

Introduction

There is a definite break between the content and style of the first six chapters and much of the seventh. While Koheleth (the preacher) continues to make his observations about “life under the sun,” he changes to the same format as most of the book of Proverbs. He moves quickly from thought to thought. Sometimes he speaks a wise thought (a proverb) sometimes he offers an observation and advice on how to deal with it. But it is much less subject oriented than the previous chapters.

The first question when beginning any new chapter centers on the type of tie to the previous one. He has just completed a series of points regarding wealth, possessions and money (**5:10-20; 6:1-12**). He has shown the complete futility to placing too much emphasis on possessions and wealth. They bring much more trouble than they solve. But with all that, there doesn't seem to be a direct tie between these thoughts and those that will now begin.

1. A good name

Before considering a good name, ponder what is involved in a name. Hebrew parents generally gave names from their language that had a meaning. Names generally indicated “*a single decisive characteristic*,” of the child, “*an event or mood*” of the parents when the child was born or “*a statement about an individual*.”

shem 8034, "name; reputation; memory; renown." Cognates of this word appear in Akkadian, Ugaritic, Phoenician, Aramaic, and Arabic. This word appears about 864 times and in all periods of biblical Hebrew.... It is not always true that an individual's "name" reveals his essence. ... Perhaps some names indicated a single decisive characteristic of their bearer. In other cases, a "name" recalls an event or mood which the parent (s) experienced at or shortly before the child's birth and or naming. Other names make a statement about an individual. This sense of a name as an identification appears in Gen. 2:19... "...and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof." ... Shem can be a synonym for "reputation" or "fame": To "give a name for one" is to make him famous: ... If a name goes forth for one, his "reputation" of fame is made known:... Shem can connote "renown" and "continuance" ... (Vine's Expository Dictionary)

Abram (exalted father) had his name changed to Abraham (father of a multitude) to more exactly describe him (**Gen 17:5-6**), while Isaac (to laugh) was named for the joy he brought to his parents (**Gen 17:17-19; 21:6**) and Moses (to draw forth) because he was drawn out of the water (**Ex 2:10**). There have been many children named by their parents in hope of what their children would grow into being. Children given names of those in the Bible in hopes that they would grow up to be like them. A good name however is reserved only for those who actually live in such a way that they earn a good reputation. This leads to the second meaning of “*reputation*,” “*memory*,” and “*renown*.” We begin to make a “*name*” for ourselves as soon as we are introduced to people. Our conduct, attitude, emotions and integrity are all assessed and attached to the feeling and attitude when our name is mentioned. A good name is a name generally stands for all that one has done with their life.

A name can confer sweetness, joy, peace, happiness and love as one ponders the memories shared with the one who holds it. A name can also confer emotions of bitterness, sadness, and even anger, if the person who was given that name has soiled his reputation through acts of unkindness or wickedness. Although it takes a lifetime of effort and toil to create such a name, it is worth every effort to do so. It is a wonderful possession to attain to. Much better than silver and gold which were shown to have no profit in the previous chapters.

is better than precious ointment,

The term “precious” is defined as “*favorable*,” “*pleasing*” “*pleasant*,” and “*delightful*.”

tob 2896, "good; favorable; festive; pleasing; pleasant; well; better; right; best." This word appears in Akkadian, Aramaic, Arabic, Ugaritic, and Old South Arabic. Occurring in all periods of biblical Hebrew, it appears about 559 times. ... This adjective denotes "good" in every sense of that word. For example, tob is used in the sense "pleasant" or "delightful": ... "favorable" or "in one's favor" ... "delightful" or "festal" ... (Vine's Expository Dictionary)

Hence this is a special kind of ointment. “Ointment” is actually a general term for an “*olive*” or “*olive oil*.” But it is used often in a general way either for “*perfume*,” or “*ointment*.”

shemen 8081, "(olive) oil; olive; perfume; olivewood." Cognates of this word appear in Ugaritic, Akkadian, Phoenician, Syriac, Arabic, and Aramaic. This word appears about 190 times and in all periods of biblical Hebrew.... Shemen means olive "oil": ... Shemen is used as a preservative on shield-leather... and in baking... and as a medication ... This "oil" is burned for light ... Its

many uses made olive oil a valuable trade item... Shemen is "a kind of perfume," or olive oil mixed with certain odors to make a perfume, in passages such as Song of Sol. 1:3: "Because of the savor of thy good ointments [NASB, "oils"] thy name is as ointment poured forth...." (from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words)

Most cultures have viewed the savors of spices and herbs in the proper combinations and mixed with oils of varying thickness as a very precious commodity. Our own culture has placed a high premium on such things. Walk through a higher quality department store and marvel at the price on the tiny bottles of perfume. God here uses this natural feeling of man toward pleasant odors to illustrate things of greater value. He also used it in the holy anointing oil, but forbid them to make anything like it.

"Take also for yourself the finest of spices: of flowing myrrh five hundred {shekels,} and of fragrant cinnamon half as much, two hundred and fifty, and of fragrant cane two hundred and fifty, 24 and of cassia five hundred, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, and of olive oil a hin. 25 And you shall make of these a holy anointing oil, a perfume mixture, the work of a perfumer; it shall be a holy anointing oil." Exod 30:23-25f

31 "And you shall speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'This shall be a holy anointing oil to Me throughout your generations. 32 'It shall not be poured on anyone's body, nor shall you make {any} like it, in the same proportions; it is holy, {and} it shall be holy to you. 33 'Whoever shall mix {any} like it, or whoever puts any of it on a layman, shall be cut off from his people.'" Exod 30:31-33

There is something about the sweet aroma's of certain spices to gladden the heart and incite the emotions.

9 Oil and perfume make the heart glad, so a man's counsel is sweet to his friend. Pr 27:9

The point of comparison is therefore on both the emotional and intellectual response to the fragrance. When we first smell the odor, it creates feelings of gladness and well-being. This is especially true when the person we already care for is wearing it. This is what God is comparing to the value of a good name. Love songs have been written to the name of a beautiful woman, the names of good men have been placed on monuments and in granite. We remember their birthdays, and name streets after them. We all recognize therefore the truth of this verse. But do we live it ourselves? How important is a good name to us and how hard are we working to make ours a good name?

A {good} name is to be more desired than great riches, favor is better than silver and gold. Pr 22:1

Anyone who carefully ponders this will have to agree that it is true. The mere mention of the name of someone who has consistently helped and cared for another in love, mercy and compassion brings a powerful and pleasing emotional response. It is obvious that it is more important to keep your name good than to put on a pleasant fragrance. But this truism is used as the basis for another truism that is much more difficult:

And the day of death than the day of one's birth.

God here reveals something that may be difficult to understand. Just as a good name is better than precious ointment the day of one's death is better than the day of their birth. In reality, though, this is really the most logical conclusion to the opening words of the book.

"Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity." Eccl 1:2

I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind. 15 What is crooked cannot be straightened, and what is lacking cannot be counted. Eccl 1:14-15

If we accept the above, then the most natural conclusion is that the sooner we can leave all that is temporary and futile and move to that which is permanent and established the better. As a matter of fact, our attitude toward this proverb will tell us a great deal about whether or not we have accepted the conclusions of the book. Ecclesiastes reveals the unvarnished truth about "life under the sun." It is so futile and empty, that God can actually say that the day of our death is better than the day of our birth. Those "under the sun" are constantly forcing God to intervene in punishment. From the curse to the flood, from the tower of Babel to Sodom and Gomorrah and from the ten plague on Egypt to the destruction of Jerusalem under Babylon and Rome, it is clear that God has found it necessary to make life very difficult for man. For this reason, the day we leave this world is actually better than the day we entered it.

For we have been consumed by Thine anger, and by Thy wrath we have been dismayed. 8 Thou hast placed our iniquities before Thee, our secret {sins} in the light of Thy presence. 9 For all our days have declined in Thy fury; we have finished our years like a sigh. 10 As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, or if due to strength, eighty years, yet their pride is {but} labor and sorrow; for soon it is gone and we fly away. 11 Who understands the power of Thine anger, and Thy fury, according to the

fear that is due Thee? 12 So teach us to number our days, that we may present to Thee a heart of wisdom. Ps 90:7-9, 10-12:

If we can read the above with understanding, then we already believe with all our heart the truth that the day of our death is actually better than the day we were born. At death, we once again enter a realm where true service to the Lord is given a full reward. In this world of paradox and shadow the exact opposite can occur(see **Heb 11:35-40**). Ponder the words of Paul:

16 Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. 17 For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, 18 while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. 1 For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. 2 For indeed in this {house} we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven; 2 Cor 4:16-18; 5:1-2

The plain truth is that the day of our death is better than the day of our birth. The day of our death is the day that our spirit returns to God who gave it.

then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it. Ecc 12:7

What a wonderful day that will be to those who are prepared for it. Those who have numbered their days and have a heart of wisdom. In my judgement, this is the main point of the next verse. In order for the day of our death to be better than the day of our birth we must be prepared for it, and the only way to prepare for it is to think about it.

2. It is better to go to the house of mourning

The connection between a house where people are mourning and the day of one's death makes it obvious that he is still speaking along the same lines as verse one. The term "mourning" is defined:

60 'ebel- mourning a) for the dead b) for rites of mourning (metaphorical) c) mourning garb d) period of mourning (BDB)

... to mourn, ... over anything; this is used of the loud wailing customary in the East at the time of burial and for thirty days after, during which they abstained from the ordinary occupations and comforts of life. (Wilson's p. 280)

Most of the time this term describes the mourning and wailing that accompanies the death of someone we love. It is also used in Scripture to describe the mourning among the Jews after the decree was signed that they were to be destroyed while Esther was queen(**Est 4:3**), and Job's sorrow over all his afflictions(**Job 30:1**). Whenever a terrible calamity occurs to us we mourn. Death is the worst of all calamities, but loss of health, and crushed dreams and plans can also lead to mourning. God has designed the curse to bring man into a state of mourning. For while we live "under the sun," we need mourning to give us wisdom. God therefore pronounces it to be "better" for man to enter into a house of mourning. This term is generally translated "good," (tob 2896), and refers to things that are "favorable," "pleasant," "right," or "best."

When we "pay our last respects" at a funeral, we are fulfilling this verse as we also are when we visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction(**Jas 1:27**). In the context of this being the end of all men and the living taking it to heart, this is the main thrust of the passage. Yet there is also benefits to weeping with those who weep(**Rom 12:15**), visiting the sick(**Mt 25:36**), for in the broader sense of the term a house of mourning is any home that has suffered tragedy! Immediately after that tragedy, those who are wise come to visit and stay to comfort. (**II Cor 1:3-7**). It is better, more favorable, good, and best to do all the above:

Than to go to the house of feasting,

A house of feasting is obviously a home where just the opposite of the above is occurring. The term "feast" is defined:

"... a drinking, a banquet, feast..." (Wilson p 160-161)

"4960... mishteh, mish-the; from 8354; drink; by impl. drinking(the act); also (by impl.) a banquet or (gen.)feast: banquet, drank, drink, feast..." (Strong p 74)

The term is used of people making feasts for: Abraham, on the day that Isaac was weaned(**Gen 21:8**), Laban, when he gave Jacob his daughter in marriage(**Gen 29:22-23**), for Pharaoh's birthday(**Gen 40:20**), Nabal had a feast in which he was drunk, (**1 Sam 25:36**). Solomon had a feast after God appeared and gave him wisdom(I Kings 3:15). The Jews feasted and rejoiced after Hamaan's decree was removed.(**Esth 8:17, 9:17-22**). Hence

a house of feasting is a home whose owner has decided that something wonderful needs to be commemorated, something good needs to be celebrated, or a good time needs to be had by all. Carefully ponder one of the most telling verses that shows the real problem behind it is in Isaiah:

Woe to those who rise early in the morning that they may pursue strong drink; who stay up late in the evening that wine may inflame them! 12 And their banquets are {accompanied} by lyre and harp, by tambourine and flute, and by wine; but they do not pay attention to the deeds of the LORD, nor do they consider the work of His hands. 13 Therefore My people go into exile for their lack of knowledge; and their honorable men are famished, and their multitude is parched with thirst. 14 Therefore Sheol has enlarged its throat and opened its mouth without measure; and Jerusalem's splendor, her multitude, her din {of revelry,} and the jubilant within her, descend {into it.} Isa 5:11-14

As is obvious from the above, the term “feasting” can refer to drunken bouts or to a legitimate outpouring of joy over God’s blessings. Does Koheleth refer only to the latter, or is this a general truth having nothing to do with the moral component? Though it is evident that many more wrong things could occur at a feast than at a funeral, this is not the main point. The application here has little to do with the moral side of it. It is better because it is the end of all men and it needs to be pondered.

