

(Man's lack of Dominion)

Introduction:

In the concluding verses of the eighth chapter Solomon spoke of the complexities of "life under the sun." Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he declares that not even wisdom can help one explain or fully understand these mysteries. There are no simple answers. Those who seek to find a purpose or a reason for the things that happen to them will not always be able to do so. A search to comprehend the complexities and anomalies of life leads to the conclusion that most things cannot be unraveled, explained or understood. "There are no answers!" is the woeful cry that comes from his lips, and those who think they have answers are wrong. The deeper one seeks for them the more elusive they become. By beginning the next sentence with the term "for" he now offers the reason for this conclusion.

Verses 1-3 set forth the greatest of all the mysteries and inscrutable realities of "life under the sun." There is no formula for success and there are no guarantees. God has so ordered this life that no one knows what the future holds for them. No matter what you do or avoid, it will make no difference to how your "life under the sun" unfolds. There are no cause and affect principles to this life. Not even righteousness and wisdom can help! You can do everything right and fail in "life under the sun." You simply do not know what the future holds, and you have no control over how it will unfold for you. Death, illness, war, financial setbacks, treachery of others, and multitudes of other factors are completely beyond the control even of the most godly and pure person.

As Solomon expresses this truth, it wrings from the heart the same statement that began the book. "***Vanity of Vanities,***" says the preacher "***Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.***" God has removed from "life under the sun" the one thing necessary for it to have meaning, lasting value and satisfaction. He has removed man's dominion. Without dominion, it doesn't matter what you have because you can't keep it. There is no point to putting any real value or stock into it because it will all be taken in the end. Some seek to lessen this by at least trying to enjoy the 80 years they might have, but even that is now removed. You don't even know if you can keep it for that long. To balance out the gravity of this revelation, Koheleth places a brief parenthesis in 9:7-10 regarding what one ought to do to get as much as possible out of "life under the sun." He then returns to this theme in 9:11-12 to give an even stronger affirmation about the lack of dominion man has in his "life under the sun."

For the Christian, with the additional light of the gospel, God bids us stop looking at this life and begin looking for the life to come where the dominion will be returned for eternity.

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. 2 Cor 4:16-18

1. For I considered all this in my heart, so that I could declare it all:

This is the third time in this section that he has used this same formula to introduce his conclusion.

*All this I have seen and **applied** my mind to every deed that has been done under the sun wherein a man has exercised authority over {another} man to his hurt. Ecc 8:9*

*When I **gave** my heart to know wisdom and to see the task which has been done on the earth (even though one should never sleep day or night), Ecc 8:16*

In each, he makes the same affirmation. He has "given" his heart, "applied" his mind, and "considered" all in his heart. He now sums all this up into a final conclusion, which he will now declare. Hence what now follows is one of the pivotal conclusions to the book of Ecclesiastes. It is the reason why "all is vanity" "under the sun" and it is also the reason why we must "fear God and keep his commandments."

It is interesting that God once again allows the human mind of Koheleth to enter into the Scriptural conclusion. Since what he did was right, God can incorporate it into the divinely inspired word of God. Since all Scripture is God breathed (II Tim 3:15-16) and since all prophets spoke as moved by the Holy Spirit (II Pet 1:20-21), we know that Koheleth was inspired by the Holy Spirit to say these things and to use his own wisdom. He "considered" and he "declared." Yet the real value of this book is its divine stamp of inspiration. The point may

be that anyone can see the truth of these conclusions whether they trust in the inspiration of God, or they deduce it from their own observations of “*life under the sun.*” His conclusion is:

that the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God.

The basic premise of his conclusion goes back into the previous chapter.

Although a sinner does evil a hundred {times} and may lengthen his {life,} still I know that it will be well for those who fear God, who fear Him openly. 13 But it will not be well for the evil man and he will not lengthen his days like a shadow, because he does not fear God. 14 There is futility which is done on the earth, that is, there are righteous men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked. On the other hand, there are evil men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I say that this too is futility. Ecc 8:12-14

This is the fundamental conclusion that nothing in this “life under the sun” can contradict. It may not seem like this is true, and as a matter of fact, he is about to reveal that even though it is true, it does not change the outcome “under the sun,” nor give any more dominion in it. The “righteous” and the “wise” are the same people referred to in 8:12 as “*those who fear God, who fear Him openly.*” The just person is one who always does what is “lawful” and “right” in the eyes of God. It is also one who has been “*justified and vindicated by God.*” The wise are those who have the “*mastery of the art of living in accordance with God’s expectations,*” and those who “*fearing God, lives in accordance with what God expects.*” These people have God’s solemn promise that they and their works are in God’s hand. The real essence of the passage is to be found in the term hand. What does it mean to be in the hand of God? The term is used over 1600 times in the OT. It can be the literal “*hand,*” or it can be used as “*a figure of speech*” “*by which God promises His protection.*”

yad 3027, This word has cognates in most of the other Semitic languages. Biblical Hebrew attests it about 1,618 times and in every period. The primary sense of this word is “hand”: ... Sometimes the word is used in conjunction with an object that can be grasped by the “hand”... In Isa. 49:2, “hand” is used of God; God tells Moses that He will put His “hand” over the mouth of the cave and protect him. This is a figure of speech, an anthropomorphism, by which God promises His protection. God’s “hand” is another term for God’s “power” (cf. Jer. 16:21). ...” (from Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words)

This is how it was used when Moses was hid in the cleft of the rock, as well as Isaiah’s prophecy of God’s care for His coming Messiah.

and it will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by 23 “Then I will take My hand away and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen.” Exod 33:22-23

And He has made My mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of His hand He has concealed me, and He has also made me a select arrow; He has hidden me in His quiver. Isa 49:2

The righteous and the wise and all their works are in God’s open hand. He will protect and shield them, no matter what “life under the sun” might bring into their lives.

For You, O Lord, will bless the righteous; with favor You will surround him as with a shield. Ps. 5:12

The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, And he delights in his way. 24 Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; For the Lord upholds him with His hand. Ps 37:23-25

Paul also spoke of this in his final epistle as he contemplated his own death.

For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day. II Tim. 1:12

Koheleth has assessed all the works under the sun, he has compiled and studied these things thoroughly. He knows in his heart that God cares for His people, and that all that they have is in his hand, that they are protected, shielded and surrounded by His providential care. Like Paul, he knew that He is able to keep what we commit to Him. Yet even with this knowledge, it does not help unravel the mysteries of life. Even with this assurance and the part of God, the most righteous and wise of both men and women still do not have dominion in this life. Not even God with all His power and might will stop the natural course of life under most circumstances. It is not with “life under the sun” that God’s providential care is primarily directed toward. For this reason, in spite of the knowledge that ultimately the righteous and wise will prevail, this will give no help or guidance for what “life under the sun” might bring to them.

People know neither love nor hatred by anything that is before them.

This clause is difficult for two reasons. There are two possible ways to understand how people do not know love

and hate, and there are two possible meanings of the term “before.” The first is a simple question of context. Although Koheleth could be affirming that people do not understand how to love or hate by anything that comes before them, what sense does that make in this context. Doesn’t it make much more sense to refer this to God? That they do not know whether God loves or hates by anything that is set before them. That this is true is clearly set forth by Jesus in the Sermon on the mount:

“But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you 45 in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on {the} evil and {the} good, and sends rain on {the} righteous and {the} unrighteous. Mt 5:44-45

No one can deduce love or hate by all that is before them “under the sun.” This is the great paradox that makes life vanity, but it is still true. Hence the lives and works of the righteous and wise are definitely in the hands of God. His favor and grace rest upon them, but no one can deduce how God feels about it all from how “life under the sun” is progressing for them. Nothing in one’s “life under the sun” tells them anything about God’s feelings toward their lifestyle.

The second difficulty comes from the meaning of the term “before.” It can mean something that happened prior to now. “I came here before you did.” “My parents were married before I was born.” Or it can speak of something that is occurring right at the present moment. “I am standing before the king.” “Walk before me and be thou perfect,” or it can even refer to something in the future. “How can I know the outcome before it occurs.” The Hebrew term has the same ambiguity. It can refer to what is “before and behind,” “formerly, from beforetime” which would put it in the past, “toward,” “in front of,” which would be the future, or “in the presence of,” “in the face of” which would be in the present.

6440 paniym, f) as an adverb of location temp: before and behind, toward, in front of, forward, formerly, from beforetime, before g) with preposition: in front of, before, to the front of, in the presence of, in the face of, at the face or front of, from the presence of, from before, from before the face of

The definition of the term will therefore allow three possible translations.

(1.) People cannot know of God’s love or hate for what they do from anything they can learn from those who have lived before them.

(2.) People cannot know of God’s love or hate for what they do from anything they can learn about what is actually transpiring in their life at the present moment. (3.) People cannot use what they know of God’s love or hate for what they do to determine anything that will happen to them in the future.

The first is false, we can definitely learn from what happened in the past about God’s feelings of love and hate toward what people do:

Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. 6 Now these things happened as examples for us, that we should not crave evil things, as they also craved... 11 Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. 1 Cor 10:5-6, 11

Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God’s kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. Rom 11:22

The second is taken up by the NKJ and KJV:

People know neither love nor hatred by anything they see before them. (NKJ)

no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them. (KJV)

The third is expressed by the ASV, NAS, and NIV:

whether it be love or hatred, man knoweth it not; all is before them. (ASV)

but no man knows whether love or hate awaits him. (NIV)

Man does not know whether {it will be} love or hatred; anything awaits him. (NAS)

I am not sure we really have to choose between 2 & 3. Since God is not bound by time, and his attitudes in the present will continue to be his attitudes in the future, and since life under the sun will remain constant until the end, time is not a factor. The lives and works of the righteous and wise are definitely in the hands of God, and His favor and grace rest upon them. But people cannot know either His love or His hatred of what they do by

anything that is before them in the present, nor can they use it to deduce what might come in the future.

That this perfectly fits the context is obvious for the next verse affirms that no one could possibly tell love or hate from anything before them because everything occurs alike to all.

2. Everything occurs alike to all: One event happens...

This is the conclusion that makes life under the sun “vanity.” It doesn’t matter what you do or do not do, life will bring what it brings. Neither moral or ethical considerations, have any affect upon it. Life has been set in motion by God after the curse in such a way that none of these things will have any bearing upon it. No matter how close you get to God, it will not affect it. This opening phrase is actually made up of two “all’s” separated by a relative pronoun. “All... relative pronoun... all.” A relative pronoun is a term that qualifies the two terms, or the two phrases that it is placed between. It is similar to a “+” a “-“ or an “=” in math. It qualifies ideas. Depending upon the context it can be “*who*,” “*which*,” or “*that which*.”

834 ‘asher- 1) (relative pronoun) a) which, who b) that which (what)

Hence literally this phrase is “all which all” “all who all” or “all that which all.” But without a subject for all to modify this means nothing. The word all describes “*the whole*” or “*the entirety*” of something. What is this “whole” or “entirety?” It is the “one event happens.” The various translations have all used the one event as the basis of their translation.

All things come alike to all:(KJV, ASV) *It is the same for all. (NAS),*

All share a common destiny(NIV) *Everything occurs alike to all (NKJ)*

“*Same*,” “*alike*,” and “*share*,” are the relative pronoun, and “All things,” “all” and “everything” are the “whole” or “entirety” of the things under consideration.

Everything that occurs “*under the sun*” “*comes alike*” “*is the same*” and “*occurs alike*” to everyone. He will clarify exactly what he means by this broad statement as the verse proceeds.

One event happens

The term “event” is the key to this section. It is only used in eight verses in the Bible. It speaks of an “*unforeseen meeting*,” of an “*accident*” or a “*chance*” happening.

4745 miqreh- unforeseen meeting or event, accident, happening, chance, fortune (BDB)

It’s use in Scripture makes it very clear to what it refers.

