

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

Ecclesiastes 4–8

On the Oppressed and their Condition

4:1 Then I looked again at all the acts of oppression which were being done under the sun. And behold *I saw* the tears of the oppressed and *that* they had no one to comfort *them*; and on the side of their oppressors was power, but they had no one to comfort *them*.

2 So I congratulated the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still living.

3 But better *off* than both of them is the one who has never existed, who has never seen the evil activity that is done under the sun.

On Labor and Gain

4 I have seen that every labor and every skill which is done is *the result of rivalry* between a man and his neighbor. This too is vanity and striving after wind.

5 The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh.

6 One hand full of rest is better than two fists full of labor and striving after wind.

On Companionship and the Benefits of Combined Effort

7 Then I looked again at vanity under the sun.

8 There was a certain man without a dependent, having neither a son nor a brother, yet there was no end to all his labor. Indeed, his eyes were not satisfied with riches *and he never asked*, “And for whom am I laboring and depriving myself of pleasure?” This too is vanity and it is a grievous task.

9 Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor.

10 For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up.

11 Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm *alone*?

12 And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three *strands* is not quickly torn apart.

On Power and Succession

13 A poor yet wise lad is better than an old and foolish king who no longer knows *how* to receive instruction.

14 For he has come out of prison to become king, even though he was born poor in his kingdom.

15 I have seen all the living under the sun throng to the side of the second lad who replaces him.

16 There is no end to all the people, to all who were before them, and even the ones who will come later will not be happy with him, for this too is vanity and striving after wind.

On Vowing to God

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

2 Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your words be few.

3 For the dream comes through much effort and the voice of a fool through many words.

4 When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it; for *He takes* no delight in fools. Pay what you vow!

5 It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay.

6 Do not let your speech cause you to sin and do not say in the presence of the messenger *of God* that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry on account of your voice and destroy the work of your hands?

7 For in many dreams and in many words there is emptiness. Rather, fear God.

On Politics and Corruption

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

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

On Wealth and Income

10 He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance *with its* income. This too is vanity.

11 When good things increase, those who consume them increase. So what is the advantage to their owners except to look on?

12 The sleep of the working man is pleasant, whether he eats little or much; but the full stomach of the rich man does not allow him to sleep.

13 There is a grievous evil *which* I have seen under the sun: riches being hoarded by their owner to his hurt.

14 When those riches were lost through a bad investment and he had fathered a son, then there was nothing to support him.

15 As he had come naked from his mother's womb, so will he return as he came. He will take nothing from the fruit of his labor that

he can carry in his hand.

16 This also is a grievous evil—exactly as a man is born, thus will he die. So what is the advantage to him who toils for the wind?

17 Throughout his life *he* also eats in darkness with great vexation, sickness and anger.

On Finding Contentment in Pleasing God

18 Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one's labor in which he toils under the sun *during* the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward.

19 Furthermore, as for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, He has also empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God.

20 For he will not often consider the years of his life, because God keeps him occupied with the gladness of his heart.

On Being Unable to Enjoy Wealth

6:1 There is an evil which I have seen under the sun and it is prevalent among men—

2 a man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor so that his soul lacks nothing of all that he desires; yet God has not empowered him to eat from them, for a foreigner enjoys them. This is vanity and a severe affliction.

3 If a man fathers a hundred *children* and lives many years, however many they be, but his soul is not satisfied with good things and he does not even have a *proper* burial, *then* I say, "Better the miscarriage than he,

4 for it comes in futility and goes into obscurity; and its name is covered in obscurity.

5 "It never sees the sun and it never knows *anything*; it is better off than he.

6 "Even if the *other* man lives a thousand years twice and does not enjoy good things—do not all go to one place?"

On Contentment

7 All a man's labor is for his mouth and yet the appetite is not satisfied.

8 For what advantage does the wise man have over the fool? What *advantage* does the poor man have, knowing *how* to walk before the living?

9 What the eyes see is better than what the soul desires. This too is futility and a striving after wind.

10 Whatever exists has already been named, and it is known what man is; for he cannot dispute with him who is stronger than he is.

11 For there are many words which increase futility. What *then* is the advantage to a man?

12 For who knows what is good for a man during *his* lifetime, *during* the few years of his futile life? He will spend them like a shadow. For who can tell a man what will be after him under the sun?

On Death and Sorrow

7:1 A good name is better than a good ointment,
And the day of *one's* death is better than the day of one's birth.