For that is the end of all men; And the living will take it to heart.

All men are going to “end” in death. Life will “*come to an end*” for all men in death. Each person’s life will “*terminate*” and they will be “*snatch(ed) away*.”

5486 cuwph- to cease, come to an end a) (Qal) to come to an end b) (Hiphil) to make an end. (BDB)

5486 cuwph (soof); a primitive root; to snatch away, i.e. terminate: Strongs

God did not create death to be ignored. He created it to be pondered and prepared for. It is therefore better for us to enter into the house of mourning to remind us of where our own life will end. It is good for us to see how easily one can be snatched away. When we see someone we knew lying in a casket, or speak to his loved ones about his death, it is impossible not to take it to heart. There is something about being in the home of another who has suffered a death in their family, or in attending a funeral that brings our own mortality into clearer focus. Death is the great event that more clearly than anything else shows us that all is not right in this world, that all is vanity and a striving after wind. We cannot control it, but we can plan for it. We can take it to heart and be ready when it comes for us. It is the end of all men, and it will be our own end. It is better than the day of our birth and it is therefore where our hearts ought to be.

3. Sorrow is better than laughter,

Again as in v 1 and v 2, a comparison is made in which one thing far surpasses another in value. This time it is sorrow over laughter. God proclaims to those who will listen and be benefitted from it that we should not run from sorrow. It is good to pass through sorrows, grief, tribulations and anguish. No one would personally select to pass through them, but they much are better for the heart. This theme finds many places in the New Testament.

And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; 4 and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; 5 and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. Rom 5:3-5

Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Cor 12:10

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have {its} perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. James 1:2-4

In each of them the power and goodness of suffering are extolled. It brings patience, steadfastness, approvedness, and hope to the heart. The heart can be made better in many ways.

For by a sad countenance the heart is made better.

The term “countenance” comes from a general Hebrew word for “*face*.” In more specific applications it refers to the “*look on one’s face*.” Thus countenance refers to the look one has on his/her face. When one has a sad countenance there is sorrow in their heart.

panim 6440, "face." This noun appears in biblical Hebrew about 2,100 times and in all periods, except when it occurs with the names of persons and places, it always appears in the plural. It is also attested in Ugaritic, Akkadian, Phoenician, Moabite, and

Ethiopic. In its most basic meaning, this noun refers to the "face" of something. First, it refers to the "face" of a human being: ... In a more specific application, the word represents the look on one's face, or one's "countenance":... (Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words)

Such a sad face actually makes the heart better. This is a different term for better than those used earlier in the chapter. It also has the meaning of "good" "pleasing," and "right," but then also means "to be well for" or "to do good to."

3190 yatab- to be good, to be pleasing, to be well, to be glad a) (Qal) 1) to be glad, to be joyful 2) to be well placed 3) to be well for, to be well with, to go well with 4) to be pleasing, to be pleasing to b) (Hiphil) 1) to make glad, to rejoice 2) to do good to, to deal well with 3) to do well, to do thoroughly 4) to make a thing good or right or beautiful 5) to do well, to do right (BDB)

A Sad face does good to the heart. It makes a heart "good or right or beautiful." These are the things we must ponder as we live our lives. We can ignore all the sorrows and sadness of the world, or we can become embittered by them. But the best and the wisest course is to allow these things to do what God designed them for. Things that bring sadness make the heart much better than it ever could have otherwise been. We must therefore learn to see sorrow as better than laughter.

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

Once again we have a proverb that goes against the "common sense" of man. God proclaims that because of the nature of "life under the sun" those who have true wisdom keep the meditations and thoughts of their heart in the house of mourning. God proclaims the wise to be those who know how to live. Those who know how to make the wisest decisions and the best plans. One of the marks of the wise is here set forth to be that their meditations seldom stray far from the house of mourning. All who are strangers and pilgrims here find it easy to understand exactly what is under consideration here.

While the worldly who only live "under the sun" seek to remove this as far as they can, the wise servant of the LORD uses every opportunity to keep his heart there. This is done in a variety of ways. When brethren lose loved ones, we are there to be with them and help them. When we visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction our hearts cannot stray far from the house of mourning. When we see ourselves as a vapor that appears for a little while then vanishes away we are dwelling in the house of mourning.

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." 14 Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. 15 Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that." 16 But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. Jas 4:13-16

This tells us a great deal about our own character and wisdom. By inspiration we are here informed that the truly wise do not allow the mind to stray far from the house of mourning. This world is not the home of a child of God, and at no time can we lose sight of this. The only portal from this world to the next is that of death. Hence the wise do not leave it far from their thoughts.

But the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

The fool is the man who "is "insolent" in religion and "stupid or dull" in wise living ... They have knowledge of God but do not properly evaluate or understand what they know." These are those who only want to live "under the sun." They want nothing to do with the LORD or His ways.

kecil 3684, "stupid fellow; dull person; fool." This word occurs in the Old Testament 70 times. All of its occurrences are in wisdom literature except 3 in the Psalms. The kecilis "insolent" in religion and "stupid or dull" in wise living ... They have knowledge of God but do not properly evaluate or understand what they know. (Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words)

God's verdict is that one of the marks of a fool by which they can be identified is that their heart does not dwell in the house of mourning. They simply do not want to think about it. They want to dwell only in the house of mirth. They only want to dwell on and enjoy "joy," "gladness," "gaiety," and "pleasure."

8057 simchah- joy, mirth, gladness a) mirth, gladness, joy, gaiety, pleasure b) the joy (of God) c) a glad result, a happy issue(BDB).

Those who wish to live only on joy and gladness are fools! As also are those who only want to hear about things that bring pleasure. God is not seeking to deny us joy and gladness, nor does He forbid pleasure to His people. But the realities of this sin cursed and vain "life under the sun" must be completely ignored to attempt to do it.

Jesus warned that those who weep now will then while those who laugh now will weep then.

21 "Blessed {are} you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed {are} you who weep now, for you shall laugh. 22 "Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and cast insults at you, and spurn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. 25 "Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry. Woe {to you} who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. 26 "Woe {to you} when all men speak well of you, for in the same way their fathers used to treat the false prophets. Luke 6:21-22, 25-26

Those who see the truth about "life under the sun" are weeping now. Those who ignore these truths are laughing now but not making preparation for what is coming. Only a fool does not take into consideration the obstacles before him and do something about them if he can. When one knows a serious threat and concern lies before him, the wise man takes thought for it and prepares. The foolish pushes it aside to enjoy the now and let the future take care of itself. Thus a fool can be known by his total lack of concern or preparation for his upcoming death.

5. It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than for a man to hear the song of fools.

After speaking of the solemn and sober attitude of the wise and the careless ease and enjoyment of the fool, he speaks of the outcome. The truly wise man who has his heart continually in the house of mourning is going to speak differently than the fool who is in the house of mirth. This wise see the dangers ahead and warn. The fools do not see or recognize danger and only have songs. God warns us here that the wise will rebuke, and we need to listen to them. A rebuke is a strong warning that something should not be done. It is "to reprove as a father his son." It generally has "severity" and is an attempt to "check," "curb," or "chastise."

"to reprove, as a father his son,... to rebuke with severity either of words or deeds; to check, curb, chastise the insolent and unruly... rebuke, reproof..." (Wilson p 341)

The wise see the dangers that the fools sing about! Foolish children might dare one another to play in the street, climb upon a roof, or engage in multitudes of dangerous activities. A parent will rebuke the child and seek to curb and chastise them. It is not the reproof of anger, but that of great care and concern. When someone is doing something that is deadly, strong words and emotions mean nothing more than love and concern. There is more lasting good and greater returns from such a rebuke than to hear the song of fools.

What is the song of fools? The term song itself does not convey anything negative. It simply means to "sing," "celebrate," "concerning anything."

"... to sing; ... to sing unto any one in his honor, to celebrate in song, also to sing of or concerning anything, ..." (Wilson p 396)

The problem is the author and therefore the content of the song. Even today, there are songs that extol and glorify the things the wise would rebuke. Sex, drugs, wealth and sin are all songs of fools. The fool can extol and celebrate anything in song. They can "sing the praise" of "life under the sun."

God tells us it is better to hear the rebuke of those who dwell in the house of mourning than it is to listen to the songs of those fools who live in the house of feasting. Flattery and empty praise come easily to the fool, but it has no lasting value and no substance to it.

6. For like the crackling of thorns under a pot,

The term "for" ties us back to the previous thought. It is also translated with "because" "since" and has a "causal connection."

3588 kiy- that, for, because, when, as though, as, because that, but, then, certainly, except, surely, since a) that; yea, indeed b) when (of time); when, if, though (with a concessive force) c) because, since (causal connection) d) but (after negative) e) that if, for if, indeed if, for though, but if f) but rather, but g) except that h) only, nevertheless I) surely j) that is k) but if l) for though m) forasmuch as, for therefore (BDB)

It offers the reason why it is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than the songs of fools. The songs of fools are like the crackling of thorns under a pot. Thorns have so little substance to them that they burn up to quickly to give any heat. It would be impossible to cook anything in a pot that only had thorns to warm it. But even more than that, they give off the crackling sound that would lead you to believe that they are actually doing some good, but they are not. .

The parallel is simple. When one hears the song of the fool they are often emboldened and strengthened to do things that are wrong. When one hears the crackling of thorns under a pot, they assume that dinner will soon be

ready. It sounds like a roaring fire, but there just isn't any substance to it.

So is the laughter of the fool. This also is vanity.

The term “laughter” is the key to this verse. It is used of people when they “*smile,*” “*deride,*” “*laugh at in scorn,*” “*mock,*” or “*jest.*”

to laugh,... to laugh or smile upon... to laugh at, deride... especially in contempt to laugh at in scorn, to scorn, especially of powerless threats;... to mock, to rejoice in others calamities; to jest to sport, to play...” (Wilson p. 244)

The fool can “*smile,*” “*deride,*” “*laugh at in scorn,*” “*mock,*” or “*jest.*” When he does, people need to realize that it is like the crackling of thorns under a pot. Because he is a fool there is no substance to the things he smiles and laughs at. A fool may find things to laugh at in things God weeps over. He may laugh scornfully at things God holds in reverence. There is no substance to a fools laugh and no one should be affected by it. It is vanity, empty in every way.

7. Surely oppression destroys a wise man's reason,

While the NKJ translates this “surely” the NAS uses “for” as it does the previous verse. Since they are the same Hebrew term, the NAS seems to have the better of the argument. The difficulty in the translation highlights the difficulty of the context. Is our writer still elaborating on the “song of fools” in verse 5, or has he left that behind and now is beginning a new point? The translator’s can give little help since it can mean either. As in so many places, we must rely on the context of the passage itself. In this case, this author has to admit that there is something for either view. There have been songs written by fools that seek to address the concept of oppression and it is obvious that their reasoning ability has been destroyed for the song is nonsense. Yet this verse could also stand alone. It is therefore left to the reader to draw his own conclusions.

This is the third and final time that Ecclesiastes addresses the problem of human oppression. He introduced it back in chapter three as something so terrible that he felt the need to congratulate the dead more than the living and better than both the one who had never been born.

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. Ecc 4:1-3

This is the real problem. It is so unfair that those made in the image of God should suffer under the oppression of others. If the oppression is severe enough then all the wonderful benefits of life as God created it to be enjoyed are removed. Life becomes so terrible that the Spirit of God reveals that some are better off dead than having to live such a life, and even better are those who have never had to see it. In the Fifth Chapter he returns to it again, reminding us that it should not be something shocking when we see it. The sinful and selfish nature of man makes life “under the sun” more like a jungle as men go further and further from God. Those who refuse to submit to God’s commands become more selfish and less loving. For these reasons, one should not be shocked:

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. Ecc 5:8

Yet in spite of what has already been revealed, the Spirit of God returns to this subject one final time to remind us that “*oppression destroys a wise man’s reason.*” The term “oppression” refers those who are treated “*with violence and injustice,*” and people whose lives have been loaded down with “*hard, injurious usage.*”

“to treat with violence and injustice, to load with hard, injurious usage; to bear hard upon a person in opposition to showing mercy... violence and calumny; something taken away by force or fraud, unjust gain; anguish...” (Wilson p 295-296)

The point of this verse is not to address the scope and nature of oppression, but to consider its impact on those who are wise. When it comes to them, or they see terrible examples of it in their lifetime, it can bring about severe emotional and intellectual difficulties. It is so unfair, and out of the ordinary scope of what wise people expect that it destroys the reason. This term ranges in meaning from “*to be foolish,*” or “*puffed up with vain glory,*” to “*so great a departure from wisdom that the mind, without and control, rushes on with a blind fury.*” It would appear from the context that it is the latter meaning that best fits here.