Then she left, and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers. And she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech. Ruth 2:3

And watch: if it goes up the road to its own territory, to Beth Shemesh, then He has done us this great evil. But if not, then we shall know that it is not His hand that struck us-- it happened to us by chance. 1 Sam 6:9

Nevertheless Saul did not say anything that day, for he thought, “Something has happened to him; he is unclean, surely he is unclean.” 1 Sam 20:26

The wise man’s eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. Yet I myself perceived that the same event happens to them all. 15 So I said in my heart, “As it happens to the fool, it also happens to me, and why was I then more wise?” Then I said in my heart, “This also is vanity.” Eccl 2:14-15

For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over animals, for all is vanity. Eccl 3:19

From the definition and its use in Scripture, it is clear that Koheleth is speaking of the chance things that life brings. All the chance things that life can bring both good and bad can come upon all the different types of people who exist on this earth whether they are good or evil. There is no rhyme or reason to “life under the sun.” All the possible “*happened to come(s)*” “*happened to us by chance*” “*something has happened*,” “*same events*” and “*as it happens*” that can come about “under the sun” will happen to all the different moral and ethical types of people that exist “under the sun.” The term “event” takes in anything of good or bad fortune that can enter ones life through no fault or reward of their own. These are things that are met without any real intention of doing so on the part of the one who is involved. When things start falling, the same event will happen to the righteous and to the wicked.

What he is now affirming is that according to the unfathomable laws of “life under the sun,” instituted as a result of the curse, there is no longer any moral code seen “under the sun.” There is no retribution for wickedness, nor reward for righteousness. The exact same events occur “under the sun.” to both with no means of determining, how, when or why. Any isolated event of fortune or misfortune that can happen in life will happen without rhyme or reason to all. This can be all boiled down to a simple equation. Take the variables “A” and “B.” Make “A” equal all that can and does happen to the wicked. All the just retribution and terrible consequences you can imagine ought to fairly rest upon the shoulders of the wicked. “A” equals all the bad and terrible things that “life under the sun” can bring upon the wicked. Now make “B” equal all that can and does happen to the righteous, all the good things that happen, all the rewards and blessings that “life under the sun” can bring to the righteous. No matter what you can imagine for “A” and “B,” Koheleth now affirms that “A = B.” That all the good things that can happen to the righteous will also be received by the wicked and that all the terrible things that could happen to the wicked will also happen to the righteous.

That is a much more difficult equation for people to accept than any found in math, geometry or trigonometry classes. Job’s three friends struggled with this, failed to grasp it, fell into grave error, and earned God’s wrath for falsely accusing Job of sin.

And it came about after the LORD had spoken these words to Job, that the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, “My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has. Job 42:7

The disciples of Jesus also fell into it when they assumed that the reason the man was born blind was due to sin:

And His disciples asked Him, saying, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?” 3 Jesus answered, “{It was} neither {that} this man sinned, nor his parents; but {it was} in order that the works of God might be displayed in him. Jn 9:2-3

In both of the above, they violated the truth that Koheleth here reveals. You cannot deduce God’s love or hate, by the events that occur in one’s life. Are there no classes of people to whom this is not true? Can’t a man become so wicked or so righteous that it will not longer hold true? No, there is not a single class of people to whom one can look and not find that above to be true. This is what makes “life under the sun” completely inscrutable. There is no point of reference with which to figure it out. It doesn’t matter how wise you are, there is nothing to figure out. There is no pattern. “Life under the sun” is patternless.

Koheleth now expounds on the extent of the second “all” which describes the type of people he had in mind.

to the righteous and the wicked;

These are the same terms used in 8:14. They describe the opposite ends of the spectrum of that which is moral, legal and right. The righteous(6662) person is one who does what is “lawful” and “right” in the eyes of God, and has therefore been “justified and vindicated by God.” The wicked(rasha`7563) person are those “who have done wrong, are still living in sin, and are intent on continuing with wrong doing.” They do “not seek God” are intent on that which “challenges God.”

There could not be a greater distinction between the moral character of those who manifest these two terms. One loves God and is justified by God(loved by God), the other challenges God and are intent on continuing with wrong doing. One would think that God could not possibly deal with these two people in exactly the same way “under the sun.” But the exact same things happen to both. Both good things and bad things happen to both without distinction.

to the good, and the clean, and the unclean;

His second contrast is between the good and clean on one side and the unclean on the other. A good(2896) person is one who “contribute(s) positively” is “pleasant.” It is someone who is “good” “in every sense of that word.” The term “characterizes a people as ‘friendly’ or ‘useful.’” It is someone who in every “given word, act, or circumstance contributes positively to the condition of a situation.” What a wonderful way to describe the character of one who is good.

A clean person is someone who has availed himself of the means God has given to be sinless. Not by deed and personal consecration, but by faith and submission to God’s plan. But though this is a gift of grace, God gives

those who possess it the right to call themselves clean. They have no *“impurity, filthiness, defilement, or imperfection.”* Like refined gold, they are *“pure”* and *“genuine.”*

tahor 2889, “clean; pure.” The word denotes the absence of impurity, filthiness, defilement, or imperfection. It is applied concretely to substances that are genuine or unadulterated as well as describing an unstained condition of a spiritual or ceremonial nature.... Gold is a material frequently said to be free of baser ingredients. ... God demands that His people have spiritual and moral purity, unsullied by sin. Anyone not clean of sin is subject to divine rejection and punishment. (Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words)

“to be clear, bright, and shining; to be pure, clean, purged; to be clean from all pollution or defilement, as opposed to... and implying that purity which religion required, and is necessary for communion with God. As there is impurity in sin, so there is a purity arising out of reconciliation with God. (Wilson 78-79)

Surely those people who have done the things necessary to appear good and clean in the sight of God would find that life would spare them some of the difficulties and trials. That God would keep them from the more trying circumstances, but no, the same events happen to them just as they to the unclean. An unclean person is someone who is “defiled” and “polluted.” Yet it is also a word of extremes. It is *“whatsoever is loathsome or unlovely, noisome or unsightly.”* It turns the stomach, causes the eyes to turn away, smells of stench and filth. In the moral realm it describes *“the greatest pollution.”*

“to be or become unclean, impure; to be defiled, polluted. chiefly spoken of Levitical uncleanness, both of persons and animals(i.e. animals not to be eaten, ... It speaks the greatest pollution, the sordidness and filthiness of habit, the gore of blood, the muddiness of water, whatsoever is loathsome or unlovely, noisome or unsightly, all these meet and make up the meaning of this world.” (Wilson p. 460)

So side by side God sees the soul of one who is clean, pure, good and pleasant and next to him one who is polluted and filthy, the very dregs of a polluted mind. Yet “life under the sun” makes no distinctions in what it brings to any of them.

To him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice.

The offering of sacrifice was the central core to the Old Testament religion. It stressed one’s consciousness of sin, and need to pay the price when they violated any of God’s laws. Those who sacrificed were those who sought to keep the law, those who felt the need to be clean and right in his sight. Those who refused to sacrifice were the profane and unclean, they were the rebellious and unbelievers. They were tempting God with their rebellion. Yet God remains silent. Their life “under the sun” holds no clue that there is any difference between them. The exact same good and bad things come alike to both of them.

As is the good, so is the sinner;

Good(2896) is a repetition of the term above. One who *“contribute(s) positively”* and is *“pleasant,” “characterizes a people as ‘friendly’ or ‘useful.’”* This time he contrasts such a person with a sinner. A sinner is someone who is guilty of *“moral failure toward both God and men.”* and has erred *“from the path of duty and right”*

chata’ 2398, “to miss, not to hit the mark, spoken of an archer, slinger, Jdg. 20:16; also of the feet, to miss, to make a false step, to stumble and fall, Prov. 19:2; to sin, i.e. to err from the path of duty and right; to sin away anything, i.e. to forfeit by sinning, to incur as penalty, ...” (Wilson p 395)

chata’ 2398, “to miss, sin, be guilty, forfeit, purify.”... 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)

Once again we have the black and white contrast between a man who is a moral failure, refusing to live up to his duties and one who is contributing positively to every circumstance by being friendly and useful. The one a moral blight and the other a beautiful rose. Yet once again, “life under the sun” makes no distinction between them, pouring out both blessings and curses with no care or consideration for such things. Will God not make a distinction here ? Will he not manifest His wrath upon the sinner and His pleasure upon the good? No, not even here will there be any difference while living “under the sun.”

And he who takes an oath as he who fears an oath.

He who takes an oath is one who esteems it lightly, carelessly or falsely. The term “take an oath” is defined.

shaba` 7650, “to swear; take an oath.” This is a common word throughout the history of the Hebrew language. The fact that it occurs more than 180 times in the Hebrew Bible attests to its importance there also.... Often “to swear or to take an oath” is to strongly affirm a promise. ... Allegiance to God is pledged by an oath. (from Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words)

This term can be used in either a good bad sense depending upon whether or not the oath is taken in reverence with the idea of keeping it. Those who swear falsely are considered to be among the worst of sinners(Lev 19:12; Mal 3:5). Those who fear an oath are those who hold the taking of an oath “*in awe*” and “*reverence*.”

yare’ 3372, “to be afraid, stand in awe, fear.” This verb occurs in Ugaritic and Hebrew (both biblical and post-biblical). The Bible attests it approximately 330 times and in all periods.... Used of a person in an exalted position, yare’ connotes “standing in awe.” This is not simple fear, but reverence, whereby an individual recognizes the power and position of the individual revered and renders him proper respect. In this sense, the word may imply submission to a proper ethical relationship to God;... (Vine’s Expository Dictionary)

The basic idea is that there are those on this earth who will take the name of God in vain in the promises they make to others. They will use God’s name to cheat and enrich themselves. They will use his name to get out of trouble and make their lies seem true. Contrast them with those who fear and respect God’s name so highly that they will not even take an oath unless it is of the highest of importance and once taken will fulfill it at all costs. Won’t it become evident now that it is better to do the one than the other as regards to how things will go for them “under the sun?” Nay, not even here will it make any difference.

Under no circumstances will one see any difference in outcome that is so common that it is obvious. Each of these categories will have the same events happen to them on such a regular basis that those with wisdom and even those with inspiration will not be able to find any noticeable distinction statistically between any of them. There are no anomalies between any of these groups, they all have the same things occurring to them of both a good and bad nature on such a regular basis that there is no noticeable difference in the lives of any of these groupings of people.

3. This is an evil in all that is done under the sun:

The inspired verdict of this set of circumstances is that this is an evil. Much is riding on our understanding of the term evil. It is used 27 times in the book, in two broad and distinct ways. One of them is moral and ethical, while the other is a description of the type or quality of things that occur “under the sun.” When it describes morals it speaks of things that are “*morally evil or hurtful*,” “*wicked*,” “*bad or evil*.” It is then used “*to denote evil words, evil thoughts, or evil actions*.” It is this sense that the term has in its second use in this verse. But it also has another use. One that describes a quality of life or of things that are happening to us “under the sun.” When it is used in this way it describes things that are “*bad or unpleasant in the sense of giving pain or unhappiness*,” and it is “*the antithesis of shalom(peace; welfare, well-being)*.” Since *shalom* is used to describe a life free from conflict and disorder, its antithesis would be a life filled with pain and unhappiness, conflict and afflictions.

ra’ 7451, “bad; evil; wicked; sore.” ... Ra` refers to that which is “bad” or “evil,” in a wide variety of applications. A greater number of the word’s occurrences signify something morally evil or hurtful, often referring to man or men:... Ra` is also used to denote evil words ... evil thoughts... or evil actions... Ra` may mean “bad” or unpleasant in the sense of giving pain or unhappiness: ... Ra` may also connote a fierceness or wildness:... In less frequent uses, ra` implies severity: ... The word may also refer to something of poor or inferior quality, such as “bad” land.... In Isa. 45:7 Yahweh describes His actions by saying, “...I make peace, and create evil [ra]...”; moral “evil” is not intended in this context, but rather the antithesis of shalom (“peace; welfare; well-being”). The whole verse affirms that as absolute Sovereign, the Lord creates a universe governed by a moral order. Calamity and misfortune will surely ensue from the wickedness of ungodly men. (Vines)

Only the context of each passage will give us the true direction for its meaning. Sometime both uses are found in the same passage.