2 It is better to go to a house of mourning
Than to go to a house of feasting,
Because that is the end of every man,
And the living takes *it* to heart.

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

4 The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning,
While the mind of fools is in the house of pleasure.

On Fools

5 It is better to listen to the rebuke of a wise man
Than for one to listen to the song of fools.

6 For as the crackling of thorn bushes under a pot,
So is the laughter of the fool;
And this too is futility.

7 For oppression makes a wise man mad,
And a bribe corrupts the heart.

8 The end of a matter is better than its beginning;
Patience of spirit is better than haughtiness of spirit.

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

On Wisdom

- 10 Do not say, “Why is it that the former days were better than these?”
For it is not from wisdom that you ask about this.
- 11 Wisdom along with an inheritance is good
And an advantage to those who see the sun.
- 12 For wisdom is protection *just as* money is protection,
But the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the lives of its possessors.

On Good Times and Bad Times

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

On Living a Balanced Life

- 15 I have seen everything during my lifetime of futility; there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness and there is a wicked man who prolongs *his life* in his wickedness.
- 16 Do not be excessively righteous and do not be overly wise. Why should you ruin yourself?
- 17 Do not be excessively wicked and do not be a fool. Why should you die before your time?
- 18 It is good that you grasp one thing and also not let go of the other; for the one who fears God comes forth with both of them.

On Wisdom and Speech

- 19 Wisdom strengthens a wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city.
- 20 Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who *continually* does good and who never sins. [cf. [Rom 3:10](#)]
- 21 Also, do not take seriously all words which are spoken, so that you will not hear your servant cursing you.
- 22 For you also have realized that you likewise have many times cursed others.

On Understanding Life

- 23 I tested all this with wisdom, *and* I said, “I will be wise,” but it was far from me.
- 24 What has been is remote and exceedingly mysterious. Who can discover it?
- 25 I directed my mind to know, to investigate and to seek wisdom and an explanation, and to know the evil of folly and the foolishness of madness.
- 26 And I discovered more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are chains. One who is pleasing to God will escape from her, but the sinner will be captured by her.
- 27 “Behold, I have discovered this,” says the Preacher, “*adding* one thing to another to find an explanation,
28 which I am still seeking but have not found. I have found one man among a thousand, but I have not found a woman among all these.
29 “Behold, I have found only this, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices.”

On Kings and Authority

- 8:1 Who is like the wise man and who knows the interpretation of a matter? A man’s wisdom illumines him and causes his stern face to beam.
- 2 I say, “Keep the command of the king because of the oath before God.
- 3 “Do not be in a hurry to leave him. Do not join in an evil matter, for he will do whatever he pleases.”
- 4 Since the word of the king is authoritative, who will say to him, “What are you doing?”
- 5 He who keeps a *royal* command experiences no trouble, for a wise heart knows the proper time and procedure.
- 6 For there is a proper time and procedure for every delight, though a man’s trouble is heavy upon him.

On the Uncertainty of Life

- 7 If no one knows what will happen, who can tell him when it will happen?
- 8 No man has authority to restrain the wind with the wind, or authority over the day of death; and there is no discharge in the time of war, and evil will not deliver those who practice it.

On Tyranny and Hypocrisy

9 All this I have seen and applied my mind to every deed that has been done under the sun wherein a man has exercised authority over *another* man to his hurt.

10 So then, I have seen the wicked buried, those who used to go in and out from the holy place, and they are *soon* forgotten in the city where they did thus. This too is futility.

On Crime and Punishment

11 Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil.

12 Although a sinner does evil a hundred *times* and may lengthen his *life*, still I know that it will be well for those who fear God, who fear Him openly.

13 But it will not be well for the evil man and he will not lengthen his days like a shadow, because he does not fear God.

On Bad Things Happening to Good People

14 There is futility which is done on the earth, that is, there are righteous men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked. On the other hand, there are evil men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I say that this too is futility.

On the Futility of Trying to Understand Everything

15 So I commended pleasure, for there is nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat and to drink and to be merry, and this will stand by him in his toils *throughout* the days of his life which God has given him under the sun.

16 When I gave my heart to know wisdom and to see the task which has been done on the earth (even though one should never sleep day or night),

17 and I saw every work of God, *I concluded* that man cannot discover the work which has been done under the sun. Even though man should seek laboriously, he will not discover; and though the wise man should say, "I know," he cannot discover.

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