“to shine; to makes oneself shine, to boast of oneself, to be foolish; to be puffed up with vain glory, to vaunt, to rave with foolish conceit; hence to be mad, to rage... madness, implies so great a departure from wisdom, that the mind, without any control, rushes on with a blind fury...” (Wilson - 262)

It was used in this sense of David:

So he disguised his sanity before them, and acted insanely in their hands, and scribbled on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva run down into his beard. 1 Sam 21:13

When serious oppression falls across the path of the wise, it takes great strength of character to pass through it safely. It can overthrow the mind and completely destroy reasoning ability. When a serious blow such as the violent death of a loved one, or the taking by force of property which rightfully belongs to another, or the war and subsequent enslavement of a people something very serious happens in the mind. It often rushes on with a blind fury out of control. It loses all bearings and for a time works like an engine which has lost control and runs full force with no way to check it.

This is a warning all ought to take seriously and take steps to avert. No one has control over when and where oppression will strike, nor can we control its severity or power. What can be controlled is its ability to influence our mind. Paul speaks of the value of all tribulation because it works steadfastness, approvedness and hope (Rom 5:3-5). Time needs to be taken in meditation to consider what such events can do to us, and proper preparations made. Job is a good example of what oppression in the hands of the devil is designed to do.

11 *“But put forth Thy hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse Thee to Thy face.” ... 4 And Satan answered the LORD and said, “Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. Job 1:11, 2:4*

Though he endured, there were times when even His great wisdom was stretched to its limit.

And a bribe debases the heart.

Debase or corrupt (NAS) comes from word that means *“to vanish, to go astray, to be destroyed.”* It can also mean *“to be lost, to stray.”*

6 ‘abad- 1) to perish, to vanish, to go astray, to be destroyed a) (in the Qal) 1) to perish, to die, to be exterminated 2) to perish, to vanish (figuratively) 3) to be lost, to stray b) (in the Piel) ... c) (in the Hiphil) 1) to destroy, to put to death (sometimes of divine judgment) ...

When one accepts a bribe, all hope of honesty and integrity is forever tainted. The heart is lost, strays and is dispersed when it accepts a bribe. The reason for this is obvious. Once it is accepted, no one, often not even the man who accepted it can be certain the reasons, motives, or integrity of any action. Even if the final decision that must be rendered is a good and proper one, how does one answer the question “Am I doing this because it is right, or because I accepted the bribe.” Even if the person who accepted the bribe knew within himself that it was for the right reasons, it would be difficult to prove it to someone else. Perhaps even worse though, once one bribe is accepted, how does one keep from taking another. The pressure from the first evil, can then be used for further evil. Though this term *“gift”* does have a good sense, it is not a good gift when it is being used to remove purity and goodness from the heart.

“4979 mattanah, mat-taw-naw; fem. of 4976; a present; spec.(in a good sense) a sacrificial offering, (in a bad sense) a bribe: -gift.” (Strong p. 75)

“And you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of the just. Ex 23:8

“You shall not distort justice; you shall not be partial, and you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous. 20 “Justice, {and only} justice, you shall pursue, that you may live and possess the land which the LORD your God is giving you. Deut 16:19-20

When someone wants to do us any type of a favor, and we suspect that the reason behind it is to get some type of favorable judgment that is opposed to what is good and right, we should not accept it.

8. The end of a thing is better than its beginning,

The “end” of something refers to the *“outcome,” “issue,” “latter end,” “what comes afterward,”* or *“the ultimate outcome,”* of it.

‘acharit 319, “hind-part; end; issue; outcome; posterity.” Akkadian, Aramaic, and Ugaritic also attest this word. It occurs about 61 times in biblical Hebrew and in all periods; most of its occurrences are in poetry. Used spatially, the word identifies the “remotest and most distant part of something”: “If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea...” Ps. 139:9. The most frequent emphasis of the word is “end,” “issue,” or “outcome.” This nuance is applied to time in a superlative or final sense: “...the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year” Deut. 11:12. ... In a different nuance, the word can mean “latter” or “what comes afterward”: “O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!” Deut. 32:29. In some passages, ‘acharit represents the “ultimate outcome” of a person’s life. Num. 23:10 speaks thus of death: “Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!” ... Both conclusion and result are apparent in passages such as Isa. 41:22, where the word represents the “end” or “result” of a matter: “Let them bring them forth, and show us what shall happen: let them show the former things what they be, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare us things for to come.” (Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words)

There is little ambiguity to this term. As far as “life under the sun” is concerned, the completion and outcome of any thing is better than it’s beginning. This term too has little ambiguity. It refers to things that are just *“beginning”* or *“first.”*

re’shiyth 7225, “beginning; first; choicest.” The abstract word re’shiyth corresponds to the temporal and estimative sense of ro’sh.

re'shiyth connotes the "beginning" of a fixed period of time: "...the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year" Deut. 11:12. The "beginning" of one's period of life is intended in Job 42:12: "So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning...." This word can represent a point of departure, as it does in Gen. 1:1 (the first occurrence): "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." (Vine's Expository Dictionary)

This short proverb takes what God said earlier about death: *the day of death is better than the day of one's birth*, and broadens it out to everything else in life. The end and completion of every task, every duty, every pleasure and every activity is better than its beginning. As one ponders and reflects on this statement, the truth of the beginning of the book begins to dawn:

"Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity." Eccl 1:2

"Life under the sun" really must be vanity if God now tells us to accept this as the truth. If the end of everything in this life is better than its beginning, and the day of death is better than the day of birth, then God has already rendered his verdict that there is nothing in "life under the sun" that we can do that really matters. It will be better for us when it is all over! We might then begin to wonder, if end of a vacation is better than its beginning, then why go? The answer is that though the end really is better than the beginning, the transient pleasure of doing them and the memories and character building that they accomplish still make them worth doing though their accomplishment is still better than their contemplation.

Some things are more obvious. The end of a meal is better than its beginning. We all eat to be filled and then enjoy the pleasant feeling of being comfortably full. The end of a good night's sleep is better than its beginning, the end of our education is better than its beginning, the end of our job (retirement) is better than its beginning.

Though no one would deny that the anticipation of beginning something is exhilarating, anticipation is often dashed into the rocks of reality. How many times has a man set out to do something wonderful with great anticipation and excitement that only ends in disappointment. When the end of a thing occurs and all has been accomplished, the dangers are passed and one has it in their possession. In the battle for moral mastery the end is certainly better than the beginning. Whether it be the quest for wisdom, patience, self-control or other moral battles, the end of it is better than the beginning. When one reaches a goal, it is much better than when they set that goal. There is no doubt that there are some things in this life that will be more difficult to see the truth about this than others. But if we trust in the Lord with all our heart and do not lean on our own understanding, we will someday fully grasp and be helped by this truth.

And the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.

God now joins being patient in spirit to the truth that the end is better than the beginning. It is hard not to see a tie to this. If we accept that the end is better than the beginning, then we have great anticipation to reach the end and must learn patience. The term "patient" is used 15 times in the Old Testament. Twelve of those fifteen are translated "*slow to anger*" Nine times with reference to God:

Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; Ex 34:6 (Cf. Num 14:18; Neh 9:17; Ps 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Nahum 1:3)

Three times with reference to man.

He who is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who is quick-tempered exalts folly. Pr 14:29

A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but the slow to anger pacifies contention. Pr 15:18

He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city. Pr 16:32

Two of the remaining three are translated "patient" once of God and once for man (here).

Thou who knowest, O LORD, remember me, take notice of me, and take vengeance for me on my persecutors. Do {not,} in view of Thy patience, take me away; know that for Thy sake I endure reproach. Jer. 15:15

Thus one who is patient in spirit is one who is slow to allow the stronger emotions of frustration, bitterness, or anticipation to lead to anger. One who has learned to be patient in spirit, is a man who is slow to become angry or depressed (often the dying embers of anger). One who has schooled themselves in such an attitude find that during provocations or oppressions simply do not feel strong emotions stirring. Such a person is much better than the proud. With this fifth use of the term "better" since the beginning of the chapter, God simply continues to

compare qualities and pronounce the greater and more lasting benefits of the one over the other. Cultivating patience is much better than allowing oneself to become proud. One who is proud is one who has a false sense of their own importance and value. Such a person will be completely unprepared for persecution and oppression. This term is used four times in the OT. Two of them help us see exactly what God is warning against here:

Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, him I will destroy; no one who has a haughty look and an arrogant heart will I endure. Ps 101:5

Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD; Assuredly, he will not be punished. Prov 16:5

Though many in this world take the self confidence and poise that arrogance and pride give as a virtue, God warns us that it is not a safe substitute for patience and the realization that we have no control over this life of “vanity” “under the sun.”

Being proud and arrogant, gives one a certain attitude which some would view as being good. An arrogant man views himself as capable of dealing with any problem. He has a confidence and sureness in His step which many envy as being a wonderful possession. The patient man on the other hand is more cautious, and less sure for he has passed through many things or applied the many things he has learned in Scripture and knows that life can be a tyrant sometimes. Though he may not be as self assured as the proud, he is on much surer ground. He knows that there are things in life that can completely upset him. The proud man does not think about such things. But they are still there, and pride certainly goes before a great fall. It is much better to seek for sureness of step in humility and patience than it is to seek through the short cut of pride. Pride does not give what it promises, it is a deceitful path.

Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, him I will destroy; no one who has a haughty look and an arrogant heart will I endure. Ps 101:5

Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD; Assuredly, he will not be punished. Pr 16:5

When pride comes, then comes dishonor, but with the humble is wisdom. Pr 11:2

Pride {goes} before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling. 19 It is better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud. Pr 16:18-19

A man's pride will bring him low, but a humble spirit will obtain honor. Pr 29:23

The temptation to be proud and arrogant must be passed over and the desire to be humble, meek and lowly sought after. It is not so hard once we accept the truth.

I know, O LORD, that a man's way is not in himself; nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps. Jer 10:23

9. Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry,

God now offers some wonderful advice to those who must live “under the sun.” With all the acts of oppression and frustrations, one of the best ways to cultivate the attitude of being patient(slow to anger) is by not allowing ourselves to hasten to become angry. The term hasten is used of those who “hurry,” or “act hastily.”

926 bahal- to disturb, to alarm, to terrify, to hurry, to be disturbed, to be anxious, to be afraid, to be hurried, to be nervous a) (Niphal) 1) to be disturbed, to be dismayed, to be terrified, to be anxious 2) to be in haste, to be hasty b) (Piel) 1) to make haste, to act hastily, to be hurried, to be hastened 2) to dismay, to terrify c) (Pual) 1) to hasten 2) hastened, hastily gained (participle) d) (Hiphil) 1) to hasten, to hurry, to make haste...

There are some people who do not like to be angry and who put up barriers to keep it from happening(slow to anger). There are others who seem to delight in anger and actually hasten it. The slightest provocation is enough to rush some into great anger. They have no control over their emotions and allow themselves to be sent into a rage hastily. Instead of doing all in their power to avoid and avert the anger from springing to life in their hearts, they are hasty to allow it to burn. They take enjoyment from it, they nurse it into a roaring fire. It is an amazing truth that some take pleasure in being “provoked,” “vexed” and “angered.” They then “rage” at others and seem to feel justified in it.

ka'as 3707, “to provoke, vex, make angry.” This word is common throughout the history of Hebrew and is used in modern Hebrew in the sense of “to be angry, to rage.” It occurs some 55 times in the Hebrew Old Testament. (Vine's Expository Dictionary)

This is the root of the “road rage” phenomena the plagues our roads and highways. There are a lot of people who

allow themselves to be easily provoked. The slightest look of frustration or driving too close or a minor mistake and some are immediately ready to harm them through words, actions and even violence. This lead to terrible consequences that would never happen if people would not allow themselves to become quickly angered. God warns against it:

Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; do not fret, it leads only to evildoing. 9 For evildoers will be cut off, but those who wait for the LORD, they will inherit the land. Ps 37:8-9

A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but the slow to anger pacifies contention. Pr 15:18

Do not associate with a man {given} to anger; or go with a hot-tempered man, Pr 22:24

For the churning of milk produces butter, and pressing the nose brings forth blood; so the churning of anger produces strife. Pr 30:33

For anger rests in the bosom of fools.