*14 In the day of prosperity be happy, but in the **day of adversity** consider-- God has made the one as well as the other so that man may not discover anything {that will be} after him. 15 I have seen everything during my lifetime of futility; there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs {his life} in his **wickedness**. Ecc 7:14-15*

This is the main question before we can interpret our present verse. Is this a moral evil or an unpleasant set of

circumstances “under the sun”? Does the above conclusion about the lack of distinction between the consequences of moral and ethical conduct (the same event happens to all) and its manifestation of God’s love or hatred of them (no one knows by their “life under the sun”) lead to terrible consequences “under the sun” or to the man’s morality?

The answer of course is that it often leads to both. If one is righteous then it leads to the former, while if one is wicked it leads to the latter. It is a grave and unpleasant reality to the righteous that their godly and holy walk with God may not lead to blessings “under the sun.” It hits home with terrible power and ferocity when the righteous reel under the weight of the terrible calamities that “life under the sun” brings even though they are righteous while the wicked receive the fate they thought would be theirs. It leads to great adversity and affliction in the hearts of those who see it. It brings distress and hurt, misery and sorrow. Who knows how many hearts have lost all joy when they first came face to face with this truth. It is a dire calamity that through the curse of sin we are forced to live in such a world. To live in a place where sentence is not speedily executed, to live in a place where no matter how righteous you strive to be, or how wicked you become there are no guarantees regarding how your life will go.

This brings grievous “*pain*” and *unhappiness*,” to all that is done under the sun. It definitely leads to the very “*antithesis of shalom (peace; welfare, well-being)*.” It means that all talk of the future must be made with great caution. It means that we have no guarantee after today that “life under the sun” will be successful. There is nothing we can do to guarantee that we will not die today, or that all that we presently have could not be taken from us today. It leads to real unpleasantness because man’s dominion is gone, and there is nothing anyone can do to get it back. Not even drawing near to God and being righteous, good, clean, giving sacrifices to God, and fearing to take an oath can bring us any more security or dominion “under the sun.”

that one thing happens to all.

Though the NKJ has “*thing happens*” here, it is the same term as that used in verse two and translated “event.” There is one “*unforeseen meeting*,” “*accident*” or “*chance*” happening that occurs to all. There are no distinctions to be made. Men cannot see by the experience of “life under the sun,” that it is wrong and destructive to be wicked and good to be righteous and pure. Wicked men often prosper, living long and fruitful lives. Righteous men often die young with no promise of life fulfilled in great anguish and agony. Seldom are the lessons revealed in Scripture also taught in experiences of “life under the sun.” Everything that happens is so random and so purposeless that they almost seem to contradict one another. God’s word tells us how good it is to be righteous and how the end of such will bring great glory and honor. But life often teaches just the opposite.

Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil;

As one looks for themselves out among the millions and billions of sons of men living in the world today, who would argue with the conclusion which Koheleth made almost 3000 years ago. Men have not changed at all! They are willing to look at “life under the sun” as all there is, and the lessons it teaches corroborate their conclusions and set their hearts toward evil and madness. They stop thinking clearly, they stop thinking about the brevity of life, they stop thinking about how they got here, about how the world was made, about duty and obligation to a Creator, about all that is good and decent. They become ever more selfish and self-centered. The moral component of evil now comes into play. They become “*morally evil or hurtful*,” “*wicked*,” “*bad or evil*.” What difference does it make. Life gives back the same thing to all. get what you can get. This then leads to their “*evil words*,” “*evil thoughts*,” and “*evil actions*.”

madness is in their hearts while they live,

For a thorough discussion of this idea please review the comments on Ecc. 2:12. This final conclusion not only leads to his own conclusion that “life under the sun” is only “vanity of vanities,” it also leads to a madness in the sons of men. The expression “sons of men” may refer to those who live out of the presence of Jehovah and only recognize their humanity and not the divine image within it. (See Gen 6:1-2), or it may just mean everyone. I am inclined to the former since those who are in the image and likeness of God do not let this happen to them. They realize there is more than just what “life under the sun” can teach. But the sons of men have “madness” in their hearts while they live. This is a “moral madness,” a temporary insanity that only affects

them in their relationship to God. Such sons of men “*rave with foolish conceit,*” because they have such a “*departure from wisdom that the mind without any control rushes on with a blind fury.*”

madness “... to shine; to make 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 p 262)

Such people live in this life as though it all ends here(madness), as though there is no God(madness), as though there are not consequences(madness). Then they die!

and after that they go to the dead.

Though some believe that this is the one event that happens to all, it is untrue that this is the only thing that makes men live as they do. Most do not live evil and unproductive lives because they are going to die just as the righteous. They live wicked lives and are filled with madness because they can see no outward distinction between what they are receiving in their youth and what the righteous are receiving. What they are receiving in their families and what the righteous are receiving. That the righteous have troubles also. These are the things that bring madness into the hearts of men

The point of this is to stress the futility and the madness which overcomes their thinking and reasoning ability. Through lust and selfishness, they become blind to the grave issues of life. There is no one to blame but themselves for this, but Koheleth only observes what has occurred not why. When they do seek to look at these things more closely and compare their lives to that of the righteous they see no distinction and thus they put it out of their minds. Once again, the goodness of God which should lead them to repentance is taken for granted and leads them to folly. Even the greatest warning God has left for man to ponder, death itself does not lead them to sober thinking and reflection. They simply go on to the dead to join the multitudes before them who made the same mistakes.

4. But for him who is joined to all the living there is hope,

Koheleth now breaks away from his subject. He seeks to elaborate on death. He seeks to bring it out in its stark and dreadful reality. He will pick up this theme again in 9:11-12. Death is such a dreadful thing. Those who are alive have hope in their hearts of better things. Even today we have a similar English proverb. “*while there’s life there’s hope!*” All who are joined to the living still have hope. But those who are dead do not. Those who are dead have no hope for the future, their future is fixed.

for a living dog is better than a dead lion.

Apparently a proverb of the day. The lion was a regal and great animal which the Jews compared to the highest and the noblest.

Judah is a lion’s whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He couches, he lies down as a lion, and as a lion, who dares rouse him up? Gen 49:9

And {there were} six steps to the throne and a footstool in gold attached to the throne, and arms on each side of the seat, and two lions standing beside the arms. 19 And twelve lions were standing there on the six steps on the one side and on the other; nothing like {it} was made for any {other} kingdom. 2 Chr 9:18-19

A dog on the other hand was the most contemptible of beasts to the Jew. An unclean scavenger.

You shall not bring the hire of a harlot or the wages of a dog into the house of the LORD your God for any votive offering, for both of these are an abomination to the LORD your God. Deut 23:18

Yet though the lion be greater than the dog, death changes everything! Death is the great equalizer. It brings the wicked down and raises the righteous up. Men with any thought at all about this subject ought to prepare for it. It looms dark and foreboding across the path of all men.

5. For the living know that they will die; But the dead know nothing,

As far as “life under the sun” is concerned, the following conclusions must be drawn. The living know that they will die. The living know that they are going to die, and therefore the living can do something about it. But “life under the sun ends at death. We bring nothing in(naked)and we take nothing out(naked). The dead know nothing about “life under the sun” any longer. The dead man is no longer listening or seeing what is going on

around him, he is no longer aware of what goes on. His eyes, ears, nose, mouth and hands have been left behind to be buried. Without these senses, he knows nothing of what transpires under the sun. You know this is such an obvious and sobering thought, yet the wicked in their madness overlook it.

And they have no more reward,

Not only do they not know anything any longer, but they can no longer enjoy anything. There is no longer any “wages” “pay” or “reward” for their efforts and toil. The joys of life “under the sun” are forever closed. They have nothing to laugh about, nothing to feel glee and joy over, no rewards, no joys, no chances to gain or master anything. They will get only what God has to give.

For the memory of them is forgotten.

Even that which some might have counted as a reward is removed. They will not be remembered. Few, no matter how famous are remembered for very long.

6. Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished;

Another sobering thought about death, everything that was once so important ceases to matter at death. All the strong and powerful emotions of life: love and hate, and even envy, powerful passions that move men to so do many things can no longer be acted upon. They are gone forever. They perish at death and cannot be kindled again. All that man hopes for in life, all the loves, all the lusts, they are all doomed to fail. Remember, this is stated to balance those things that are spoken of in the first few verses. Man should not be mad, he should not allow the inconsistencies of the events of “life under the sun” to blind them to these realities. It doesn’t take much meditating along these things to realize that it is foolish to live on for the here and the now with death looming just over the horizon. Men simply do not think about it.

Nevermore will they have a share in anything done under the sun.

Death forever draws to a close the affairs of this life. It is the curtain that drops and can not be lifted to look back. It is the sobering event that happens to the righteous and the wicked which brings sanity back to some. It is the single event that makes all the rest of it make sense. To place one’s life into the hands of God may not affect this life, but it will certainly affect that which comes after death. Meditate on that thought for a few moments and every other thing pales into insignificance. The day is coming, moving closer and closer every moment when we will die and then we will never again have any share of the joys and pleasantness of life under the sun. When that day comes, do you want God to be able to bless you with eternal life, or do you want to have God angry with you. No matter what this life fails to teach about this, death teaches it all so clearly and forcefully, that it must be overlooked to miss it!

Ecclesiastes 9:7-12

September 13, 1998

Introduction:

In the concluding thoughts of the eighth chapter Koheleth began directing the flow of the book toward those difficult issues of life that had led him to the conclusion first uttered in 1:2: “*All is vanity!*” The inequities and unfairness of life can make any heart despondent. He was seeking “*to see the business that is done on earth,*” and “*find out the work that is done under the sun.*” He wants some kind of formula or set of circumstances that would lead to dominion and success. As he weighed it out and gathered all the facts, it soon became obvious to him that he was way over his head. There was simply no way for him to comprehend it all. There was no way for him to put all the information he had into any kind of a clear formula. In the first six verses of chapter nine, he offered a summation of this information. There is no rule or standard in life by which one can escape the calamities or guarantee the blessings which “life under the sun” can convey. Not even moral and ethical conduct that bring one into favor with God can do it. The absolute correlation between righteousness and God’s blessing or wickedness and God’s cursing do not exist “under the sun.”

There is no advice to give the young that will insulate them against the perils of life. Being righteous will not keep you safe from robbery, it will not keep you safe from accidents, it will not keep your family safe from all harm. It will not keep away disease, nor will it stop sorrow and bereavement. Though he will not finish this thought and what ought to be done about it until chapter eleven and twelve, he now offers some advice about

being happy in spite of this knowledge.

Two facts have definitely come out of his inquiry. First, *“it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him”* (8:12) and *“the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God”* (9:1). Second, though God will ultimately fulfill all His promises to the righteous, for now it will not help them in their “life under the sun.” They will be subjected to the same curses that the wicked get, while they see the wicked getting the same blessings they thought would be reserved for them. God demands that the righteous walk by faith.

But My righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him. 39 But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul. Heb 10:38-39

In this respect, Ecclesiastes is an excellent prerequisite to the gospel. It gives the foundation for Jesus’ warnings that we are only strangers and pilgrims here on the earth and that there are greater principles at stake and greater blessings to be gained than is available “under the sun.” God is seeking to save as many as possible from the curse of sin. To accomplish this, God must punish nations, allow sinners to get away with sin while giving them time to repent, and allow the righteous to be mistreated. There are circumstances in “life under the sun” that make it impossible for Him to always act on their behalf.

But what about “life under the sun?” Though we cannot have guaranteed success and blessings by living a righteous, clean, and good life, is there nothing to be gained? Should we simply reject this life as a complete waste and wait for the one to come? Are there any redeeming qualities to this life? Does God want us to simply set this life aside and take no joy in it?

No, their full trust in God and hope for the future leads them to enjoy what can be enjoyed out of “life under the sun” while it can be enjoyed and trust God to take care whatever comes. The author gives the exact same answer he has offered six times (Ecc. 2:24; 3:12,13,22; 5:18; 6:12; 8:15). It is such a simple answer. Too simple for some. Leupold offers an interesting observation.

