On Bad Things Happening to Good People**

14 There *is* a vanity that happens on earth: sometimes the righteous suffer what the wicked deserve, and sometimes the wicked receive what the righteous deserve. I said, “This also *is* vanity!”

**On the Futility of Trying to Understand Everything**

15 So I recommend enjoyment. For there *is* nothing better for man under the sun than to eat and to drink and to rejoice. This will accompany him in his toil the days of his life that God gives to him under the sun.

16 I applied my mind to know wisdom and to understand the business that is done on earth—how neither day nor night one’s eyes see sleep.

17 Then I saw all the work of God—man *is* not able to discover the work that is done under the sun. Although man may toil in seeking, he cannot find it. Even if a wise man claims *that he* knows it, he cannot find it.

Scripture quotations are from the [Lexham English Bible](#) (LEB). Copyright 2012 [Logos Bible Software](#). Lexham is a registered trademark of [Logos Bible Software](#).