After reading the above Scriptures and seeing their truth all around us, what other conclusion could we possibly draw. No matter who you are, when anger is in your heart, you are going to act like a fool. When anger is at the helm, one becomes a “*stupid fellow;*” and a “*dull person.*”

Their “*knowledge of God*” has been distorted by anger and they “*do not properly evaluate or understand what they know.*”

kecil 3684, “stupid fellow; dull person; fool.” The kecil is “insolent” in religion and “stupid or dull” in wise living They have knowledge of God but do not properly evaluate or understand what they know.

Thus to allow anger into our hearts is to bring in something that will make a fool of us and keep us from doing what even we know is right. True wisdom is always set aside and prudence is thrown to the wind when one acts under the motivation of anger. It is always foolish to hasten to allow anger into the heart, no matter what we do next we will later be ashamed of it.

10. Do not say, Why were the former days better than these? For you do not inquire wisely concerning this.

Another problem that God would have his people avoid regarding “life under the sun” is the tendency to look back with a sigh to the past and call them the “good old days.” Some people cannot enjoy the present because they are too busy looking back with longing to times long gone by. Some assume that these “good old days” were better than the present days that we are forced to live in. Too often it is because they have forgotten the bad and remember only the good, thus longing for an illusion that never did exist. This is a foolish notion. Yet the antique trade and those who collect memorabilia are proof of the tendency of man to do this. “They just don’t make things like they used to.” “People just are not as kind or good as they used to be.” “Schools are not as good as they used to be.” These things are often simply the muted memory of those who forget the bad and remember the good.

But Ecclesiastes 3:2-11 makes it very clear that there will be some times in history that are better than others, or things in life that make an earlier period of life better than another. When there are such a variety of times as a time to plant or uproot, heal or kill, tear down or build up, weep or laugh, search or give up as lost, sew together or tear apart, love or hate, war or peace, it is obvious that all of us will find things or hear from others about the past that they liked better than now. Yet even when the times of the past were actually better than the present, God’s warning and advice is still true. What good are we doing to ourselves and others to dwell on how much better it used to be. It only leads to bitterness and frustration or unhappiness and depression. We must live in the time God has given us and use it to the best of our ability. Anything less is not inquiring wisely about the past.

We do ourselves a grave disservice if we do not appreciate and enjoy the life we have been given by the Lord. Regardless of what we like or do not like about any given phase, it has been designed by God for a specific purpose. We must use each moment and strive to get the most out of it. Those who allow their lives to be locked in the past, and whose waking moments only relive memories of long ago are not living wisely. Their lives are already over and they will grow no more. Nor will they be productive in the present.

11. Wisdom is good with an inheritance, And profitable to those who see the sun.

Koheleth now brings wisdom and money into focus. Both parents and children are here counseled on these vital points. Most parents work very hard to give their children the things they need. One of the primary forces that motivate many people to great effort is in striving to make life better for their children than it was for them. Paul also validates this attitude in a spiritual way:

Here for this third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be a burden to you; for I do not seek what is yours, but you; for children are not responsible to save up for {their} parents, but parents for {their} children. 15 And I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls. If I love you the more, am I to be loved the less? 2 Cor 12:14-15

Parents are responsible to save for their children. Both spiritually and materially. It is both natural and good for parents to want to help their children materially. This has been a part of God's plan at least since the calling of Israel and probably goes all the way back to the beginning.

nachalah 5159, "possession; property; inheritance." This noun is used frequently (220 times), but mainly in the Pentateuch and Joshua. It is rare in the historical books. The first occurrence of the word is in Gen. 31:14: "And Rachel and Leah answered and said unto him, Is there yet any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house?" The basic translation of nachalah is "inheritance": ... The word more appropriately refers to a "possession" to which one has received the legal claim. The usage of nachalah in the Pentateuch and Joshua indicates that the word often denotes that "possession" which all of Israel or a tribe or a clan received as their share in the Promised Land. ... After the Conquest the term "inheritance" is no longer used to refer to newly gained territory by warfare. Once "possession" had been taken of the land, the legal process came into operation by which the hereditary property was supposed to stay within the family. For this reason Naboth could not give his rights over to Ahab 1 Kings 21:3-4. (Vine's Expository Dictionary)

The inheritance centered first on the land God had given them by lot when they were given the land of Canaan. Not only was the land passed on, but so also were the financial assets. being passed on to his children. God views this as a good and natural thing. There is no stigma at all attached to parents wanting to help their children. Such a thing is good and profitable.

But he links wisdom with it. Although an inheritance is a wonderful legacy that parents can pass on to their children, it is greatly enhanced if they first give them wisdom. God has given parents a great role in giving wisdom to their children:

Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of discipline will remove it far from him. Prov 22:15

Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and do not forsake your mother's teaching; 9 Indeed, they are a graceful wreath to your head, and ornaments about your neck. Pr 1:8-9

When I was a son to my father, tender and the only son in the sight of my mother, 4 Then he taught me and said to me, "Let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments and live; 5 Acquire wisdom! Acquire understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth. Prov 4:3-5

My son, observe the commandment of your father, and do not forsake the teaching of your mother; 21 Bind them continually on your heart; Tie them around your neck. 22 When you walk about, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; and when you awake, they will talk to you. Pr 6:20-22

These are just a few of the many passages dealing with this great possession that parents can pass on to their children. Since wisdom is good with an inheritance, parents ought to be greatly concerned about giving them both.

An inheritance without wisdom is not a very good gift. Those who are given vast sums of money at a young age, and are not given the wisdom and discretion necessary to live their life, which generally come as the consequence of learning how to gain the money in the first place will generally come to a bad end. They will waste the inheritance, and will often destroy their minds and their hearts with it. Both are necessary, and when both are given, it is good and profitable. Things that are profitable are things that bring "excellence," "advantage," "gain," or "pre-eminence."

"3148 yowther, excellence; advantage, profit... gain; pre-eminence, advantage... abundance..." (Wilson 329)

If we really want to give our children such profit than we must join wisdom to an inheritance. All the money in the world will not profit them if they lose their own soul. Those parents who have been blessed with the natural affection of wanting to give to their children all that they can must first give them wisdom. If we are going to work hard to give our children an inheritance, God counsels us to be kind and loving enough to also give them wisdom also.

12. For wisdom is a defense as money is a defense,

The reason verse eleven is true is that wisdom is a defense to those who have it. The term defense is used about fifty times in the OT and is translated “*shade*” or “*shadow*” most of the time. Since the sun is blocked by the tree(making shade), and in hot climates this is considered protection from the sun it came to have a figurative meaning of “*shelter*” or “*protection.*”

6738 tsel (tsale); from 6751; shade, whether literal or figurative:...”

6738 tsel- a shadow, shade a) a shadow (on a sundial) b) a shadow, shade (as a protection) c) a shadow (symbolic of the transitoriness of life)

It is translated defense three times. Twice here and the other time in Numbers as Joshua and Caleb worked to change the hearts of the people after the negative report of the other ten.

“Only do not rebel against the LORD; and do not fear the people of the land, for they shall be our prey. Their protection has been removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them.” Num 14:9

We are giving our children protection from the terrible spiritual and moral powers of “life under the sun” in the same way that shade does from the heat of the sun. Wisdom can keep one out of trouble.

A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself, but the simple pass on and are punished. (NKJ)Prov 22:3

It keeps the mouth silent when a fool might open it and cause them great tribulation. It keeps the hand back from some deed that might bring great dishonor or trouble. It keeps the mind clear to make decisions quickly in tough spots that keep one clear from things which might need bring ruin or death.

In a similar way money is also a defense. Money is a great shelter from many of the harsh troubles of life. This is why parents are so interested in helping their children. With wisdom, money can be very very helpful to the well-being and enjoyable nature of the “life under the sun” for our children. Money can buy good health care, along with good food, clothing and shelter. It can bring many pleasures and keep one from many adversities. Yet in comparison, wisdom is a greater benefit “under the sun.”

But the excellence of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to those who have it.

The first thing one notices is that Koheleth substitutes the synonym “knowledge” for “wisdom.” Knowledge is foundation upon which all wisdom is laid. One of the best definitions of wisdom is “the proper application of knowledge to the activities of life.” One must first have knowledge before it can be applied in wisdom. Hence the great excellence(advantage-NAS) of knowledge. This term is only used in Ecclesiastes. It has been translated thus far with “*advantage,*” “*profit,*” “*excels,*” “*excellence.*” It is defined as things that are “*more than others.*”

“to remain; to be abundant; to be more than others; to excel... what exceeds bounds or measure, pre-eminence... profit... excellent; ...” (Wilson p 151-152)

Wisdom therefore has an advantage, a profit and an excellence that gives it more than others. Wisdom has a quality about it that causes it to rise above other things that give shelter and protection. Many things money can buy can give a defense, but if the person does not have the wisdom to use them of what benefit would they be? More to the point though is that wisdom often keeps one from problems so that no further need of a defense is called for.

The reason given here is that wisdom gives life to those who have it. It enhances the quality of life. Note how Paul says godliness does the same thing:

for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and {also} for the {life} to come. 1 Tim 4:8

This is what wisdom does. It makes life easier as well as longer.

How blessed is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding. 14 For its profit is better than the profit of silver, and its gain than fine gold. 15 She is more precious than jewels; and nothing you desire compares with her. 16 Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. 17 Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace. 18 She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who hold her fast. Pr 3:13-18

Those who find this wisdom and gain this understanding will follow God’s commands and enjoy life. Those who have this wisdom to avoid alcohol, sexual gratification outside of marriage, drugs, fighting, the wrong crowd and

fast cars, are going to have a defense that keeps them from many dangers and gives them life. Second those with wisdom follow God and all His laws, this promotes the happiest of all lives here and then gives one eternal life at the end of this one. Wisdom is the greatest of all possessions and the greatest of all legacies and inheritances one could give to their children. Nothing can compare or vie with her. This obviously compensates for the increased grief it brings to its possessor. Ecc 1:18.

13. Consider the work of God;

Koheleth has been doing most of the considering up to this point in the book, now he advises us to do the same. All are bidden to “*consider*” the work of God. He wants us to “*see with thought and reflection.*” He wants us to see “*with attention*” and “*take good notice.*”

“... to see with thought and reflection, with attention; to take good notice; to look upon with a kind, friendly, compassionate affection; to respect to regard...” (Wilson p 92-93)

It is always wise to take time to give thought, reflection and attention to the work of God. He has already discussed this theme in 3:1-15. There is a time for everything under the sun. There are certain things that God has set into motion at the beginning of time, and they are not going to be changed by man. This is not offered by way of pessimism, nor should we take a “what is the use” attitude. What all ought to do is “consider” the work of God. Do not ever allow a time to come when you do not reflect with attention on what is going on in your life. If you are trying to kick against the goad as Saul of Tarsus did, you will never be happy. If you consider yourself in complete control of your life and think of what you will be doing in a year or two from now, then again, perhaps it is time to consider the work of God. James offered wise counsel:

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.” 14 Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are {just} a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. 15 Instead, {you ought} to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that.” 16 But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. Jas 4:13-16

The problem above was a violation of the advice offered here. They did not consider, meditate and pay close attention to the work of God. They did not take into consideration that this is God’s world, that it runs as He desires it to run. Things have been set in motion which only God can set aside if He chooses to do so. Man cannot set such things aside. There is a time for everything and man can not stop or control it. He can only look to God for help.

For who can make straight what He has made crooked?

This is a short summation of Ecc. 1:13-15. Everything that God made crooked is still crooked. Man cannot straighten it back out. Man must learn to be humble and admit it. The curse God set in motion due to sin that made all these things crooked is a just punishment for what man has done. of sin Many have tried to set aside such things, and have done no more than just that, they have broken themselves.

Man is not going to be very successful in seeking to undo the curse of sin. They are here to teach man the damage of sin. Man can consider the work of God, he can work within the framework God has designed for his lifetime, but he cannot remove it. We should therefore never let a day go by that we do not consider how temporary all that we have really is. Never should a day go by when we are not fully prepared for everything to fall apart and change. God is in control, and is working all things after the counsel of His will(Eph 1:11). While we live in a time of prosperity, let us be joyful, but never lose sight of the fact that it could all turn to adversity in a moment of time with no warning and no way to ever turn back the clock. We must be prepared for tribulations and anguish or they might overthrow our reasoning ability(Ecc. 7:7).

