

Ecclesiastes: The Teacher's Reflections – Part 2 (c. 937t–932t BC)**Ecclesiastes 4–8****On the Oppressed and their Condition**

4:1 So I again considered all the oppression that continually occurs on earth.

This is what I saw: The oppressed were in tears,
but no one was comforting them;
no one delivers them
from the power of their oppressors.

2 So I considered those who are dead and gone more fortunate
than those who are still alive.

3 But better than both is the one who has not been born
and has not seen the evil things that are done on earth.

On Labor and Gain

4 Then I considered all the skillful work that is done: Surely it is nothing more than competition between one person and another. This also is profitless—like chasing the wind.

5 The fool folds his hands and does no work,
so he has nothing to eat but his own flesh.

6 Better is one handful with some rest
than two hands full of toil and chasing the wind.

On Companionship and the Benefits of Combined Effort

7 So I again considered another futile thing on earth:

8 A man who is all alone with no companion, he has no children nor siblings; yet there is no end to all his toil, and he is never satisfied with riches. He laments, "For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?" This also is futile and a burdensome task!

9 Two people are better than one, because they can reap more benefit from their labor.

10 For if they fall, one will help his companion up, but pity the person who falls down and has no one to help him up.

11 Furthermore, if two lie down together, they can keep each other warm, but how can one person keep warm by himself?

12 Although an assailant may overpower one person, two can withstand him. Moreover, a three-stranded cord is not quickly broken.

On Power and Succession

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

14 For he came out of prison to become king, even though he had been born poor in what would become his kingdom.

15 I considered all the living who walk on earth, as well as the successor who would arise in his place.

16 There is no end to all the people nor to the past generations, yet future generations will not rejoice in him. This also is profitless and like chasing the wind.

On Vowing to God

5:1 Be careful what you do when you go to the temple of God; draw near to listen rather than to offer a sacrifice like fools, for they do not realize that they are doing wrong.

2 Do not be rash with your mouth or hasty in your heart to bring up a matter before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth! Therefore, let your words be few.

3 Just as dreams come when there are many cares,
so the rash vow of a fool occurs when there are many words.

4 When you make a vow to God, do not delay in paying it. For God takes no pleasure in fools: Pay what you vow!

5 It is better for you not to vow than to vow and not pay it.

6 Do not let your mouth cause you to sin, and do not tell the priest, "It was a mistake!" Why make God angry at you so that he would destroy the work of your hands?"

7 Just as there is futility in many dreams, so also in many words. Therefore, fear God!

On Politics and Corruption

8 If you see the extortion of the poor, or the perversion of justice and fairness in the government, do not be astonished by the matter. For the high official is watched by a higher official, and there are higher ones over them!

9 The produce of the land is seized by all of them, even the king is served by the fields.

On Wealth and Income

10 The one who loves money will never be satisfied with money, he who loves wealth will never be satisfied with his income. This also is futile.

11 When someone's prosperity increases, those who consume it also increase; so what does its owner gain, except that he gets to see it with his eyes?

12 The sleep of the laborer is pleasant—whether he eats little or much—
but the wealth of the rich will not allow him to sleep.

13 Here is a misfortune on earth that I have seen: Wealth hoarded by its owner to his own misery.

14 Then that wealth was lost through bad luck; although he fathered a son, he has nothing left to give him.

15 Just as he came forth from his mother's womb, naked will he return as he came, and he will take nothing in his hand that he may carry away from his toil.

16 This is another misfortune: Just as he came, so will he go. What did he gain from toiling for the wind?

17 Surely, he ate in darkness every day of his life, and he suffered greatly with sickness and anger.

On Finding Contentment in Pleasing God

18 I have seen personally what is the only beneficial and appropriate course of action for people: to eat and drink, and find enjoyment in all their hard work on earth during the few days of their life which God has given them, for this is their reward.

19 To every man whom God has given wealth, and possessions, he has also given him the ability to eat from them, to receive his reward and to find enjoyment in his toil; these things are the gift of God.

20 For he does not think much about the fleeting days of his life because God keeps him preoccupied with the joy he derives from his activity.

On Being Unable to Enjoy Wealth

6:1 Here is another misfortune that I have seen on earth, and it weighs heavily on people:

2 God gives a man riches, property, and wealth so that he lacks nothing that his heart desires, yet God does not enable him to enjoy the fruit of his labor—instead, someone else enjoys it! This is fruitless and a grave misfortune.

3 Even if a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years—even if he lives a long, long time, but cannot enjoy his prosperity—even if he were to live forever—I would say, "A stillborn child is better off than he is!"

4 Though the stillborn child came into the world for no reason and departed into darkness, though its name is shrouded in darkness,

5 though it never saw the light of day nor knew anything, yet it has more rest than that man—

6 if he should live a thousand years twice, yet does not enjoy his prosperity. For both of them die!

On Contentment

7 All of man's labor is for nothing more than to fill his stomach—yet his appetite is never satisfied!

8 So what advantage does a wise man have over a fool? And what advantage does a pauper gain by knowing how to survive?

9 It is better to be content with what the eyes can see than for one's heart always to crave more. This continual longing is futile—like chasing the wind.

10 Whatever has happened was foreordained, and what happens to a person was also foreknown. It is useless for him to argue with God about his fate because God is more powerful than he is.

11 The more one argues with words, the less he accomplishes. How does that benefit him?

12 For no one knows what is best for a person during his life—during the few days of his fleeting life—for they pass away like a shadow. Nor can anyone tell him what the future will hold for him on earth.