“Though this counsel has been offered already in 2:24; 3:12, 13, 22; 5:18; 6:12; 8:15, the very simplicity of it is apparently apt to lead men to despise it because it is not a particularly brilliant solution. Since it is really a treasure of wisdom, that recommends itself ever more forcefully each time it is considered, the author keeps on hammering away at it so as to make an impression.” (Leupold p 213).

Jesus offers the same basic conclusion:

Do not be anxious then, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘With what shall we clothe ourselves?’ 32 For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you. 34 Therefore do not be anxious for tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. {Each} day has enough trouble Mt 6:31-34

As does Paul:

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

Though this life be temporary, and though God does not guarantee that we will come through it unscathed from pain, sorrow and trouble, He wants us to enjoy this life as fully as possible.

7. Go, eat your bread with joy,

The term “go” is generally used *“of commencing or entering upon an action or enterprise.”* Koheleth offers the righteous the proper path to enter or action to take after they have grasped and understand the truth as he has just revealed it and taken it to heart.

“ to go, to go away, to go out; to go one’s way; by a peculiarity of idiom, often employed in the sense of commencing or entering upon an action or enterprise...” (Wilson p 190)

The *“action”* or *“enterprise”* that they are now to undertake is to eat their bread with joy. This is the eighth and final time this term is used in the book (2:1, 2, 10, 26; 5:20; 7:4; 8:15). It has been translated *“mirth,” “pleasure,” “joy”* and *“enjoyment”* in the book. It comes from a term that primarily speaks of *“a smiling, cheerful, merry countenance, free from care; sometimes of a louder joy, to be or make merry.”*

to rejoice, to be joyful, to be glad: the primary idea seems to be that of a smiling, cheerful, merry countenance, free from care; sometimes of a louder joy, to be or make merry, spoken of persons feasting; hence to rejoice before Jehovah... (Wilson p. 346)

God wants us to eat our food with “*a smiling cheerful merry countenance,*” He wants us to eat “*free from care,*” and rejoicing before Him. This is exactly what Paul writes many years later.

{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 4:3-5

God wants our food to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. Nothing Solomon has revealed should take away the joy, pleasure and gratitude we feel for our food.

and drink your wine with a merry heart;

Although the NKJ chose to translate the term “good” with merry, it is actually the same term that was used in 9:2 “the *good* and the clean and unclean” and “as is the *good*, so is the sinner. There is was defined: “*contribute(s) positively*” is “*pleasant,*” one who is “good” “*in every sense of that word,*” “*characterizes a people as ‘friendly’ or ‘useful.’*” Here the terms broader use is taken into account. Things that are “*favorable,*” “*festive,*” “*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)

The translations have translated “*merry,*” “*cheerful,*” and “*joyful*”

drink your wine with a merry heart; (NKJ, ASV, KJV)

drink your wine with a cheerful heart (NAS)

drink your wine with a joyful heart, (NIV)

When drinking beverages like wine, God wants our heart to be “*good,*” and “*festive,*” filled with “*delight*” and “*joy.*” This is the proper attitude to those who come to the same conclusions Koheleth did about “life under the sun.” But it is important to note the reason why they can do so.

For God has already accepted your works.

Since the term “for” is a term indicating “*causal relations of all kinds,*” we have to ask what is the connection between this conclusion and the rest of the sentence.

3588 kiy (kee); a primitive particle [the full form of the prepositional prefix] indicating causal relations of all kinds, antecedent or consequent; (by implication) very widely used as a relative conjunction or adverb [as below]; often largely modified by other particles annexed: (Strongs)

It is offered as the reason(cause) why one should eat their bread with joy, drink their wine with a merry heart. God here reveals that man has no dominion or control over their future. The same events come upon all and there is no formula or method by which this can be controlled. But nevertheless He counsels His people to eat with joy and drink with a merry heart. He offers as consolation for their lack of dominion and control the promise that He has already accepted their works. Since a great deal of the interpretation of this passage is based upon the term “already,”

it is important to fully understand it. The research is somewhat limited since the term is only found in the book of Ecclesiastes, where it is used eight times. It is an “*adverb of time*” or an “*extent of time*” describing things that have “*already*” happened. Sometimes it is “*a great while*” or “*long ago*” while other times it is “*already*” or even “*now*” referring to things that have already happened though they are still present.

3528 kebar from 3527; properly, extent of time, i.e. a great while; hence, long ago, formerly, hitherto... already, (seeing that which), now.” (Strongs)

3528 kebar- already, long ago, a great while (BDB)

3528 kebar- adv of time, long ago, formerly...” (Wilson)

It's use in Ecclesiastes up to this point bears out the definition.

- 1:10 It has **already** been in ancient times before us.
2:12 what can the man do who succeeds the king?-- Only what he has **already** done.
2:16 since all **that now is** will be forgotten in the days to come.
3:15 That which is has **already** been, and what is to be has already been;
4:2 Therefore I praised the dead who were **already** dead,
6:10 Whatever one is, he has been named **already**.
9:-6 Also their love, their hatred, and their envy **have now** perished;
9:7 for God has **already** accepted your works.

It always refers to things that have occurred in the past. How far into the past is determined by context. But for Koheleth to here say that the reason man can rejoice in his food and drink is because God has already accepted his works. This forces us to conclude that these words are only directed to those “*who fear God, who fear before Him*” (8:12) and to “*the righteous and the wise and their works*” who “*are in the hand of God*” (9:1). This is the comfort and the hope of the righteous. The distinctions he made in verse 1-2 and will make again in 11-12 between the moral and the immoral, the clean and unclean the good and the sinners will never be seen “under the sun.” The same events will still happen to both. But the righteous have one thing that the wicked do not. They know God has already accepted their works. The term “accepted” is actually one of the tamest ways to translate the word. It is generally used of things that God will “*be pleased with, accept favorably.*” When speaking of “*God's being pleased with someone, the English versions often translate it as 'be delighted.'*” It speaks of things that someone is “*well pleased with,*” or wants to “*take delight in,*” “*particularly to accept graciously one with a present.*” Hence the translators could have actually translated it as God is already “delighted with your works.”

ratsah 7521, “to be pleased, be pleased with, accept favorably, satisfy.” This is a common term in both biblical and modern Hebrew. Found approximately 60 times in the text of the Old Testament, one of its first appearances is in Gen. 33:10: “Thou wast pleased with me.” ... When ratsah expresses God's being pleased with someone, the English versions often translate it as “be delighted,” which seems to reflect a sense of greater pleasure: “...mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth” Isa. 42:1; ... On the other hand, when one must meet a certain requirement to merit ratsah, it seems more logical to translate it with “to please” or “to accept.” For example: “Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams...?” Mic. 6:7; ... (Vine's Expository Dictionary)

“... to be well pleased with, to take delight in a person or thing; particularly to accept graciously one with a present, or with offerings and prayers... to bear with a patient, acquiescing, submissive mind; in opposition to reluctance, impatience, distrust, or despair... delight, acceptance, approbation; good will, favor, grace...” (Wilson p. 4)

What a wonderful promise God makes to those who have no other means of knowing His favor! What you can't see “under the sun” is abundantly testified in Scripture. God has assured His people that if they keep His covenant and trust Him with all their heart He has already accepted their work. Like Abraham before them, they are waiting for the city whose builder and maker is God.

By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign {land} dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; 10 for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. Heb 11:9-10

All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. 14 For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. 15 And indeed if they had been thinking of that {country} from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But as it is, they desire a better {country} that is a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them. Heb 11:13-16

It is easy to eat one's food with “*a smiling cheerful merry countenance,*” and drink their wine with a “*good,*” “*festive,*” filled with “*delight*” and “*joyous*” heart when one knows that God has already accepted their works, that come what may, it will ultimately be well with them, and that they are only strangers and pilgrims “under the sun.” It doesn't matter any more what happens here because God has built a city for them. They “desire a better country that is a heavenly one. They enjoy each day and wait with patience for God's reward.

God has made precious and exceeding great promises to those who believe in Him, trust Him, and keep His word. Regardless of outward circumstances, God will do what He has promised. Never let outward

circumstances affect your outlook on God's approval or disapproval of your life. God has already accepted your works if you are righteous in accord with the Law. Since you have full assurance of this, you can enjoy your food and drink and be patient for the Lord will take care of the rest.

8. Let your garments always be white,

This verse leaves us somewhat perplexed to interpret since our own culture is so different. It is hard for us to know exactly what the wearing of white signified to them. For us white is a sign of purity. A glance through a concordance may or may not give the answer. It appears from a passage in Esther that white was linked with royalty and rejoicing, while Isaiah and Ezekiel may be implying that it has some link to wealth, prosperity, or comfort.

Then Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal robes of blue and white, with a large crown of gold and a garment of fine linen and purple; and the city of Susa shouted and rejoiced. Esth 8:15

Moreover, the manufacturers of linen made from combed flax and the weavers of white cloth will be utterly dejected. Isa 19:9

Damascus was your customer because of the abundance of your goods, because of the abundance of all kinds of wealth, because of the wine of Helbon and white wool. Ezek 27:18

But there is also a spiritual and moral component to the wearing of white. God uses the idea of white snow and white wool as an allusion to moral purity.

"Come now, and let us reason together," says the LORD, "Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool." Isa 1:18

Jesus promises that those who are worthy will walk with Him in white (Rev 3:4-5; 7:9, 13-14). But He also advises the Lukewarm church in Laodicea to buy white garments from Him.

I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire, that you may become rich, and white garments, that you may clothe yourself, and {that} the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see. Rev 3:18

When Jesus was transfigured his garments became white (Mt 17:2), Angels also appeared in white (Matt 28:3; Mark 16:5; John 20:12; Acts 1:10). Thus far does a concordance take us. Those who have studied the times and the culture proclaim much the same thing.

"In the light of what preceded we are inclined to accept without hesitation the suggestion of BDB that white is here a "sign of cheerfulness and joy," as also commentaries generally agree though the thought offered by others is not foreign to the context when they claim that "white garments become the emblems of purity and festivity" (Ginsburg)." Leupold p. 214-215

"The white garments are in contrast to the black robes of mourning and thus are an expression of festal joy, of a happy mood; black and white are according to the ancients colour symbols, the colours respectively of sorrow and joy, to which light and darkness correspond..." Delitzsch Vol 6 p. 363

"White" in the Bible signifies glory, purity and joy. The Preacher is arguing for a full, happy life to be lived by the ones who labor through life with God's blessing... The white attire of angels (Mk 16:5) and of men (Acts 1:10) represents messengers of God who have His approval ... The people in Solomon's day were admonished to wear white as a sign of God's approval. (Kidwell, Ecclesiastes & Song of Solomon, p. 230)

It is obvious from these quotes that it is all guesswork. There is no clear indication here of whether the white is to be word "as a 'sign of cheerfulness and joy,'" "the emblems of purity and festivity," "an expression of festal joy" and "a happy mood," "signifies glory, purity and joy," or "a sign of God's approval." All of this could be true, or then again, perhaps in that day and age, it only meant that one of the basic and simple pleasures of life was wearing clean comfortable clothing. Any of these could be true. Since God has accepted your works let your garments manifest it by being white (live in purity). Festivity and joyfulness tie in with verse 7 and 9 in that they both speak of being merry and living joyfully. Clean clothing fits with this verse on personal grooming which is a delight in and of itself (let your head lack no oil). Let the reader decide for himself. They are all true.

and let your head lack no oil.

Here again, there are some who see festivity and joy, and others who see comfort.