14. In the day of prosperity be joyful,

While living in days of prosperity enjoy yourself! Have a wonderful time enjoying life and do not allow the thoughts of what might come in the future to remove the joy from your heart. It is an interesting point that the term “prosperity” is the same term for “good” used so many times to describe the world in Genesis one. All was prosperity and goodness then. While living in this set of circumstances, thoroughly enjoy yourself. Even more interesting is that the term “joyful” is also the word used in Genesis chapter one to describe that all is “good.” When things are good on the outside they can be good on the inside also. Both “prosperity” and “joyful” come

from

tob 2896, “good; favorable; festive; pleasing; pleasant; well; better; right; best.” This word appears in Akkadian, Aramaic, Arabic, Ugaritic, and Old South Arabic. Occurring in all periods of biblical Hebrew, it appears about 559 times. This adjective denotes “good” in every sense of that word. For example, tob is used in the sense “pleasant” or “delightful”:... Its first occurrence is in Gen. 1:4: “God saw that the light was good” (NASB). God appraises each day’s creative work as being “good,” climaxing it with a “very good” on the sixth day Gen. 1:31. (Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words)

When it is “good,” “favorable,” “festive” and “pleasing” on the outside, then we ought to feel the same way on the inside. When all is “pleasant” and “delightful,” we ought to be pleased and delighted! During days when all is good, and one sees beauty all around them, they ought to be joyful. There is nothing in this book or anywhere else in the Bible that teaches us we should not enjoy good days because we are so concerned about the bad that will surely come. During times of prosperity, one should not forget the work of God. They should not forget the crooked things in this world, but they can be joyful and fully enjoy the warmth of the days of prosperity.

But in the day of adversity consider:

When a day of adversity arrives, it is time to set aside joy and mirth and ponder and meditate upon it. The term “adversity” has been translated “evil” many times in the book. It is “7451 ra”, and speaks of things that give “pain” or “unhappiness.” When our world is turned upside down with some tragedy that takes all the joy out of life and leads us to feel empty and without hope “under the sun,” it is time to “consider.” This is the same term used in verse thirteen where he said we ought to consider the work of God. Now he wants us to “see with thought and reflection,” “with attention” and to “take good notice” of this adversity.

All who have been in deep straits and distress, know how much easier it is to meditate on things of sorrow and trouble, and of the comfort of the Scriptures than when all is prosperous. This ties us back to verse 1-3. The house of mourning is better than the house of feasting just like the times of adversity are better than the times of prosperity. During times of prosperity we are joyful. During times of adversity we learn and grow!

Surely God has appointed the one as well as the other,

God made both the day of prosperity and the day of adversity. There is a time and a purpose for both of them. They are allowed by Him to coexist together in our sin cursed age. The term “appointed” (made-NAS) is generally translated “make” “do” or “produce.” God created the first out of love for man and the second as punishment for sin. They are both necessary. One as a testimony to his goodness and the other as testimony of His wrath. He made the one “as well as” the other. He made them “side by side” and they are “corresponding to” each other. Man needs both to fully understand.

5980 ummah-juxtaposition used only as a preposition: 1) close by, side by side with, alongside of, parallel with 2) agreeing with, corresponding to, exactly as, close beside 3) correspondingly to (BDB)

So that man can find nothing that will happen after him.

All of this has been done for a specific purpose. This world has therefore been cursed by God to keep man humble. One of the reasons for the curse is to show man that it is not in him to direct his own steps and that he must trust in the LORD with all his heart and not lean on his own understanding. This is for his good always! We must learn this if we are ever to be content.

Ecclesiastes 7:15-18

August 9, 1998

15. I have seen all things in my days of vanity:

Though there is a paragraph break, the thought is being extended. The “all things” he has seen center on the fact that the “day of prosperity” and the “day of adversity” come without warning and no one has the means to “find out what will happen after him.” “Life under the sun” cannot be made into a simple “two plus two equals four” proposition. The more he has seen, the more obvious this truth has become. He says he has seen it all! Both in his own life and in the lives of others. He calls his own life “my days of vanity,” which simply means that he has applied to his own life what he has been preaching since chapter one. Since “all is vanity,” the days of his own life are also vanity. They are futile and empty. He has already concluded that he cannot accomplish anything of lasting value during his days under the sun. Hence his days under the sun are empty and futile. Though this is

a side point, it is an important one. All the things he has seen during his own days of vanity have led him to a profound conclusion. Anyone who looks carefully at his/her own life, or the lives of those around them also knows this is true. There are so many inequities in life, so many things that are not fair. When they happen to us or those we love our mind screams out in anguish and bitterness that life is not fair! There are so many “crooked things” that happen to the wrong people at the wrong time. Yet it is God who placed them all side by side, and man is completely incapable of changing them. We must content ourselves that these mindless and pointless things that happen as a result of simple time and chance(9:11) have a valid purpose. A purpose which leads a man to know:

I know, O LORD, that a man's way is not in himself; nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps. Jer 10:23

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. Pr 3:5

It is hard to pick which of the two things that follow are the most difficult to understand. God has an entire book(Job) dealing with the incongruity of the righteous suffering, along with many passages a chapter in Hebrews(11-12) speaking on the issue of the righteous suffering even to the point of death. Psalm 73 addresses the latter part of this verse. The fact that many wicked men enjoy all that this life has to give. It gives the impression that there is no moral component to life. If our eyes are open, and we are truly aware of what is going on around us then we are going to see this and it must be worked out in our minds. The concept is introduced in a general way here and then returned to again.

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. 8:14

It is the same for all. There is one fate for the righteous and for the wicked; for the good, for the clean, and for the unclean; for the man who offers a sacrifice and for the one who does not sacrifice. As the good man is, so is the sinner; as the swearer is, so is the one who is afraid to swear. 3 This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men. Furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil, and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives. Afterwards they {go} to the dead. 9:2-3

I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread to the wise, nor wealth to the discerning, nor favor to men of ability; for time and chance overtake them all. 12 Moreover, man does not know his time: like fish caught in a treacherous net, and birds trapped in a snare, so the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls on them. 9:11-12

As one reads these passages over and over, the incongruity is that this life ends without any real difference for the good and the evil or the righteous and the wicked. “Life under the sun” often comes to an end without the good being rewarded and the wicked being punished. Often it is just the opposite. The wicked die in peace, prosperity, and popularity while the righteous die in turmoil, poverty and persecution. This may lead man to draw a very wrong conclusion. It is this wrong conclusion that Koheleth begins to deal with.

There is a just man who perishes in his righteousness,

For the Hebrew “just” and “righteousness” are the same as our “faith” and “believe.” One is an adjective and the other is a noun. They both refer to one who exhibits “loyalty” to God. In the relationship of “a man to his God” it describes the concept of being “faithful” to each others expectations.” It also “embodies all that God expects of His people.”

tsedeq 6664; tsedaqah 6666, "righteousness." ... carries the sense of "loyalty" demonstrated by a king or priest as a servant of his own god.... The word tsedaqah, which occurs 157 times, is found throughout the Old Testament (except for Exodus, Leviticus, 2 Kings, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah). Tsedeq, which occurs 119 times, is found mainly in poetic literature. ... Exegetes have spilled much ink in an attempt to understand contextually the words tsedeq and tsedaqah. The conclusions of the researchers indicate a twofold significance. On the one hand, the relationships among people and of a man to his God can be described as tsedeq, supposing the parties are faithful to each other's expectations. ... The books of Psalms and of the prophets particularly use the sense of "righteousness" as a state... Tsedeq and tsedaqah are legal terms signifying justice in conformity with the legal corpus (the Law; Deut. 16:20), the judicial process Jer. 22:3,... The word "righteousness" also embodies all that God expects of His people. The verbs associated with "righteousness" indicate the practicality of this concept. One judges, deals, sacrifices, and speaks righteously; and one learns, teaches, and pursues after righteousness.... (Vines Expository Dictionary)

Hence what Solomon has seen is someone who was “loyal,” “faithful,” and meeting “all that God expects” of him, yet perished in it. Righteous people perish even though they are righteous. Sometimes they even perish because they are righteous! This is one of the most perplexing of all the circumstances set in motion by the curse

of sin, and God's desire to save as many as possible. It is also one of the greatest of the contributing reasons why life "under the sun" is futile. When something as critical to life as living for God and in harmony with His will cannot even help make "life under the sun" more safe and secure, then truly, there is nothing we can do in this life to be secure.

The fact is that sometimes God does not use righteousness as a shield to protect His people. Sometimes a righteous man will suffer grievously even unto death as a result of his righteousness. Jesus and Stephen are good examples of this, as also is Jeremiah. Though we cannot put names to all of them, God is very clear that we should still expect that some of us today who are righteous will suffer a similar fate.

35 Women received {back} their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, in order that they might obtain a better resurrection; 36 and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated 38 {men} of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. Heb 11:35-38

And there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his wickedness.

As time passes, we will also see as Solomon did that there are some wicked people who will prolong their lives even though they are wicked. The main idea behind those who are wicked are "being in the wrong." They are those "who have done wrong, are still living in sin, and are intent on continuing with wrong doing." A wicked man "does not seek God" "challenges God" "loves violence," and "oppresses the righteous."

rasha` 7563, "wicked; ungodly; guilty." Rasha` occurs only in Hebrew and late Aramaic. The word occurs about 260 times as a noun or an adjective and especially in the poetic literature of the Old Testament. It is rare in the Pentateuch and in the historical books. Its frequency increases in the prophetic books. The narrow meaning of rasha` lies in the concept of "wrongdoing" or "being in the wrong." It is a legal term. The person who has sinned against the law is guilty: "They that forsake the law praise the wicked: but such as keep the law contend with them" Prov. 28:4. ...Rasha` also denotes the category of people who have done wrong, are still living in sin, and are intent on continuing with wrongdoing. This is the more general meaning of the word. The first psalm exhorts the godly not to imitate the deeds and behavior of the ungodly, wicked people. The "wicked" does not seek God Ps. 10:4; he challenges God Ps. 10:13. In his way of life the "wicked" loves violence Ps. 11:5, oppresses the righteous Ps. 17:9, does not repay his debts Ps. 37:21, and lays a snare to trap the righteous Ps. 119:110.... (Vine's Expository Dictionary)

One would think that God would deal with such people "under the sun," but He doesn't. There are people like this who are blessed in every possible way "under the sun." It was this type of person who caused the feet of the inspired Psalmist to almost slip.

2 But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling; My steps had almost slipped. 3 For I was envious of the arrogant, {As} I saw the prosperity of the wicked. 4 For there are no pains in their death; and their body is fat. 5 They are not in trouble {as other} men; nor are they plagued like mankind. 6 Therefore pride is their necklace; the garment of violence covers them. 7 Their eye bulges from fatness; the imaginations of {their} heart run riot. 8 They mock, and wickedly speak of oppression; they speak from on high. 9 They have set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue parades through the earth. 10 Therefore his people return to this place; and waters of abundance are drunk by them. 11 And they say, "How does God know? And is there knowledge with the Most High?" 12 Behold, these are the wicked; and always at ease, they have increased {in} wealth. 13 Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure, and washed my hands in innocence; Ps 73:2-13

All Koheleth is affirming is that there are people in every generation that will fit both of these circumstances. They are a fact of "life under the sun."

The fact is, you simply cannot know what tomorrow will bring therefore consider the works of God and realize you are not going to know what tomorrow is going to bring, and no matter how hard you try you will never change that. If these most obvious cause and affect principles do not operate, then no others will either. You cannot prepare for the future by any means known to man and expect this life to be good to you. Whether you are righteous or wicked, rich or poor, strong or weak, wise or fool, you will see adversity and prosperity in varying degrees at different times in your life.

16. Do not be overly righteous,

One cannot help but recoil a little bit when one first reads this verse. There is nothing like it anywhere else in the Bible. Most Scripture that deals with righteousness are explanations of how far short of it man has come to it. Through Moses in Deuteronomy, Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, and Paul in the book of Romans, God has condemned man's efforts at serving Him as coming far short of what was necessary.

as it is written, "There is none righteous, not even one; 11 There is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; 12 All have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one." ... But now apart from the Law {the} righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even {the} righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, Rom 3:21-23

In the clear light or revelation from the book of Romans, God's verdict of man is that "there is none righteous not even one" "All have turned aside" "there is none who does good, there is not even one." In concluding the section the Spirit of God affirms that all men have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. No one could keep God's righteousness! It is only by God's merciful kindness that Jesus died in our place and gave us righteousness by faith in Him. This was the righteousness that Paul and Abraham had.

and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from {the} Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which {comes} from God on the basis of faith, Phil 3:9

For what does the Scripture say? "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." Rom 4:3

As Paul pointed out so eloquently, this is what the Law taught.

Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God; 20 because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law {comes} the knowledge of sin. Rom 3:19-20

Koheleth is not teaching something different here. Therefore, when seeking for an explanation concerning how one might be overly righteous, the Holy Spirit is not offering to man a moderate life. He is not saying that one can take God's religion too seriously and become a fanatic. He is not offering those "under the sun" the right to modify doctrine and morality to fit in with the people of that day. This flies in the face of all that the Bible demands. We are to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

We are therefore, compelled to look for a different interpretation than the obvious. For when it comes to keeping the commands, standards and expectations of God, there is no way to be overly righteous. Such is a contradiction of terms. What would we lose? If we lose one of the least of God's commands it reflects on us and keeps us out of the kingdom.

"Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches {them,} he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 "For I say to you, that unless your righteousness surpasses {that} of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. Mt 5:19-20

Where then can one draw a line. Can we lessen our righteousness to keep from losing life or avoid persecution?

Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. Rev 2:10

And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. 2 Tim 3:12

Can we lessen our righteousness to avoid loss of liberty or physical comfort?

For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart. 4 You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; Heb 12:3-4

Can we lower our righteousness to keep from losing friends and relatives?

34 "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 "For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; 36 and a man's enemies will be the members of his household. 37 "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. 38 "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. 39 "He who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it. Mt 10:34-39

No matter which way our mind turns in an attempt to lessen righteousness to a point where it keeps us from grief, we find a specific command warning us not to do it. God demands that our quest for His righteousness be our first priority (Mt 6:33), and that if this cost us our relatives, friends, possessions liberty, or even lives, it must be sacrificed. God has always strongly condemned those who seek to use difficult scriptures to justify sin or evil. (Jude 4; Rom 3:8 II Pet 3:14-18).

Now that we have spent nearly two pages discussing what the verse cannot mean, we must now seek for an explanation of what it does mean. Since the warning is obviously against some type of excess, we must contemplate whether there are any Scriptures that warn against things that man claims are righteous, and appear

on the surface to be good, but which in fact God has no real care and concern about. During the days of Jesus the Pharisees had developed many onerous additions to the law which seemed good to them but which Jesus would not submit to.

(For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, {thus} observing the traditions of the elders; 4 and {when they come} from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.) Mark 7:3-4

Paul warned of those who do not handle touch or taste, but which have no value at all, and those who command to abstain from foods and marriage.

20 If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 21 "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" 22 (which all {refer to} things destined to perish with the using)-- in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? 23 These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, {but are} of no value against fleshly indulgence. Col 2:20-23

1 But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, 2 by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, 3 {men} who forbid marriage {and advocate} abstaining from foods, which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. 4 For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude; 5 for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer. 1 Tim 4:1-5

These are but a few of the many examples in both the old and the new testament of those who have added to God's law in a mistaken idea that this would help them be more righteous. Koheleth call this overly righteous. The term "overly" describes "numerical increase" things that "multiply, become numerous, become great."

rabah 7235, "to multiply, become numerous, become great." This verb also occurs in Akkadian, Arabic, Amorite, and biblical Aramaic. Biblical Hebrew attests it about 220 times and in all periods.... Basically this word connotes numerical increase. It can refer to the process of increasing numerically: God told the sea and air creatures to "be fruitful, and multiply" Gen. 1:22-- the first occurrence.... This verb can be used of being quantitatively large. In Gen. 7:17 the waters are said to have "increased, and bare up the ark, and it was lifted up above the earth." So here the verb means "to increase in quantity." ... Rabah is sometimes used with another verb to signify its increase in occurrence or frequency. In some passages it signifies that a process is continuing: (Vine's Expository Dictionary)

With this definition, it is clear that God has set forth what righteousness is in the Scriptures. It is set and is to not be added to or taken from. If we seek to increase our righteousness above what is written, then we are simply decreasing the enjoyment of life to no purpose. We cannot be more righteous than what God has asked us to be.

Nor be overly wise:

The same reasonings offered above also apply here. There is simply no way to get too much of God's wisdom.

Make your ear attentive to wisdom, incline your heart to understanding; 3 For if you cry for discernment, lift your voice for understanding; 4 If you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; 5 Then you will discern the fear of the LORD, and discover the knowledge of God. 6 For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth {come} knowledge and understanding. 7 He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; {He is} a shield to those who walk in integrity, Pr 2:2-7

How blessed is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding. 14 For its profit is better than the profit of silver, and its gain than fine gold. 15 She is more precious than jewels; and nothing you desire compares with her. 16 Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. 17 Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace. 18 She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who hold her fast. Pr 3:13-18

5 Acquire wisdom! Acquire understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth. 6 "Do not forsake her, and she will guard you; love her, and she will watch over you. 7 "The beginning of wisdom {is:} acquire wisdom; and with all your acquiring, get understanding. 8 "Prize her, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her. Pr 4:5-8

"Take my instruction, and not silver, and knowledge rather than choicest gold. 11 "For wisdom is better than jewels; and all desirable things can not compare with her. 12 "I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, and I find knowledge {and} discretion. 13 "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way, and the perverted mouth, I hate. 14 "Counsel is mine and sound wisdom; I am understanding, power is mine. Pr 8:10-14

From these and many other verses it is obvious that one cannot get too much of God's true wisdom, nor is it possible to be "overly" wise when it comes to truth. Once again, the problem comes when we become so wise that we exceed the Scriptures. God bids us pray for wisdom and promises to give it liberally.

But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given

to him. James 1:5

Obviously one cannot have too much of this wisdom! But anyone who accepts the wisdom of men over the word of God is overly wise(I Cor 1:18-31). When one glories in their own wisdom above all else(Jer 9:23-24). Solomon himself is a good example of a man who was overly wise and destroyed himself. He did not accept the counsel of God. He was wiser than Scriptures in his choice of wives.(Deut 17:14-20)

Why should you destroy yourself?

When one seeks to be more righteous than God demands, or wants to be wiser than God reveals, he is on the path to destruction. Not only does he ruin his chances of being right with God on the day of judgment(II Jn 9-11; Gal 1:6-9; Mt 15:8-9), but he also ruins himself in this life as well. Only what God reveals will work. Everything man devises only leads to destruction and desolation. Those today who are overly righteous and wise(wiser than God) in morality or ethics will only bring destruction upon themselves and our nation. It doesn't matter what man tampers with or thinks himself wiser than God in, it will only lead to his destruction. We see man tampering with marriage, homosexuality, and death. Many have become wiser than God and condemn him in order to justify themselves(overly righteous). Only grievous ruin can follow such folly.

"Your words have been arrogant against Me," says the LORD. "Yet you say, 'What have we spoken against Thee?' 14 "You have said, 'It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His charge, and that we have walked in mourning before the LORD of hosts? 15 'So now we call the arrogant blessed; not only are the doers of wickedness built up, but they also test God and escape.'" Mal 3:13-15

Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become foolish that he may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, "{He is} the one who catches the wise in their craftiness"; 20 and again, "The Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, that they are useless." 1 Cor 3:18-20

17. Do not be overly wicked,

A new and equally difficult possibility is now set forth. When speaking of extremes that go above and beyond, there are those who want to be more righteous than is proper, and there are those who want to be more wicked. At first glance this too appears to be an impossibility. Just as you can't really be too righteous, there really are no acceptable levels of wickedness. By very definition, any wickedness is too much. These are people who are "in the wrong." They "have done wrong, are still living in sin, and are intent on continuing with wrong doing." They are the "wicked, ungodly, guilty."

rasha` 7563, "wicked; ungodly; guilty." Rasha` occurs only in Hebrew and late Aramaic. The word occurs about 260 times as a noun or an adjective...The narrow meaning of rasha` lies in the concept of "wrongdoing" or "being in the wrong."...Rasha` also denotes the category of people who have done wrong, are still living in sin, and are intent on continuing with wrongdoing.... (Vine's Expository Dictionary)

How much of this type of behavior is too much in the eyes of our God? How can we set a threshold for one to be "overly" wicked?

The first possibility is that those who allow their wicked tendencies to have such free reign in their hearts that it leads to their death. We see this in drug addicts, alcoholics, gamblers, and those whose sexual practices lead to disease and death. They have a sinful tendency, and they allow it to completely control them to the point where they self-destruct. Very few do this, but there are some in every school and city who do. Koheleth may be using this extreme to warn that even under the sun, with no eternal consequences to consider, it is foolish to allow wickedness to have control over our lives.

Yet we are still drawn to the one sticking point. Why does God put "overly" in this phrase. We would naturally expect it to be "Be not wicked?" All wickedness in the eyes of God is wrong.

The wicked are not so, but they are like chaff which the wind drives away. 5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. 6 For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. Ps 1:4-6

The LORD tests the righteous and the wicked, and the one who loves violence His soul hates. 6 Upon the wicked He will rain snares; fire and brimstone and burning wind will be the portion of their cup. Ps 11:5-7

The LORD keeps all who love Him; but all the wicked, He will destroy. Ps 145:20

20 But the wicked are like the tossing sea, for it cannot be quiet, and its waters toss up refuse and mud. 21 "There is no peace,"

says my God, "for the wicked." Isa 57:20-21

Since this book deals primarily with "life under the sun," He is evidently speaking here of things that always work (God's righteousness & God's wisdom) and things that never work (man's additions to God's righteousness and wisdom) and (going too far in the areas God condemns as wicked). There is little doubt that there is a difference between when the spiritual consequences of evil occur and when the physical consequences do. Spiritual consequences of being wicked are immediate. Physical consequences often require a great deal more wickedness. It appears that this is what Koheleth warns against. Of course, it goes without saying that the same God who is revealing that severe physical consequences occur when one is "overly" wicked also reveals that severe spiritual consequences will occur with any amount of wickedness.

Nor be foolish:

Koheleth himself helps clarify the meaning of being foolish:

Even when the fool walks along the road his sense is lacking, and he demonstrates to everyone {that} he is a fool. Ecc 10:3

The idea behind this term is one who is so obviously without sense that he is doing things so outlandish that it is obvious to all that he is a fool. Without sense, people "act stupidly," "absurdly" and "inconsistently."

"To act stupidly, absurdly, inconsistently, to be ... it denotes any deviation of the mind from what is true, good and right, wise and prudent;... (Wilson p172)

Those who do not take all the laws of life into consideration before they act and thus have "deviation of the mind from what is true," are definitely at risk. When we see people who take foolish risks with their lives either by defying physical laws or by taking risks that leap the sanity of those who are cautious, we know exactly what Koheleth speaks of here.

Why should you die before your time?

Taking this literally, one is taken back to the idea brought out in 7:12. Length of life is often found in wisdom, and in listening to God's instructions. A mere moment of foolish recklessness has taken the lives of those who otherwise would have lived much longer. We see this in the vast majority of automobile accidents and violent crimes. So many times they could have been avoided and lives spared if people would live more responsibly and less foolishly. When the moral component is added in, it becomes even more stark. Multitudes of people die before their time because they do things God has condemned either as morally wrong, or foolish. This is the real point to the fifth commandment.

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you. Ex 20:12

When one lives in submission to God's laws they remove themselves from so many of the things which bring great danger and death at a young age. Children who fulfill the command to honor their father and mother are given this as a promise by God.

18. It is good that you grasp this, And also not remove your hand from the other

The term "good" is the same term used in Genesis one to describe the goodness with which God created the heavens and the earth. It refers to things that are wholesome, pleasant prosperous and happy. Those who can grasp the truth and do not withhold their hand from the truths of the above verses are going to avoid some of the terrible emotional extremes that life can bring about. They will avoid the terrible consequences of the foolish opinions of men. They will guard themselves against becoming angry and doing something foolish or overly wicked. They will protect themselves from the Spartan and Ascetic lifestyles of those who devise a life that they think might be good, but which they have not consulted God about. Truly it is good that we grasp this truth. The term "grasp" means to "seize," "take hold," or "take possession."