On Death and Sorrow

7:1 A good reputation is better than precious perfume;
likewise, the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth.

2 It is better to go to a funeral than a feast.
For death is the destiny of every person,
and the living should take this to heart.

3 Sorrow is better than laughter,
because sober reflection is good for the heart.

4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning,
but the heart of fools is in the house of merrymaking.

On Fools

- 5 It is better for a person to receive a rebuke from those who are wise than to listen to the song of fools.
- 6 For like the crackling of quick-burning thorns under a cooking pot, so is the laughter of the fool.

This kind of folly also is useless.

- 7 Surely oppression can turn a wise person into a fool; likewise, a bribe corrupts the heart.
- 8 The end of a matter is better than its beginning; likewise, patience is better than pride.
- 9 Do not let yourself be quickly provoked, for anger resides in the lap of fools.

On Wisdom

- 10 Do not say, “Why were the old days better than these days?” for it is not wise to ask that.
- 11 Wisdom, like an inheritance, is a good thing; it benefits those who see the light of day.
- 12 For wisdom provides protection, just as money provides protection. But the advantage of knowledge is this: Wisdom preserves the life of its owner.

On Good Times and Bad Times

- 13 Consider the work of God: For who can make straight what he has bent?
- 14 In times of prosperity be joyful, but in times of adversity consider this: God has made one as well as the other, so that no one can discover what the future holds.

On Living a Balanced Life

- 15 During the days of my fleeting life I have seen both of these things: Sometimes a righteous person dies prematurely in spite of his righteousness, and sometimes a wicked person lives long in spite of his evil deeds.
- 16 So do not be excessively righteous or excessively wise; otherwise you might be disappointed.
- 17 Do not be excessively wicked and do not be a fool; otherwise you might die before your time.
- 18 It is best to take hold of one warning without letting go of the other warning; for the one who fears God will follow both warnings.

On Wisdom and Speech

- 19 Wisdom gives a wise person more protection than ten rulers in a city.
- 20 For there is not one truly righteous person on the earth who continually does good and never sins. [cf. [Rom 3:10](#)]
- 21 Also, do not pay attention to everything that people say; otherwise, you might even hear your servant cursing you.
- 22 For you know in your own heart that you also have cursed others many times.

On Understanding Life

- 23 I have examined all this by wisdom; I said, “I am determined to comprehend this”—but it was beyond my grasp.
- 24 Whatever has happened is beyond human understanding; it is far deeper than anyone can fathom.
- 25 I tried to understand, examine, and comprehend the role of wisdom in the scheme of things, and to understand the stupidity of wickedness and the insanity of folly.
- 26 I discovered this: More bitter than death is the kind of woman who is like a hunter’s snare; her heart is like a hunter’s net and her hands are like prison chains. The man who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is captured by her.
- 27 The Teacher says: I discovered this while trying to discover the scheme of things, item by item.
- 28 What I have continually sought, I have not found; I have found only one upright man among a thousand, but I have not found one upright woman among all of them.
- 29 This alone have I discovered: God made humankind upright, but they have sought many evil schemes.

On Kings and Authority

- 8:1 Who is a wise person? Who knows the solution to a problem? A person’s wisdom brightens his appearance, and softens his harsh countenance.
- 2 Obey the king’s command, because you took an oath before God to be loyal to him.
- 3 Do not rush out of the king’s presence in haste—do not delay when the matter is unpleasant, for he can do whatever he pleases.
- 4 Surely the king’s authority is absolute; no one can say to him, “What are you doing?”

5 Whoever obeys his command will not experience harm, and a wise person knows the proper time and procedure.

6 For there is a proper time and procedure for every matter, for the oppression of the king is severe upon his victim.

On the Uncertainty of Life

7 Surely no one knows the future, and no one can tell another person what will happen.

8 Just as no one has power over the wind to restrain it, so no one has power over the day of his death. Just as no one can be discharged during the battle, so wickedness cannot rescue the wicked.

On Tyranny and Hypocrisy

9 While applying my mind to everything that happens in this world, I have seen all this: Sometimes one person dominates other people to their harm.

10 Not only that, but I have seen the wicked approaching and entering the temple, and as they left the holy temple, they boasted in the city that they had done so. This also is an enigma.

On Crime and Punishment

11 When a sentence is not executed at once against a crime, the human heart is encouraged to do evil.

12 Even though a sinner might commit a hundred crimes and still live a long time, yet I know that it will go well with God-fearing people—for they stand in fear before him.

13 But it will not go well with the wicked, nor will they prolong their days like a shadow, because they do not stand in fear before God.

On Bad Things Happening to Good People

14 Here is another enigma that occurs on earth: Sometimes there are righteous people who get what the wicked deserve, and sometimes there are wicked people who get what the righteous deserve. I said, “This also is an enigma.”

On the Futility of Trying to Understand Everything

15 So I recommend the enjoyment of life, for there is nothing better on earth for a person to do except to eat, drink, and enjoy life. So joy will accompany him in his toil during the days of his life which God gives him on earth.

16 When I tried to gain wisdom and to observe the activity on earth—even though it prevents anyone from sleeping day or night—

17 then I discerned all that God has done: No one really comprehends what happens on earth. Despite all human efforts to discover it, no one can ever grasp it. Even if a wise person claimed that he understood, he would not really comprehend it.

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