Ointment and perfume delight the heart, And the sweetness of a man's friend does so by hearty counsel. Pr. 27:9

And Joab sent to Tekoa and brought from there a wise woman, and said to her, "Please pretend to be a mourner, and put on

mourning apparel; do not anoint yourself with oil, but act like a woman who has been mourning a long time for the dead. II Sam. 14:2

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cups runs over. Ps. 23:5

Then I washed you in water; yes, I thoroughly washed off your blood, and I anointed you with oil. Ezek. 16:9

You shall sow, but not reap; You shall tread the olives, but not anoint yourselves with oil; And make sweet wine, but not drink wine. Mic. 6:15

From the above scriptures two things are evident. Anointing the head with oil was a part of the normal grooming process by which they prepared for the day. It was a part of their comfort to use it. It also shows that oil and gladness are joined together. Hence, it is purely a matter of opinion whether he emphasizes the one or the other here.

9. Live joyfully with the wife whom you love (NKJ, ASV, KJV)

9. Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, (NAS, NIV)

For the first time, Koheleth adds the married state to the things God has given man “under the sun” that lead to joy and contentment. He has already revealed that eating and drinking(2:24-25; 5:18-19; 8:15; 9:7), enjoying one’s labor(Ecc 2:24; 5:18-19), and being merry(8:15); are all things God has given to mankind to enjoy “under the sun.” They passed through the curse and are still man’s path to true satisfaction and fulfillment “under the sun.” God now reveals that marriage can also be added to this list. It was a gift from God dating back to the garden. As a matter of fact, all the gifts spoken of in Ecclesiastes with the exception of drinking are all specifically mentioned as gifts from God from the beginning. Man was given all the fruit of the trees in the garden(except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he was to tend the garden and take dominion of the earth(labor), and when it was noted that it was not good for man to be alone God brought him the gift of a woman(marriage).

“Life under the sun” is enhanced and made more enjoyable when it is enjoyed with a wife whom you love. The term “live joyfully” or “enjoy life” is actually the same construction as that found in Ecc 2:1(Please review the comments found there). What he actually says is that one should “‘see’ life with the wife he loves.” The basic idea behind this term is taking the time to “*observe*,” “*perceive*,” “*gain understanding*,” “*examine*,” and “*get acquainted with*” something. When one goes out and sees “*with one’s own eyes*,” they are experiencing something for themselves.

ra’ah 7200, “to see, observe, perceive, get acquainted with, gain understanding, examine, look after (see to), choose, discover.” This verb occurs only in Moabite and all periods of Hebrew. It appears in the Bible about 1,300 times.... Basically ra’ah connotes seeing with one’s eyes... (Vine’s Expository Dictionary)

Koheleth is therefore advising the righteous to “*observe*,” “*examine*” and “*get acquainted*” with life with a wife whom they love. This is the natural extension of God’s counsel in the garden of Eden. Since it is not good for man to be alone, and since he created a woman to be a helper who would be suitable for him(Gen 2:18), the most profitable and enjoyable way to get acquainted with “life under the sun” is with a wife whom you love. Since the entire context of this section is the joy and comfort such things bring, the translators simply used the word “*enjoy*” or “*joyfully*.” instead of “*observe*” or “*get acquainted*” with. Truly, any man who seeks to get the most he can out of his “life under the sun” and to minimize the vanity should rejoice with the wife of his youth.

Let your fountain be blessed, And rejoice with the wife of your youth. As a loving deer and a graceful doe, Let her breasts satisfy you at all times; And always be enraptured with her love. Pr 5:18-19

He who finds a wife finds a good thing, And obtains favor from the Lord. Pr 18:22

Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies. The heart of her husband safely trusts her; So he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil All the days of her life. Pr 31:10-12

A wife is a most precious gift from God, one that if properly chosen and carefully maintained will bring great joy to both of them. Koheleth, like Paul so many years later makes it very clear that all of the value of the husband/wife relationship is contingent upon the husband loving his wife. This term describes something “*in which a man delights, or which he earnestly desires; it implies ardent and vehement inclination of the mind, at the same time tenderness and fullness of affection.*”

“... to love that in which a man delights, or which he earnestly desires; it implies ardent and vehement inclination of the mind, at the same time tenderness and fullness of affection, and is to be taken in the same extensive sense as the English word “love;” and is used of the unspeakable love and tender mercies of God in covenant with his people...” (Wilson p 260-261)

There is something wonderfully satisfying and enjoyable about this love. A woman is a wonderful gift from God. One to be cherished, loved and appreciated. In this respect nothing has changed from then to now.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her;... 28 So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; 29 for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also {does} the church, Eph 5:25 28-29

Each man is responsible for the joy and love he receives from his wife. It is up to him to see life with the woman he loves. It is interesting to note that the polygamous Solomon extols the value of a monogamous relationship. Once again inspiration takes precedence over practice or the foolish notions of a human author.

all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity; for that is your portion in life,

In spite of all the joys to be found in good food and satisfying drink in comfortable clothes and good grooming, and in a good wife whom you love, life “under the sun” is still vain. The Spirit of God is not changing any of the conclusions drawn in the book, only offering ways to minimize their sorrow and maximize their enjoyment. Twice in this verse it is emphasized that the days that we spend under the sun are going to be vain. Looked at collectively, all of our days will add up to a vain life, and looked at individually, all of our days no matter how many they might be will be days of vanity.

Since true dominion is gone and the same events come to all regardless of their preparation, life “under the sun” truly is futile and meaningless. With nothing brought in and nothing brought out, with no control over what we have while here, and the possibility of everything coming crashing down in a moments notice without warning, we live day by day. But this is all ground that has been covered over and over before. The two things that make this verse different are the phrases “*which he has given you under the sun*” and “*that is your portion in life.*”

In both these phrases, God’s control shines through. He may not act to change the events that happen by chance to all(9:1-2; 11-12), but is not meant to imply that He is not in complete control. God gives us the days of our lives and they are our portion from Him. The term give is

a very broad term used in the OT over 2,000 times. In this context it means “*to give, entrust, commit.*”

5414 nathan (naw-than’) to give; to lay, set, place; to make, to do, the varied use of this word may be classed under these significations. I. To give, ... to give in the hand of anyone... to entrust, commit... under this head it bears the sense, to grant, to give forth, ... II To set, place... used for planting, fixing, & c. III to make to do; .. cause to be...”

When God breathed the breath of life into Adam and Eve and gave them dominion over all the creation, he was entrusting and committing it into their care. He asked them to be fruitful, multiply, replenish the earth while subduing and taking dominion over it and tending the garden. He thus committed it all into their care. This did not change after the curse, it was diminished but not removed. The days are still ours, to do with as we choose. They have been given to us, but as Koheleth will remind us in the final chapters, we will render an account of how we used them. We must never lose sight that they are a gift and though we have no control over them, we should be grateful that we have them.

The term “portion” describes a “*part taken from a whole*” that one is then given. has in something. It can be the spoils of war, a portion of the food, a portion of land, or a portion of life.

“to divide, to divide out as a spoil, to take away a portion,... a part or portion taken from a whole...that which is assigned to man by God for his enjoyment... (Wilson p. 318-319).

In this case the last portion of the definition perfectly fits. “*that which is assigned to man by God for his enjoyment.*” Again, Koheleth wants it understood that we still owe all that we have to God. He determined after the curse of sin just how much would be left in this life for man to enjoy. He here reveals that the portion of man his share of the whole and what is assigned to him is food, drink, clothing, grooming, a job we enjoy and a woman that we love. If we wish to enjoy what God has portioned, then we must accept by faith that this is it. This is the very best life offers. If you have this then seek no further, there is not more and a reaching out

for more than this is a waste of time. If you do not yet have all this, then Koheleth bids us to seek it. But look no further. This is all there is to enjoyment “under the sun.”

and in the labor which you perform under the sun.

Again the author reminds us of the joy of labor. The joy of accomplishment, of seeing things get done. This ought to be our portion both in our job, and in the things we do in our spare time. To work around the home, to work with one’s hands is the best cure for despondency. Indolence leads to depression. A job we do enjoy doing, or a slothful and lazy attitude is not conducive to happiness in this life. God created man to work and to tend. This is his portion also.

Ecclesiastes 9:10-18

September 20, 1998

Introduction

As the author now moves to the conclusion of this section, he guards his readers the against the possible reactions that these undisputed facts could lead to. Some of these reactions are very natural, and even have a semblance of wisdom, but God wants His people to reject them. It has now been clearly established that all that exists in “life under the sun” is vanity. There is nothing new under the sun, and no matter how hard man strives, he cannot fix it’s problems that have resulted from the curse. Wealth and pleasure do not bring lasting satisfaction. There is a time and a season for everything and man must learn to bend to them, for he cannot change them. There will be times when man oppresses man and sometimes nothing can be done about it. Some will find success only to die before they can enjoy it. Sometimes the righteous will receive the what the wicked deserves, while other times the wicked will receive what the righteous deserve. The same events come to all, and morality will not deliver anyone from them. Though all these conclusions the same theme has echoed: “Life under the sun” is vanity, futile, empty, meaningless and empty.

What does God expect His faithful servants to do with all this inspired information? God has absolutely repudiated the heathen philosophies of those who have discovered the same truths that Koheleth has revealed here. The cynicism, apathy, pessimism, and indifference of the Stoic is countered with God’s advice to “*eat your bread in happiness, and drink your wine with a cheerful heart,*” to enjoy their labor, the wife they love, and the comforts of clothing and grooming(9:7-9). While God’s advice that “*whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might*” destroys the Epicurean philosophy of giving one’s life to pleasure and refusing responsibility. Though it is true that this world is not our home, God does not want us falling prey to the follies of those who use their own wisdom to decide how to deal with it. He wants men to enjoy what He has created and not simply put their lives on hold while they are here. He wants men to work and do all they can to fulfill His original intent.

After making man in His image and likeness, He determined that they should rule over all the earth(Gen 1:26), He then told man to “*Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule*”(Gen 1:28) After the curse, God added, “*cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life*”(Gen 3:17) and “*by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread,*” “*till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.*” (Gen 3:19). It is obvious from these commands that the things stated in Ecclesiastes are only an elaboration of God’s will for man. The curse does not change God’s intent that man do all the above to the best of his ability. Man is still to see “life under the sun” as a great challenge. No longer the exclusive challenge for the spiritual ones are also important, but God doesn’t want His people to become hermits, nor does he want them to opt out of life. They are to be great examples of how to truly enjoy this life as it was meant to be enjoyed and to serve God with might and toil along with gladness and singing both in the spiritual realm and in the material. What follows is just as much a command of God as any other.

10. Whatever your hand finds to do,

The true conclusion to all the information God has revealed about “life under the sun” both in this book and throughout the rest of Scripture is revealed here. Because “all is vanity” and because the “same event comes to all,” God wants us to develop this attitude toward life.

The term “whatsoever” is actually very similar in construction to “*everything occurs alike to all*” in 9:2. It is the same term “*all*” and the same relative pronoun “*alike*”(please review the comments on verse two). As noted in verse two, a relative pronoun is a term that qualifies the two thoughts it is placed between. In this case it is placed between “all” and “hand finds to do.” It could therefore be translated as “all that your hand finds to do,” or “everything that your hand finds to do.” “all that” or “everything that” “life under the sun” brings that you hand can find something to do with or about should be entered into with all your might. God doesn’t want His people to grow despondent, or jaded. He wants them to be filled with zeal, enthusiasm, and ambition. He wants the righteous to have an optimism that leads them to get involved and to work hard.

God wants our hands to “find” things to do. This term can refer both to searching for the things one knows are out there to be found as well as finding things one was not looking for. The central idea is that something that has been lost, overlooked, misplaced, or not known is sought for or comprehended and understood. When any of these things happen, God has advice on what ought to be done next.

matsa’ 4672, “to find, meet, get.” ... It is attested both in biblical (about 455 times) and post-biblical Hebrew... Matsa’ refers to “finding” someone or something that is lost or misplaced, or “finding” where it is. The thing may be found as the result of a purposeful search, ... On other occasions, the location of something or someone may be found without an intentional search... Matsa’ may connote not only “finding” a subject in a location, but “finding something” in an abstract sense. This idea is demonstrated clearly by Gen. 6:8: “But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.” ... Matsa’ can also mean “to discover.” God told Abraham: “If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes” Gen. 18:26. ... (Vines)

When an opportunity arises out of careful searching and purposeful thought on the one hand or by an accidental occurrence and chance on the other, if it is found it is found. It doesn’t matter whether the opportunity leads us to having to help an enemy, or neighbor, or whether we are so busy we would rather not get involved, when such things are found, God wants us to react.