'achaz 270, "to seize, grasp, take hold, take possession." Found in various Semitic languages, including ancient Akkadian, this word is a common one throughout the stages of the Hebrew language. It occurs almost 70 times in the Hebrew Old Testament. It is used for the first time in the Old Testament in the passive sense with reference to the ram "caught in a thicket by his horns" Gen. 22:13 and thus became a substitute for Isaac. While 'achaz is a common term for taking hold of things physically, such as Jacob's "taking hold" of Esau's heel Gen. 25:26, 'achaz is frequently used in a metaphorical or figurative sense.... (Vine's)

It is good for each of us to seize upon the truth that too much righteousness and wisdom will lead to our

destroying ourselves, and too much wickedness and folly can cut our lives short. We must keep it in the forefront of our mind for we will need it. It was spare us the extremes of life that others are captured by. It is important that each servant of God take the time to master point and gain a full understanding of it. It can protect us from some of the major traps and pitfalls of life.

and also not remove your hand from the other

The other may be the former or the latter. It is hard to know for sure which one goes with which. Don't forget either admonition is the strongest point to be understood. Neither of them should be minimized. So many people have lost their joy of life, or caught themselves up in a web of sorrow by becoming involved with a sect, cult, or other false religion that required more "righteousness" than God ever intended. Do not remove your hand from this understanding. Seek to fix them both in your mind. Service to God and true righteousness requires exact and precise walking between two very small lines(Mt 7:13-14). One cannot afford to stray to either side or they make themselves very unhappy, and they will also lose all hope of everlasting life.

For he who fears God will escape them all.

Here is God's precious promise to His people. Just as the fear of God is the beginning of knowledge Prov 1:7, the fear of God will help all escape the pitfalls of folly which sinful man has devised. A fear of the Lord leads to so many wonderful fruits and blessings. It keeps one in awe and respect of all God's commands which have been given for our good always(Deut 6:24-25). Those who truly fear the Lord and seek to give Him the reverence, respect and awe that is due Him will escape all such dangers. Such people cannot be enslaved to false religion, duped into self-righteousness, or snared by human wisdom, folly, or wickedness. They will come through all of them safely. They will keep their anger and frustration in check and avoid the mad insanity that rage can bring. As well as being able to see clearly the subtle temptations that the devil might place before them.

Having introduced the difficult situations that arise in our “life under the sun” that defy wisdom’s discerning ability to explain, he returns to a series of proverbs extolling wisdom and discussing its benefits and limitations when it is directed toward the “vanity” of “life under the sun.”

19. Wisdom strengthens the wise

This is the tenth of the twenty-one times this term is used in the book. It generally refers to the *"mastery of the art of living in accordance with God's expectations."* It describes one who *"fearing God, lives in accordance with what God expects,"* and can apply *"wisdom to every situation in life."*

chakam 2450,... was viewed as a mastery of the art of living in accordance with God's expectations. In their definition, the words "mastery" and "art" signify that wisdom was a process of attainment and not an accomplishment. The secular usage bears out the importance of these observations.... The chakam in secular usage signified a man who was a "skillful" craftsman... The religious sense of chakom excludes delusion, craftiness, shrewdness, and magic. God is the source of wisdom, as He is "wise"... Isa. 31:2. The man or woman who, fearing God, lives in accordance with what God expects and what is expected of him in a God-fearing society is viewed as an integrated person. He is "wise" in that his manner of life projects the fear of God and the blessing of God rests upon him. Even as the craftsman is said to be skillful in his trade, the Old Testament chakam was learning and applying wisdom to every situation in life, and the degree in which he succeeded was a barometer of his progress on the road of wisdom... The opposite of the chakam is the "fool" or wicked person, who stubbornly refuses counsel and depends on his own understanding: ...(Vines)

When someone has mastered God’s solution for every circumstance and difficulty in life, he is strengthened. He is given the power to avoid and respond to dangerous situations in a successful way. The term “strengthen” generally describes being strong enough to *“prevail.”*

5810 `azaz- to be strong a) (Qal) to be strong, to prevail b) (Hiphil) to make firm, to strengthen

When one has wisdom one has a greater ability to gain the desired end . There is great strength and power in wisdom. A strength and power that gives security and firmness to those who possess it. It does this first by averting most of the problems people bring upon themselves by doing foolish things, and secondly by giving the best possible solution to the problems that arise that cannot be avoided. Thus wisdom should be viewed as a powerful companion and ally that one can take with him into all the difficult circumstances of life.

More than ten rulers of the city.

There seem to be as many explanations of the ten rulers of the city as there are authors to write about them. The number ten seems to be a number of completeness. Laban changed Jacob’s wages ten times(Gen 31:7, 41), Israel put God to the test ten times. (Num 14:22), God gave ten commandments(Dt 4:13), Job complained his three friends had insulted him ten times(Job 19:3), Daniel and his three friends were ten times better than the other wise men(Dan 1:20). Though there may be a more historical reason for this number, no commentator has yet found it. It seems best to see no more here than that wisdom is a better ally than the complete number of mighty rulers in the city. These are not simply rulers because of political power. They were rulers because they had *“mastery”* and were *“imperious.”*

7989 shalliyt- having mastery, domineering, master a) having mastery; ruler (substantive) b) domineering, imperious

But even with a complete number of the most mighty men of valor and strength, one would not be as well protected as he would be with wisdom.

20. For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin.

What the author says here is not nearly as difficult to understand as the reason he said it. That there is not a just man in all the earth is an often stated truth in Scripture. The first three chapters of Romans makes it abundantly clear that this is the truth. There never has been and never will be a just man on the earth that does good and does not sin. But why does he bring this up now and at this point in the book? It appears that this is the reason why wisdom is so much greater a defense than ten mighty men in a city. God’s wisdom will never fail us. It will never give us a false path or solution. It will never fail or forsake us. Men will do all these things. Regardless of the might of any man, there is no man who will always give the right answer and do the right thing under all circumstances. Even those trying as hard as they can(Abraham, Job, David, Solomon, Peter & Saul of Tarsus) occasionally fail and fall short of the great ally wisdom. The only way we can protect ourselves from such a

danger is to rely primarily upon wisdom. that found in the NT. The term “sin” speaks of those times when we “miss,” or “forfeit,” generally describing “*moral failure toward both God and men.*” Men will fail and let us down. God never will.

chata' 2398, "to miss, sin, be guilty, forfeit, purify." This verb occurs 238 times and in all parts of the Old Testament. It is found also in Assyrian, Aramaic, Ethiopic, Sabeian, and Arabic..... The basic meaning of this verb is illustrated in Judg. 20:16: There were 700 left-handed Benjamite soldiers who "could sling stones at a hair breadth, and not miss." The meaning is extended in Prov. 19:2: "He who makes haste with his feet misses the way"... From this basic meaning comes the word's chief usage to indicate moral failure toward both God and men, and certain results of such wrongs.... (Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words)

21. Also do not take to heart everything people say,

Here Koheleth offers some advice that illustrates why wisdom is so valuable to one who has it. When it comes to taking things to heart and thus changing direction in order to please them, there is an important consideration to take into account. Though God bids us take to heart all that He tells us,(Deut 32:46; Mal 2:2) He warns us not to take to heart all the things that any one else says. This is an important thing to learn and practice. There are many things that need to be taken to heart, mulled over, pondered and taken seriously. This is not one of them. The casual things that people say about others and about things in general always needs to be taken with a grain of salt. They should not always be taken at face value and marked down as the way someone really is. One's actions should always be allowed to speak much louder than their words. So many times people are caught up in the emotion of the moment and say things they later wish they had not said and really didn't mean. He offers one example of how this can happen.

Lest you hear your servant cursing you.

A servant is one who is a slave either by law or by choice. He may willingly serve another as we do in our own nation with employees, or he may be a slave of war, violation of law or of debt. Such a person had an obligation to another. Anyone in a situation of servitude regardless of the reason will feel frustration and anger at one who is over him from time to time. He may even verbalize these feelings. Most of the time they are not really true. They are a momentary emotion that is soon gone, and it is foolish to allow such things to hurt the relationship. Everyone feels and sometimes verbalizes such emotions and then later regrets saying them and no longer feels that way. The term “curse” describes that moment when we “*esteem lightly*” another and consequently utter “*violent reproaches*” against them.

"... to esteem lightly... to utter violent reproaches, to imprecate evil, to curse..." (Wilson p 105)

A servant might speak to another about the things they lightly esteem about their master. It doesn't necessarily affect their overall view of him, and may not even be the way he feels the next day. It only takes in the weaknesses and foolish side of each of us. We all have such a side, and sometimes others speak of it. The author here would keep us from the grief of listening to such talk with an ear that takes it personally, and has it affect our feelings about ourselves and about them.

22. For many times, also, your own heart has known That even you have cursed others.

Who can read this without knowing deep within our heart that it is true. We have all at some time or another allowed the weaknesses in another to move us to speak to others things that never should be said and which most of the time we don't really mean. We find things in others that are their weakest points of character and then grumble about them to others. Even as we are saying them we often regret that we did. Sometimes we even take them back right after we say them, but the damage is already done. They are words that are out where they can be heard and passed on. Everyone does this from time to time. He does not speak of the rightness or wrongness of this. It may be a slight lack of esteem that does not sin, or it may be a truly evil and wicked remark, but either way, it is foolish to take such things to heart. Things spoken by our fellow man, unless backed by the wisdom of God's word need to be simply disregarded. We did not really mean it when we did it and they don't either. Most of the time we are simply caught up in an emotional moment and are voicing opinions we do not really hold, or are saying things we do not really mean.

How many times during a conversation have we spoken things about others that were painfully true, but did not need to be said and did not really affect how much we love or respect another. Yet if the person heard it and took

it to heart, it would hurt them deeply. It is wise to never express these things, but we all do sometimes. Hence the warning. When such things are said, let them “go in one ear and out the other” or be like “water off a ducks back.” Even our own sages have wise proverbs about this.

23. All this I have proved by wisdom. I said, "I will be wise"; but it was far from me.

Continuing to extol wisdom he now speaks of the value it has brought into His own life. All of the things brought out in this book have been proven by this wisdom. These are the observations that will lead one to a healthy and happy life here and to favor with God which secures a favorable verdict at the judgement day. This is what true wisdom is. It is the ability to properly assess all the knowledge that one has and make the right decisions which bring about the best possible outcome. It begins with a fear of Jehovah(Prov 1:7) for any life which does not have at its root a fear and desire to please ones Creator will most certainly end in failure. Yet this was but the beginning of a much larger task which Solomon set for himself. He had proved many things by wisdom, but he set himself a task which proved beyond His ability to fulfill. He said "I will be wise." That was His goal, that was the task he set for himself, but he found it to be "far from him." It was “remote,” “far,” seen off in the “distance.”

7350 rachowq or rachoq- as an adjective: 1) remote, far, distant, distant lands, distant ones; used of distance, time as a masculine noun: 2) distance; from a distance (with a preposition)

He could see it, but could never quite get to it. What exactly was he seeking for? What was just beyond his reach? He was the wisest man who ever lived, inspired by the Holy Spirit in all His writings, and here through inspiration admits that there was something just beyond His grasp. Many things fit here. There are things beyond the Scriptures that God has kept secret.

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law. Dt 29:29

There are also many things that the Scriptures reveal that are beyond our ability to put together in exactly the right way all the time. We fall short of God’s glory both in spiritual things and in material things. No matter how hard we try, the perfect life is always just beyond our grasp.

Not that I have already obtained {it} or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of {it} yet; but one thing {I do} forgetting what {lies} behind and reaching forward to what {lies} ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Phil 3:12-14

24. As for that which is far off and exceedingly deep, who can find it out?

He now speaks along the same line as Job 38-41. There are things far off and exceedingly deep. The foundations of the earth (38:4), the morning stars singing together(38:7), The limitation of the seas(38:8-11), the dwelling of light(38:19), the path of a thunderbolt(38:25), the making of the stars(38:31-32), the ordinance of the heavens(38:33), the ways of the animals(39-41). Many of these things cannot be fully comprehended by any man. A study of one of them would and has required a lifetime and still the one who does it admits he has not seen it all yet. The deeper one looks into anything the greater the depth and intensity to which it grows. There is nothing simple in this entire universe. All of it is far off and exceeding deep. No one in this life can find it all out. Yet though all of the above is true, even in the book of Job, they were not the central point. All the complexities of the material creation were only illustrative of God’s dealings with man. The real issue stems from the moral complexities of the human heart.

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings. Jer 17:9-10

This is what Solomon begins to introduce here and continues through to the end of the chapter.

25. I applied my heart to know, To search and seek out wisdom and the reason of things, He now describes the nature and scope of this search. First, he applied his heart. The term “applied” refers to “a circular movement,” or “turning something over”

Cabab 5437, "to turn, go around, turn around (change direction)." This verb occurs only in Hebrew (including post-biblical Hebrew) and Ugaritic. Nouns using these radicals appear in Arabic and Akkadian. Biblical Hebrew attests the word in all periods

and about 160 times.... Basically this verb represents a circular movement... Perhaps one of the passages where this meaning is clearest is Prov. 26:14, which speaks of the "turning" of a door on its hinges.... the verb may mean "to roam through" as a scout looking for water:... cabab may be used of "turning something over" (from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words)

Solomon drew a circle around a particular thing in his heart and then roamed through it. While on this subject, he determined both to search and seek out.