“If you meet your enemy’s ox or his donkey wandering away, you shall surely return it to him. 5 “If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying {helpless} under its load, you shall refrain from leaving it to him, you shall surely release {it} with him. Exod 23:4-5

“You shall not see your brother’s ox or his sheep going astray, and hide yourself from them; you shall certainly bring them back to your brother. 2 “And if your brother is not near you, or if you do not know him, then you shall bring it to your own house, and it shall remain with you until your brother seeks it; then you shall restore it to him. 3 “You shall do the same with his donkey, and so shall you do with his garment; with any lost thing of your brother’s, which he has lost and you have found, you shall do likewise; you must not hide yourself. 4 “You shall not see your brother’s donkey or his ox fall down along the road, and hide yourself from them; you shall surely help him lift them up again. Deut 22:1-4

He wants us to understand that we can and should make a difference. He does not want us to be sluggards, He wants His servants to be examples of diligence and hard work in the way they keep up their home, in the way they raise their children, in the way they lead their lives. he wants us to be prepared to buy up every opportunity to do what is good. There are times when he uses man to fulfill His purposes. Man must always be ready at each time he finds something to do whatever he can.

The final term to take into consideration is the term “do.” A term Koheleth uses over 45 times in the book to describe the various aspects of life “under the sun.” “*In its primary sense this verb represents the production of various objects.*” It can also “*mean to make something into something*” or “*the general concept of producing some product.*”

’ashah 6213, “to make, do, create.” It occurs ... about 2,625 times in the Bible... In its primary sense this verb represents the production of various objects. ... The verb can mean to make something into something... In an extended use this verb means to prepare a meal, a banquet, or even an offering... Used in association with “Sabbath” or the name of other holy days, this word signifies “keeping” or “celebrating”:... Depending upon its object, ’ashah has several other nuances within the general concept of producing some product. For example, with the object “book” the verb means “to write”: “...of making many books there is no end...” Eccl. 12:12... Used absolutely this verb sometimes means “to take action” ... This verb used of plants signifies “bringing forth.” In Gen. 1:11 it means “to bear” fruit: “...and the fruit tree [bearing] fruit after his kind...” In another nuance this verb represents what a plant does in producing grain... Hos. 8:7.... ’Ashah is used theologically of man’s response to divine commands. God commanded Noah: “Make thee an ark of gopher wood...” Gen. 6:14... This verb is also applied specifically to all aspects of divine acts and actions. In the general sense of His actions toward His people Israel, the word first occurs in Gen. 12:2, where God promises “to make” Abram a great nation...” (Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words)

Whenever a hand finds something that it can produce, or make something into something, then God wants us

to do it. But not only does God speak of what we ought to do, but how we ought to do it.

do it with your might;

This is a common word for “*strength*,” “*power*,” “*force*,” and “*ability*.” Its most basic meaning is “*an ability to do something*.” It was used in Scripture of Samson’s strength, of the strength of the land to produce crops, or someone’s ability to withstand hard times.

koach 3581, “strength; power; force; ability.” This Hebrew word is used in biblical, rabbinic, and modern Hebrew with little change in meaning. The root is uncertain in Hebrew, but the verb is found in Arabic (wakaha, “batter down,” and kwch, “defeat”). Koach, which occurs 124 times, is a poetic word as it is used most frequently in the poetic and prophetic literature. The basic meaning of koach is an ability to do something. Samson’s “strength” lay in his hair Judg. 16:5, ... It is even possible to say that a field has koach, as it does or does not have vital “powers” to produce and harvest: “When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength [i.e., crops]...” Gen. 4:12... The internal fortitude was best demonstrated by the difficulties and frustrations of life. A strong man withstood hard times. The proverb bears out this important teaching: “If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small” Pr. 24:10. (Vine’s)

In short, doing something with one’s “might” refers to each individual person’s inherent strengths and abilities. Whatever they are, God wants us to put all that we have into it. As in our love for Him, we must give all our heart, soul, mind and strength to do something. The four terms that follow are examples of the kinds of products or productions that God expects the righteous to do with all their might.

for there is no work or service or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.

The term “for” is the same term used back in 9:7 (please review). It generally emphasizes “*causal relations of all kinds*.” The reason(cause) for the admonition to do what your hand can find to do with all your might is “*because*,” or “*since*” there is no work, service, knowledge or wisdom in the grave where we are going. The connection centers on the fact that what we can do now, we will no longer be able to do then. Ecclesiastes has made it clear that there is not much that we can do to change the things in this life, but there are some things we can do! The point of this verse is that we need to do them while we can do them. What God needs His people to do for Him “under the sun” will no longer be possible then. The four things listed above that make up such an important part of our service to the LORD will no longer be necessary once we die. As in an earlier chapter of the book:

For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over animals, for all is vanity. 20 All go to one place: all are from the dust, and all return to dust. 21 Who knows the spirit of the sons of men, which goes upward, and the spirit of the animal, which goes down to the earth? Ecc 3:19-21

Koheleth leaves completely alone what happens next. Once life “under the sun” is closed, he takes us no further. For the purpose of this book, it is immaterial what happens next, we are to do these things with all our might now because we can’t do them after our body is in the grave. There is no work, service, knowledge or wisdom “under the sun” in the grave.

These four terms have been used in the book to outline the entire scope of the book. The first term “work” was introduced in the first few chapters as the effort and toil that man can do “under the sun.” Koheleth had noted all the works that men had done(1:14), He decided to prove the enjoyment one can derive from life by making his works great(2:4) and then proceeded to build houses and vineyards(2:4), made gardens, orchards, and fruit trees(2:5),

water pools(2:6), acquired male and female servants, had herds and flocks(2:7), gathered silver and gold and special treasures(2:8), singers, delights, and musical instruments(2:8). At the end, he looked on all the works of his hands(2:11).

The second term translated “*service*” in the NKJ, “*device*” in the KJV and ASV, and “*planning*” in the NAS and NIV. It is a term used to describe the “*reasoning, reckoning*” and thinking of man.

2808 cheshbown- account, reasoning, reckoning

Koheleth used this term earlier when speaking of his own quest to find “*the reason of things*” and “*to find out the reason*.” of some things.

I applied my heart to know, to search and seek out wisdom and the reason of things, to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness.... 27 "Here is what I have found," says the Preacher, "Adding one thing to the other to find out the reason, Eccl 7:25-27

The time to do this is while we live "under the sun." There will be no more of this in the grave.

The third term "knowledge" is used eight times in the book. It describes the "perception" and "skill" one can develop as they gain "discernment," "understanding" and "wisdom."

1847 da' ath- knowledge a) knowledge, perception, skill b) discernment, understanding, wisdom

This is one of the exciting things about life. As we grow and develop in our line of work and in the other endeavors of our "life under the sun," we gain this special knowledge that makes us good at the things we do. It gives us some dominion over these things. It is satisfying and enjoyable to gain this knowledge. But now is the time to gain and use it for there is none of it once we go to the grave. Two uses of this stand out in this respect.

I said to myself, "Behold, I have magnified and increased wisdom more than all who were over Jerusalem before me; and my mind has observed a wealth of wisdom and knowledge." Eccl 1:16

For wisdom is protection {just as} money is protection. But the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the lives of its possessors. Eccl 7:12

The final term is "wisdom." It is one of the largest terms in the Scriptures, taking in both the spiritual and material side of life. It is used and extolled many times in the first ten chapters of Proverbs. Solomon praises it as something to seek above silver and gold. It is a great possession to master and hold. Yet it too is something to be gained with all one's might here "under the sun" for the value that it has here will not pass from this life into the next.

When we enter the grave, there is no more "life under the sun." This is the first and only time this term is used in Ecclesiastes. It is translated Sheol in the ASV and NAS, and grave in KJV, NKJ, and NIV. It describes on the one hand no more than the grave. The place where the body is laid and is corrupted. It is also a place of conscious existence for the righteous and the wicked. The KJV, NKJ and NIV may have the better logic here for their translation. Rather than confusing the issue by translating it with the term Sheol which infers conscious existence, the grave where the body is laid is better since Koheleth does not take us beyond the grave until the final chapter.

she'ol 7585, "Sheol." The 66 occurrences of this word are distributed throughout every period of biblical Hebrew. First, the word means the state of death: "For in death there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks?" Ps. 6:5; cf. 18:5. It is the final resting place of all men: "They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave Job 21:13. ... "Sheol" is parallel to Hebrew words for "pit" or "hell" Job 26:6, "corruption" or "decay" Ps. 16:10, and "destruction" Prov. 15:11. Second, "Sheol" is used of a place of conscious existence after death. In the first biblical appearance of the word Jacob said that he would "go down into the grave unto my son mourning" Gen. 37:35. All men go to "Sheol"-- a place and state of consciousness after death Ps. 16:10. The wicked receive punishment there Num. 16:30; Deut. 32:22; Ps. 9:17. They are put to shame and silenced in "Sheol" Ps. 31:17. Jesus alluded to Isaiah's use of she'ol 14:13-15 in pronouncing judgment on Capernaum Matt. 11:23, translating "Sheol" as "Hades" or "Hell," meaning the place of conscious existence and judgment. It is an undesirable place for the wicked Job 24:19 and a refuge for the righteous Job 14:13. Thus "Sheol" is also a place of reward for the righteous Hos. 13:14; cf. 1 Cor. 15:55. Jesus' teaching in Luke 16:19-31 seems to reflect accurately the Old Testament concept of she'ol; it is a place of conscious existence after death, one side of which is occupied by the suffering, unrighteous dead separated by a great chasm from the other side peopled by the righteous dead enjoying their reward. (Vine's Expository Dictionary)

Since family is no more, home and job are lost, food and drink no longer needed, and no further need for work, service, knowledge, and wisdom in the grave where we are going, we must take advantage of every opportunity while living "under the sun." We should want to look back on this life as a time when we accomplished all we could to fulfill God's desire that we enjoy what He created for us in the ways He designed. When we look at the spiritual realm this becomes even more powerful! The time to serve God is now. There is no service of the kind we have now. There are so many people we can talk to and help now that will be too late then. So much to do now that cannot be done later, that is forever closed to one once they leave this life.

11. I returned and saw under the sun that –

Koheleth has used this expression when he is returning to a thought that he has not quite finished making(see

4:1,7). In this case, he began the ninth chapter giving the reason why this life is too complicated to develop a formula for success(8:16-17). There is nothing here for man to use as traction or a handhold to gain absolute dominion. The same things come alike to all. He is now returning to that thought. There is no single set of circumstances that will always work and guarantee that anyone who does them will pass this life unscathed from its problems and completely successful. He used several illustrations and proverbs to illustrate his point, and now returns to make his final conclusions about the mindless vanity(futility) of life “under the sun”

He exposes the truth that many of the things one simply takes for granted just are not true. they should be true, and we think they are true, but if you carefully examine how things go in this life, you see clearly that he is right and that life “under the sun” is so unfair! Things that ought to be true are not.

The race is not to the swift,

Within the term race is the type of race involved. This is a foot race with a set course to be run..

4793 merowts- running, race, course

Though one would think that the fastest runner would always win on this course, Koheleth has carefully observed and seen that it is not true. The swiftest person does not always win.

7031 qal- swift, light, fleet a) swift b) one who is swift

So many things can happen between the start and the finish of any race that there is no way for anyone to predict who will be the winner. The fastest person may not be feeling good, may get hurt, or simply have an off day. Someone who does not even deserve to win the race could actually be the winner. Yet this truth goes much further than the simple running of a race. It can apply to “life under the sun” as well. Those who look in their youth like the most likely to quickly succeed in all that life can bring often do not, while those who look as though life will pass them by completely end up on the very top of it. No one can predict and often, no one can even tell why after it happens.