Searching stresses
*“ f i n d i n g
something that is
missing, ” “whose
location is
unknown. ” To
accomplish this
one must “aim at,
devote oneself to,
and be concerned
about. ”*

baqash 1245, "to seek, search, consult." This verb occurs only in Ugaritic, Phoenician, and Hebrew. It appears in the Bible about 220 times and in all periods. Basically baqash means "to seek" to find something that is lost or missing, or, at least, whose location is unknown... The sense "seek to secure" emphasizes the pursuit of a wish or the accomplishing of a plan. ... This image may have an emotional coloring, such as, "to aim at, devote oneself to, and be concerned about."... Theologically, this verb can be used not only "to seek" a location before the Lord (to stand before Him in the temple and seek to secure His blessing), but it may also be used of a state of mind: "But if from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him [daras] with all thy heart and with all thy soul" Deut. 4:29. (Vines)

Seeking out captures the idea one who will “*spy out,*” “*explore,*” or “*make a reconnaissance.*”

8446 tuwr- to seek, to search out, to spy out, to explore a) (Qal) 1) to seek out, to select, to find out how to do something 2) to spy out, to explore; explorers, spies (participle) 3) to go about; a merchant, a trader (participle) b) (Hiphil) to make a search, to make a reconnaissance

Solomon is on a quest. He has narrowed the inquiry down to a specific thing that he has drawn a circle around and he is now working to find what he is missing by devoting himself to spying out and exploring.

He will use wisdom as his ally as outlined in verse nineteen, to find out what he wants to know. When one sees what he is seeking, one realizes why he will need wisdom.

To know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness.

He will use wisdom to “know” the wickedness of folly. He wanted to know just how bad and how perverted it was when a man was a fool and would not submit to that which he was created by God to be. The nature of the inquiry showed him that folly leads to wickedness, to foolishness and to madness. All stand or fall together. When a man will not submit to the will of God, will not agree with the evidence all around him that there is a God who created the universe and that this God needs to be served, he becomes and is a fool (Ps 14:1), once a man sets his foot down this path, he becomes wicked (there is none who can escape it - Ecc 7:20). Since he does not respect God's law and he will not submit to it, thus making himself foolish. Only folly can account for one who will not submit to the laws of His creator and benefactor. This leads to madness in many. Not in the sense of insanity, but in the sense of the senseless folly of what they do to themselves and others. They tear down their own house with their own hands.

He now offers an example of such a thing.

26. And I find more bitter than death

More bitter than death is perhaps the strongest way to discuss a horrible situation that one can get themselves into. When one is led to their death, either by execution, or by some disease that leads to an early death, it is a bitter experience. The term “bitter” literally describes things that are bitter to the taste and cause the face to contort. It is figuratively applied to those things that do the same thing emotionally. Though it generally refers to grief, it can also encompass, other emotions as well. “*To be ‘bitter of soul’ is to be exasperated, angry, disgusted, uneasy, discontented; exceedingly sorrowful.*”

To be bitter, in bitterness; figuratively applied to the severity of sufferings, of sorrow; to be 'bitter of soul' is to be exasperated, angry, disgusted, uneasy, discontented; exceedingly sorrowful... bitter herbs... bitter, poisonous,... sadness, grief..." Wilson OT Words p 40

Which emotions are specifically described here is hard to choose since all of them accompany death at various times. In death, there is nothing left to look forward to, since all that is in this "life under the sun" is forever removed from them. Hence something more bitter than this would be an exceedingly terrible experience. What is it that he has found to be so bitter, so counterproductive to an enjoyable life? So removed from what God intended for it to be?

The woman whose heart is snares and nets, Whose hands are fetters.

When God made a woman, he made her as the perfect helpmeet for man. She is in every way appealing to him. In the marriage relationship this is the most wonderful of blessings and one of the greatest enjoyments of life. When God is served, when one seeks by wisdom to use God's gifts in the way He intended for them to be used a wonderful thing occurs. The hearts of both of them are knit together and they become one flesh. Such a woman is a blessing to all. But not all women are like this.

The type of women Solomon here had found and now describes is more bitter than death to any man who enters her domain. A woman whose heart is full of snares and nets(scheming and selfish) and whose hands are fetters is a seductive woman. These three terms describe the worst of entrapments for there is no escape from them. The first is the net that is thrown on the land to capture the bird or other animal. While the second is thrown into the water and slowly pulled together. There is no escape for any living thing that is within it once it is cast forth.

Moreover, man does not know his time: like fish caught in a treacherous net, and birds trapped in a snare, so the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls on them. Ecc 9:12

After so describing the heart of such a woman, he moves to her hands. They are like fetters. This term actually has two different ideas. The first is that of "bonds" or "bands" that are placed on the hands and hold the person firmly. The second is that of a "prison" where one is also unable to escape.

612 'ecuwr- 1) a band, a bond 2) a house of bonds, a prison (figurative)

The first is used of Sampson and the second of Jeremiah.

When he came to Lehi, the Philistines shouted as they met him. And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him mightily so that the ropes that were on his arms were as flax that is burned with fire, and his bonds dropped from his hands. Judg 15:14

Then the officials were angry at Jeremiah and beat him, and they put him in jail in the house of Jonathan the scribe, which they had made into the prison. Jer 37:15

Koheleth is either affirming that her hands are bonds that hold fast the hands, or they are a prison that hold fast. Either way liberty and freedom are forever lost. What a terrible description of the heart of a woman who leaves the designated role of her Creator to use her body and soul to catch men. Such a woman is more bitter than death to any man as well as to herself.

24 To keep you from the evil woman, from the smooth tongue of the adulteress. 25 Do not desire her beauty in your heart, nor let her catch you with her eyelids. 26 For on account of a harlot {one is reduced} to a loaf of bread, and an adulteress hunts for the precious life. 27 Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? 28 Or can a man walk on hot coals, and his feet not be scorched? Prov 6:24-28

And behold, a woman {comes} to meet him, dressed as a harlot and cunning of heart. 11 She is boisterous and rebellious; her feet do not remain at home; 12 {She is} now in the streets, now in the squares, and lurks by every corner. 21 With her many persuasions she entices him; with her flattering lips she seduces him. 22 Suddenly he follows her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as {one in} fetters to the discipline of a fool, 23 Until an arrow pierces through his liver; as a bird hastens to the snare, so he does not know that it {will cost him} his life. 24 Now therefore, {my} sons, listen to me, and pay attention to the words of my mouth. 25 Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways, do not stray into her paths. 26 For many are the victims she has cast down, and numerous are all her slain. 27 Her house is the way to Sheol, descending to the chambers of death. Pr 7:10-12, 21-27

He who pleases God shall escape from her,

What a wonderful promise and testimony to wisdom. This woman is as dangerous to a man as a lion or tiger is to an unwary animal. She is lethal and deadly. Those who please God will escape her because of two important reasons. First because God will keep her from our path(I Cor 10:13) and second because God has given us

warnings against her and those who please God are those who keep his commandments which are for our good always. Though she is a deadly snare and net to some, she poses no real threat to those who please God if they always listen to God.

But the sinner shall be taken by her.

Because God designed male and female so that it was not good for them to be alone he gave to each strengths and weaknesses that are complemented by one another. Man has the strong sex drive that is driven by the eyes. Woman has the body to fulfill all these needs. When a good man marries a good woman, then there is no danger, her strength complements his weakness, and all is well. When an evil woman is hunting for the precious life, a wicked man will be taken. He simply doesn't have the inner strength to do it and without God's wisdom and help he will fall.

For on account of a harlot {one is reduced} to a loaf of bread, and an adulteress hunts for the precious life. Pr 6:26

27. Here is what I have found, says the Preacher, adding one thing to the other to find out the reason,

He now sums up his inquiry into the deep mysteries of things. This is the conclusion to his quest to **“to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness.”** Here is what he has found. Perhaps he had been assessing lifestyles of people, perhaps he had looked at outlook and attitude. It is even possible that God allowed him to use the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to see into the hearts of men. After an exhaustive search into the manners and circumstances surrounding the wickedness of folly and foolishness and madness. Here is what he found out. He now explains his use of wisdom. He added one thing to another to find out the reason.

28. Which my soul still seeks but I cannot find:

His inquiry had led him to an interesting quest. A quest for a good woman. His soul still sought for her but he had not yet found her. Many have sought to malign Solomon here. Certainly his own life among woman made him a very poor candidate for such a search. Yet one forgets the inspiration which covers the writing of this book. Solomon was a man with a man's weaknesses and folly. He did not practice what he preached here and ultimately fell to the nets, bands and fetter of such women. Yet in the writing of this epistle, he is guided from such things by his own inspiration. These are not just the authors conclusions. These are the conclusions of the Spirit of God.

One man among a thousand I have found,

He had found one such good man among a thousand. This is a terrible percentage among the men of Israel at the height of its prosperity and power, but is not very startling. Only the remnant were ever truly the children of Jehovah. This conclusion does not meet with incredulity. It is not only within the realm of possibility, but is truly still not only in the days of our Lord(See Mt 7:13-14) and even to this present day.

But a woman among all these I have not found.

This is startling. This is powerful, it is something that causes a great deal of consternation among many who read it. Many seek to nullify his words, to make them teach something else, or to malign his own wisdom and inspiration and state that he is wrong. The likelihood of this being true is scant. The entire foundation of the inspiration of the Scriptures rests on accepting each conclusion as the inspired conclusion of God himself. This is the Holy Spirit's conclusion not Solomon's. It stresses the supreme difficulty with which a woman has in reaching after Her creator's intent and design for her. Peter used Sarah as an example of what all women ought to be. She is vividly portrayed in as a worthy woman in Proverbs 31. Such a woman is very rare, and Solomon had not found her yet. This does not mean that she does not exist, but only that of all the women Solomon had met up to this time, he had not found one such woman yet.

Why would such a woman be so very rare? Perhaps because the easier path to a man is the improper use of her body. Because it takes great effort to accept being a servant as the true role of being a woman. The New Testament only heightens the difficulty of her task. She is to submit to man, she is not to teach or take dominion over man, she is to be saved through her childbearing(Eph 5:21-24; I Cor 11:1-16; I Cor 14:35-36; I Tim 2:9-15; I Pet 3:1-6). To deny these things simply means that such women will be even more rare for the ones who should be striving for it are scoffing at it.

To accept these things as God's truth takes great faith in God. It requires us to fulfill Prov 3:5 and trust in the

Lord with all our heart and not lean on our own understanding. To actively work on them and fulfill them completely takes great character and fortitude. It is hard to find such a woman. She is rare and thus of great value and price. Submission to God carries her a little deeper than man into servitude, and thus makes it more difficult for her as she compares roles. In Solomon's day he simply could not find one. She is getting harder and harder to find today also. She is prone to argue against these conclusions with the contempt of the term "chauvinist." Yet Paul was not a chauvinist and neither was Solomon. They were servants of God sent to reveal the truth. Only Satan has names such as this for a worthy woman. As long as a woman is blind to this truth, the door to greatness is forever closed to her.

29. Truly this have I found:

Yet Solomon does not stop with the woman. The final tally and conclusion to this matter is:

That God made man upright,

In the garden of Eden, man (male and female) was upright, he was all that God intended for him to be and he was designed to be very happy. "Upright" is defined:

"... to be straight, right; to be even, level... straight, right and proper; of persons, uprightness, integrity... evenness, uprightness, sincerity; justice; evenness, ..."

This is how God made man. He was made straight, right and proper, with integrity and sincerity. This is not how he remained.

But they have sought out many schemes.

The term "sought out" is the same term as he used back, in verse 25 when he began his quest to find certain things. It is now sinful and fallen man who is doing the seeking. Searching stresses "*finding something that is missing,*" "*whose location is unknown.*" To accomplish this one must "*aim at, devote oneself to, and be concerned about.*" This is what sinful and fallen man has done regarding schemes.

"to think, to meditate, to purpose; ... to think out, to invent, devise... arts, devices..." (Wilson p 231)

So many means and ways of sinning and violating God's ways have been sought for. Man has found a multitude of wrong ways to live and paths that seem right but end in death. He has sought for many ways to ruin himself the fall in the garden. The misery of man has been multiplied. This is what Solomon's search for wisdom had led him to. Man has truly corrupted himself. It took the wisdom and power of God to devise the means to bring him back

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. 3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly {places} in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, {it is} the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, that no one should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Eph 2:1-10