Nor the battle to the strong,

The term battle refers to “war” or “combat” “*the over-all confrontation of two forces.*”

milchamah 4421, “war; battle; skirmish; combat.” This word has a cognate only in Ugaritic. Biblical Hebrew attests it 315 times and in all periods. This word means “war,” the over-all confrontation of two forces Gen. 14:2. It can refer to the engagement in hostilities considered as a whole, the “battle”: “...and they joined battle with them in the vale of Siddim” Gen. 14:8. This word is used not only of what is intended but of the hand-to-hand fighting which takes place: “And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said unto Moses, There is a noise of war in the camp” Exod. 32:17. Milchamah sometimes represents the art of soldiering, or “combat”...” (Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words)

When the battle is joined, it is not a given that the “strong” always win. the term strong is actually a term for a “hero” and “*in the context of battle, the word is better understood to refer to the category of warriors.*” Hence when there is a war, not always do the heros and warriors always win.

gibbor 1368, “hero.” This word appears 159 times in the Old Testament... In the context of battle, the word is better understood to refer to the category of warriors. The gibbor is the proven warrior; especially is this true when gibbor is used in combination with chayil (“strength”). The KJV gives a literal translation, “mighty men [gibbor] of valor [chayil],” whereas the NIV renders the phrase idiomatically, “fighting men” (cf. Josh. 1:14). David, who had proven himself as a warrior, attracted “heroes” to his band while he was being pursued by Saul 2 Sam. 23. When David was enthroned as king, these men became a part of the elite military corps. ... (Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words)

Not always does the battle, whether it be an actual war or simply a contest of strength between two opposing parties always end as one would suppose. It is so much more complicated than this. If all battles could be figured out simply by each side determining who has the most warriors and heros, there would be a lot fewer war. Those who are the strongest do not always win life’s battles. Often those who appeared so weak live the longest while the strong die young. No one can predict, it is far beyond such calculations.

Nor bread to the wise,

One would certainly conclude that those who seek for wisdom and understanding would always have bread. This is a term that generally refers to the grain that makes it or the bread itself, but can also refer to food in general.

lechem 3899, “bread; meal; food; fruit.” This word has cognates in Ugaritic, Syriac, Aramaic, Phoenician, and Arabic. Lechem occurs about 297 times and at every period of biblical Hebrew... This noun refers to “bread,” as distinguished from meat... “Bread” was baked in loaves: Lechem can represent food in general. In Gen. 3:19 (the first biblical occurrence), it signifies the entire diet: “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread....” This nuance may include meat, as it does in Judg. 13:15-16: “And Manoah said unto the angel of the Lord, I pray thee, let us detain thee, until we shall have made ready a kid for thee. And the angel of the Lord said unto Manoah, Though thou detain me, I will not eat of thy bread....” In 1 Sam. 14:24, 28, lechem includes honey, and in Prov. 27:27 goat’s milk. Lechem may also represent “food” for animals: “He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry” Ps. 147:9; ... (Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words)

In one’s youth, they may predict success based upon wisdom and mental ability. One may assume that they will always have enough to eat, based upon their keen abilities to assess life and be successful, but even in this, it does not always happen. Such things do not always come to those who most likely appear that they will gain them. Often other circumstances intervene and leave one astonished with the way “life under the sun” actually worked out for that person. “That’s life” is our way of coining this truth. “Life under the sun” is so full of eddy’s and bends in the river that the current often carries us back the way we have already come (we aren’t really getting anywhere) and we don’t even recognize it. Other times we can see it, but there is nothing we can do about it. When this occurs neither speed, or strength, or wisdom or understanding and skill avails anything.

Nor riches to men of understanding,

Again, there are those who seem to have such an understanding of financial dealings and the way life works that it just seems sure that they will become wealthy, yet they never do. It seems a sure thing, they have all is necessary yet it doesn’t happen. All their understanding doesn’t seem to help them. Yet we know instinctively that those who “*deal wisely, consider, pay attention to, regard, notice, discern, perceive,*” and “*inquire*” ought to succeed when they direct this toward wealth. Yet it doesn’t always happen.

bin 995, “to understand, be able, deal wisely, consider, pay attention to, regard, notice, discern, perceive, inquire.” This verb, which occurs 126 times in biblical Hebrew, has cognates in Ugaritic, Arabic, Ethiopic, late Aramaic, and Syriac. Bin appears in all periods of biblical Hebrew. (Vine’s Expository Dictionary)

Nor favor to men of skill;

Men of skill are those people who first carefully scrutinize the things around them and gaining the knowledge of how things work and the best way to deal with things find success in all they do. They are men of skill because they have that ability to get in there, tackle the problem, and come up with a solution. Yet these people do not always get favor. This is a broad term describing “*whatever is pleasant and agreeable.*”

chen 2580, “favor; grace.” The root with the meaning “to favor someone” is a common Semitic term. ... The Hebrew noun chen occurs 69 times,... The first occurrence is in Gen. 6:8: “But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.”... The basic meaning of chen is “favor.” Whatever is “pleasant and agreeable” can be described by this word. When a woman is said to have chen, she is a “gracious” woman Prov. 11:16;... Chen also denotes the response to whatever is “agreeable.” The verbs used with “favor” are: “give favor” Gen. 39:21, “obtain favor” Exod. 3:21, and “find favor” Gen. 6:8, (Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words)

Its use here probably parallels that of Joseph while in prison.

But the LORD was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. Gen 39:21

Because God gave him wisdom, everything he did turned out well, and he therefore gained favor in the sight of the chief jailer. The jailer viewed him as being a pleasant and agreeable person and therefore used him in difficult situations. As he solved these problems, he gained even more favor. This is of course how it is supposed to be. But it is not always this way! Sometimes men of skill do not gain favor.

But time and chance happen to them all.

Here at last are the real factors that make or break someone regardless of their natural abilities and hard work. It all comes down to time and to chance. Koheleth used this term thirty-one times when he introduced it in chapter three. He then referred to it again in chapter eight and now returns to it again to make some final conclusions. This is an important term for those who live “under the sun.” Time refers to “*a period of time*” in which something can be done which we often translate with “*opportunity.*” It can also be an “*appointed time*” or a “*season,*” which describes the rigid nature of time. Things have to be done when they can be done. It is pointless to attempt them when it is not the right time. It is a mixture of both these meanings that is used

in the book. After opening the third chapter with this general truth, Koheleth then related many things that are rigid and fixed. there is a time to be born and a time to die, etc.

To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: Ecc 3:1

In the eighth chapter he returned to this theme to stress again that time is the master with full dominion “under the sun.” We must bend our will to it, or be crushed.

a wise man’s heart discerns both time and judgment, 6 Because for every matter there is a time and judgment, though the misery of man increases greatly. 7 For he does not know what will happen; so who can tell him when it will occur? Ecc 8:5-7

Here, time is set forth as the master again! All of man’s great abilities, the swift, the hero, the wise, the discerning, and the able must all bend to it. None of these things matter when the time is not right. Time reigns “under the sun” when it is time, those with ability will gain the end they seek. When the time is not right, others with less ability will gain while those with great abilities will fail.

He now introduces “chance.” This is a difficult term to fully describe since it is only used here and one other place in Scripture. The definition of the term centers on the idea of “an occurrence,” “incident,” “impact,” or “happening” It comes from a root term that means “to impinge by accident” “violence” or “importunity.”

6294 pēgā - an occurrence, a happening, a chance(BDB)

“an occurrence, incident.” (Wilson p. 72)

6294 pēgā (pēh’-gah); from 6293; impact (casual): KJV-- chance, occurrent.(Strongs)

6293 pāgā (paw-gah’); a primitive root; to impinge, by accident or violence, or (figuratively) by importunity (Strongs)

By coupling this term with that of the rigid nature of time itself, the every translation has gone with the idea of chance. Those events that fall without any rhyme or reason and end up impinging plans and outcomes. they are incidents with an impact, or occurrences that create importunity and trouble. They can be caused by an accident of nature, inattention by men, or violence(intent by evil men). These events change the course of one’s life, often without our knowledge and sometimes with grave impact. This is the ultimate application of his opening conclusion:

I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and indeed, all is vanity and grasping for the wind. 15 What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be numbered. Ecc 1:14-15

When the time to die comes and by chance a car cuts us off and we head toward the cliff we cannot avoid, or a chance entrance of a virus into our body gains the upper hand, or the time for the financial world to collapse leads to the chance event of our bankruptcy, we are impinged and no matter who we are, what our gifts might be, and how well we have used our days, there will be nothing we can do. This is the sad reality of what the curse did to our life “under the sun.” When a bolder begins to crash down the mountainside at the same moment our car approaches on the road, our righteousness, purity, holiness, our wisdom skill and perception, and any other qualities we might possess will not change the outcome of where that rock rolls. If we pass it before or after it lands on the road, there will be no harm. If by chance impingement, that rock lands on our car then whatever physical laws begin to operate will function no matter what the consequences to us, our family, and our possessions.

It works both ways. There will be seasons of convenient opportunity when good things appear out of nowhere. Times when things simply go our way through no effort or toil on our own. We are simply blessed by time and chance. We know not how or why, but life “under the sun” smiles upon us. But there are also times of impingement when whether by accident or violence through no tangible fault of our own, life simply throws difficulties to us. These can be directed by Satan(Job), by God(David), by life(here). We simply cannot know and the Bible gives no means of doing so. The entire book of Job leads one to the conclusion that this question cannot be answered.

12. For man also does not know his time:

He concludes with the most powerful impingement of all. Death nearly always enters “life under the sun” at a moment we do not expect and do not desire, and no one knows when that time will be. There is a time to die(Ecc 3:2). But no one knows when that time will be. This term for knowledge is primarily what is

“observed” or “experienced.” It is knowledge that comes from “*experience with the senses,*” “*by investigating and proving,*” and “*by reflection and consideration.*” No matter how much observation and investigation one does regarding death, and no matter how many tests they do on their own body, until there is an actual problem, there is no way to predict when or how it will come. Most people do not know their time. There are those with terminal illnesses who are diagnosed and become an exception to this, but for most people, there is simply no way to know when an accident or illness is going to strike them down. A healthy 20 year old has no more guarantee of tomorrow than a healthy 80 year old does. Accidents of every description, sickness and disease, and other factors make life such an uncertain thing. There are no observations, investigations, or reflections that will help with this.

Like fish taken in a cruel net, Like birds caught in a snare,

These two illustrations are set forth as examples of how “life under the sun” operates. No one can know his time just like these two circumstances. When a fisherman arises early in the morning to gather his net and head out to the fishing grounds, the fish are “blissfully ignorant” of the fate that is coming upon them. They do not have the intelligence to even consider the possibility. They simply begin to swim as they do any other day, but the net is soon cast and falls across them. They are soon taken, and there is no escape. One moment they are swimming in the water, the next they are captured in the net. They may see it darkening the sun as it descends upon them, they may swim as hard as they can to escape, but the net falls to the bottom and they are caught, and life simply ends. This is how death can descend upon most men. They get up in the morning like every other morning, they begin their daily pursuits like always, and suddenly like the illustration above, they see death coming. They may have a few moments to ponder it being unable to stop it, or they may not have any time at all. But nothing anyone can do to begin each day can stop this or change the way it works.

Birds are caught in a snare in exactly the same way. The trap is laid, perhaps that day, or perhaps many days before. The birds are flying from tree to tree, doing what they always do. The snare is hiding awaiting them. As long as they stay away from that particular tree all is well. But suddenly, the leader swerves in the wrong direction, and the next moment they are caught in the snare. Struggling and seeking for the way of escape that is simply not there. Completely unsuspecting one moment forever captured the next. So God would have us view our own death that we might be continually prepared for it.

So the sons of men are snared in an evil time,

In exactly the same way that it happens to the fish and it happens to the birds, so the sons of men are snared. This term carries the thought of “*to be ensnared*” or “*to be entrapped.*”

3369 yaqosh- to lure, to entice, to snare, to lay a snare or lure, to set a trap...1) to lay snares (figurative of devices of wicked)...
b) (Niphal) to be ensnared, to be caught by bait c) (Pual) to be entrapped

This is exactly how death comes. Whether by accident or illness or by trauma or disease, death ensnares and entraps. Man does everything he can to escape it. He seeks to see it coming and strives for means to avoid and escape it. But for everyone the day finally comes when all escapes are blocked, and man is captured by it.

This always comes in an evil time. This is the same term for time discussed above. It is the appointed time described in Ecc 3.

The sad fact is that because Adam chose to sin, he brought death to all men. Because of the curse of sin, death entered the world and then came to all men because they too sinned. It is therefore now appointed to men to die.

but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die. Gen 2:17

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—... Rom 5:12

And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, Heb 9:27

Koheleth however is not primarily focusing upon this fact, it is in the background, but his central point is the method by which it is meted out. Though God can mete it out death directly as a punishment of sinners, and the Scriptures reveal that He does do so (the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, Nadab and Abihu, etc.), the normal

means is quite different. God has left the death of most men to time and chance. It is the just punishment for sin(globally), but individually, it death is about as fair as a net taking a fish or a snare taking a bird. Most individual deaths “under the sun” are bitterly empty and futile! Most of them never should have happened. It was a case of “being at the wrong place at the wrong time.” Death always comes at an “evil” time. Though this Hebrew term(*ra’-7451*) can have a moral emphasis such as “*wicked,*” “*morally evil or hurtful,*” it does not have that here. This is a time that is “*bad or unpleasant in the sense of giving pain or unhappiness,*” and is “*the antithesis of shalom.*” Ponder the antithesis of the time to be born and the time to die. The time to be born is a day of goodness, it is pleasant and the very essence of “shalom.” It is a day of happiness and rejoicing. The “time to die” from the perspective of “under the sun” is an evil time. It is a day of mourning, a day of bitter tears. A day to be avoided and a day to flee. Yet like the net and the snare, every man is ultimately ensnared by it.

When it falls suddenly upon them.

This too is a part of God’s plan for how death comes upon all men. There is no way to predict or plan for it. The first indications that one is going to die are always sudden and without warning. It simply “falls” suddenly. This term is a very general term for falling down.

“5307 *naphal-* to fall, as a house or city; in war; to fall sick, asleep: (Wilson p 155)

“5307 *naphal-* to fall, to lie, to be cast down, to fail... 2) to fall (used of violent death)... 1) to cause to fall, fell, to throw down... (BDB)

It is used of the walls of Jericho falling down flat(*Josh 6:5,20*) of Joshua falling down upon his face to plead with the LORD(*Josh 7:6,10*). It is also a very common term for death. “*120,000 men had fallen*” *Jdg 8:10*, “*he fell dead*” - *Jdg 5:27*. God describes death as something that falls suddenly. “*Like lightning out of a clear blue sky*” so to speak, it comes without warning. The term “suddenly” comes from a root word describes “*a wink.*” It is something instant, quick and unexpected. It comes “*suddenly, surprisingly, instantly!*”

6597 *pith’owm* or *pith’om-* as an adverb: 1) suddenly, surprisingly as a substantive: 2) suddenness

6597 *pith’owm* (*pith-ome’*); or *pith’om* (*pith-ome’*); from 6621; instantly:

6621 *petha’* (*peh’-thah*); ... a wink, i.e. moment... quickly or unexpectedly... at an instant...”

The most dreaded and feared enemy of those who live “under the sun” brings it suddenly and quickly to a close is death. Death can only come in an evil time, but it is a time that cannot be prepared for since it comes instantly and without warning. Even with our current technology, we have not changed this much. We can now predict some forms of death, but this changes nothing for though we can move back the time of revealing it a little, the initial revealing is no different that what is described here. It always comes suddenly and without warning. All violent deaths though are instant and without warning.

The one thing that comes out of this section and that we must all keep firmly in mind is that God reveals death is a part of “time and chance.” He brought it originally into “life under the sun” as punishment for sin, but it doesn’t not follow that every death is a punishment for sin. It is like the fish and the net and the bird and the snare, unexpected, instantaneous, and without rhyme or reason.

Koheleth now turns to a new subject. Some see a connection between the previous section and this one while others do not.

13. This wisdom I have also seen under the sun, and it seemed great to me:

The key phrase once again is “under the sun,” which qualifies the type of wisdom under consideration. This is an “under the sun” wisdom. It is the highest and greatest level to which wisdom can climb if it does not acknowledge God, and is only concerned with the here and the now. There are many men and women of great wisdom and discretion who use their wisdom only “life under the sun.” What generally happens in such cases? Is this wisdom a guarantee that all will be well with the one who has it? He has spoken of life’s inequities throughout this chapter. He will conclude it with the inequities of “under the sun” regarding the proper and good use of wisdom. The author’s use of the term “great” makes it clear that he has not chosen just any example, but a superlative one. This is something that is “*large in magnitude*” and great in “*number,*” “*intensity*” and “*importance*”

1419 gadowl or (shortened) gadol- as an adjective: great a) large (in magnitude and extent) b) in number c) in intensity d) loud (in sound) e) older (in age) f) in importance 1) important things 2) great, distinguished (used of men) 3) God Himself (used of God)...” BDB

As a man of great wisdom himself, our author finds it a great matter that even wisdom because of time and chance “under the sun” suffers a tragic loss of power. It seems that the thing that struck him so forcefully was that in spite of its successful use, it can still leave one no better off than a fool. The example he cites may have been an actual event that all were familiar with, or it may be no more than a selection of the kind of events that would cause the heart of any to admit to its emotional impact.

14. There was a little city with few men in it;

The story opens up with a small city with few men in it. What can we draw from this? Because it is small, everyone will know one another. Because it is small, it has few defenses. Perhaps it is small because the city in which it really occurred was small.

and a great king came against it, besieged it, and built great snares around it.

A great king is generally great because of the size of his nation or the size of his army. Either way, it does not bode well for the outcome of the city that this is a great king. The two uses of “great are both from the same term used in the previous verse(see definition). Under normal circumstances this would spell the doom of the city that a great king was out to conquer it with great snares. The term besieged is the same term used to describe the destruction of Jericho.

cabab 5437, “to turn, go around, turn around (change direction).” Biblical Hebrew attests the word in all periods and about 160 times. Basically this verb represents a circular movement—“ to take a turning.” ... A second emphasis of cabab is “to go around,” in the sense of to proceed or be arranged in a circle. ... This is the action pictured when Israel besieged Jericho, except with the further nuance of encircling in a processional and religious march... (Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words)

The great snares were the siege-works necessary to breach the city. There was no way in and no way out and the walls were in danger of being overthrown.

4685 matsowd or (fem.) metsowdah or metsodah- as a masculine noun: 1) siege-works, a bulwark 2) a hunting implement, a net as a feminine noun: 3) a net 4) fastness, a stronghold (BDB)

The main idea is that the cities fate is almost sealed and there is little hope of escape.

15. Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Can one imagine the great amount of wisdom necessary to deliver such a city from such a problem. The man would have to come up with a wonderful plan. It would save the people’s homes, their lives, their lifestyle. It would bring so many wonderful blessings to the people of the city. Their wives and children would be spared the sword or worse, they would be spared from slavery or death. They would be spared watching their city be burned or destroyed. One can hardly imagine the thanks and honor which was due this man for what he had done!

Yet no one remembered that same poor man.

Yet the fact of the case is that in “life under the sun” there is no moral or compelling obligation for them to do so. In this case they did not. In spite of all that was done for them, they did not choose to remember or be thankful or appreciative of it. This is how life “under the sun,” often rewards those who give great benefits and blessings to others. No one can expect what is fair or just to always happen. One can do great favors for others, they can manifest great wisdom and insight that greatly enhances their quality of life, yet when their time for gratitude comes, it just might not be there.

The moral of this story is simple and clear. If you have wisdom, use it in ways in which your reward is secure regardless of what it brings “under the sun” God is not unrighteous to forget like man is:

For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. Heb 6:10

16. Then I said: “Wisdom is better than strength.

The author now draws his conclusion. First and foremost what is learned from this story is wisdom is better

than strength. Strength could not have delivered that city from its fate, but wisdom did deliver it. Therefore wisdom should be cultivated and sought after. It should be prized highly and recognized as a great asset.

Nevertheless the poor man’s wisdom is despised, And his words are not heard.

Yet in spite of the above truths, wisdom is subject to the same time and chance as all other things in this “life under the sun.” The poor man’s wisdom was despised. The term “despised” refers to things that are held in “contempt,” or “neglect.” “it is opposed to the act of esteeming, appreciating or caring for.”

“... to do that which implies contempt; to slight, neglect, make little account of, to treat contemptuously and proudly;... it is opposed to the act of esteeming, appreciating or caring for; it implies sometimes only to make little account of...” (Wilson p. 119)

Nobody cared after the city was delivered. They did not appreciate they man who did it and they did not listen to anything he later had to say. They neglected and made little account of the poor man’s wisdom. They did not even remember what he had done for them well enough to continue to respect him and hear his words.

What should have happened in a perfect world is that since he has proven himself to be wise and be capable of protecting them they ought to from that day on seek his counsel and offer him respect. Yet it does not always happen that way. Sometimes people just forget.

17. Words of the wise, spoken quietly, should be heard

There is a slight difference in the various translations, although the end result is that they all teach the same thing.

The words of the wise heard in quietness are {better} than the shouting of a ruler among fools. (NAS)

The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouts of a ruler of fools. (NIV)

Words of the wise, spoken quietly, should be heard rather than the shout of a ruler of fools. (NKJ)

The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the cry of him that ruleth among fools. (ASV)

The words of wise men are heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools. (KJV)

Wise men who know what they are talking about, often speak quietly. They have no need to shout or speak with emphasis. Truth and right are emphasis enough. Those who simply speak the facts clearly and quietly ought to be heard. It would be so much better for those who hear if they are heeded.

Rather than the shout of a ruler of fools.

The term “ruler” refers to someone who has “*dominion*” or the right to “*reign*” over others.

mashal 4910, “to rule, reign, have dominion.” It is found approximately 100 times in the text of the Hebrew Old Testament. ...Mashal is used most frequently in the text to express the “ruling or dominion” of one person over another Gen. 3:16; 24:2. Cain is advised “to rule over” or “master” sin Gen. 4:7. ... As Creator and Sovereign over His world, God “ruleth by his power for ever” Ps. 66:7. (Vine’s Expository Dictionary)

Hence this is either a king or leader. Yet this one has an interesting reign. He holds dominion over fools. The context of this passage is difficult. Is he still speaking of the city above. Are the people of this city fools? Was it the shout of this ruler that got them into trouble? The truth of his statement does not need these questions answered for it stands on its own. It is obvious that the quiet words of a wise man should hold more weight than the shouts of a ruler over fools.

18. Wisdom is better than weapons of war;

The above story also teaches that wisdom has greater value and better results than weapons of war. What could not have been gained through strength or weapons, was gained through the wisdom of the wise man.

But one sinner destroys much good.

He spoke of this sinner back in 9:2(see the definition) as one of the classes of people who have the same events happening to them regardless of their moral makeup. A sinner is someone who is guilty of “*moral failure toward both God and men.*” and has erred “*from the path of duty and right.*” Though such a person will have the same quality of life under the sun as the good and useful person, but as he closes the chapter, he reminds

us that though life may bring the same to both the good and the sinner, it is not reciprocated. The sinner does not bring good to life “under the sun.” He does the opposite. The sinner destroys much good. He causes it to perish and vanish.

6 ‘abad- 1) to perish, to vanish, to go astray, to be destroyed ... b) (in the Piel) 1) to destroy, to kill, to cause to perish, to give up (as lost), to exterminate... 2) to blot out, to do away with, to cause to vanish, (figuratively)... (BDB)

One sinner can destroy all the good that a wise man’s wisdom can bring. He does this by refusing to listen and even doing the opposite of what is right.