

Words of Koheles Son of David King of Jerusalem

Vapor of vapors, vapor of vapors, everything is vapor.

What does a man gain from all his labor that he puts forth beneath the sun?

One generation goes and another comes; but the earth endures forever.

The sun rises and the sun sets and hastens to the place from which he rose. The wind goes toward the south and turns around toward the north; it turns around and around all the time. All the rivers run into the sea and yet the sea is never full; the rivers flow ceaselessly to their appointed destination.

All stories are tiresome; yet the story-tellers never cease; and the eyes never seem to get enough of seeing the story-tellers or of hearing them tell their stories.

That which has been is that which will be;

Words of the Preacher Son of David King in Jerusalem

Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity.

What profit has a man of all his labor which he takes under the sun?

One generation passes away, and another generation comes: but the earth abides forever.

The sun also arises, and the sun goes down, and hastes to his place where he arose. The wind goes toward the south and turns about to the north; it whirls about continually; and the wind returns again according to his circuits. All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full; to the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.

All things are full of labor; man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.

The thing that has been is that which shall

that which has been done is that which will be done; there is nothing new under the sun. Is there something of which it is said, “See, this is new”? It has been here already in the ages that were before us.

We have no remembrance of those who lived a long time ago, neither shall there be any remembrance of those who live a long time after us by those who will live a long time after them.

I, Koheles, was king over Israel in Jerusalem.

I set to work to examine and to investigate logically everything which is being done beneath the heavens; what a miserable and troublesome notion this is for those to whom God has given it! I have seen everything which is done beneath the sun; and, indeed, it is all evanescent and like grasping at the wind. That which is crooked cannot be made straight and that which is defective cannot be trusted.

I said to myself: “I have gathered together a greater store of wisdom than any other who ever lived in Jerusalem; I have considered much thought and knowledge. I have gotten for myself information on prudence and information on madness and folly”; and now I know that all this is likewise grasping at the wind. The more wisdom, the more vexation; to increase one’s knowledge is to increase one’s pain. I said to myself: “Let me try merriment and take a look at enjoyment”; these, too, are nothing but vapor. Of laughter I said: It is to be scorned; and concerning merriment I said: Of what use is it?

be; and that which is done is that which shall be done; and there is no new thing under the sun. Is there anything whereof it may be said, “See, this is new”? It has been already in old time which was before us.

There is no remembrance of former things, neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those who shall come after.

I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem.

And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: This sore travail has God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit. That which is crooked cannot be made straight; and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.

I communed with my own heart, saying, “See, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they who have been before me in Jerusalem”; yes, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. And I gave my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. For in much wisdom is much grief, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow. I said in my heart, “Go on now, I will prove you with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure”: and, behold, this also is vanity. I said of laughter: It is mad; and of mirth: What does it?

I sought to measure the pleasures of the flesh, to balance against each other the way of the intellect and the way of the world, so that I might decide which way is best for human beings to follow during their brief earthly lives. I concentrated upon worldly matters: I built houses; I planted vineyards; I created gardens and parks; I planted in them every kind of tree; I made water-ponds with which to nourish the growing forests; I bought male slaves and female slaves who produced for me even more slaves; I had larger herds of big animals and little animals than any man of Jerusalem had ever owned; I gathered together silver and gold, precious stones and merchandise; I surrounded myself with the kinds of pleasures in which men especially delight, male singers, female singers and large numbers of big-bosomed beauties. I kept on building and acquiring until my possessions exceeded those of any who had been before me in Jerusalem; but at no time did I cease to ponder upon the meaning of it all. I tried to find an answer for every question which came to my mind; I did not evade any mental problem; on the contrary, the more difficult the problem, the more my mind rejoiced; my reward for this mental labor was found in the labor itself. When I finally compared the value of all the material things which my hands had gathered and the value of my mental efforts, I recognized that the quest for material things is a vapor and a grasping after wind which has no lasting advantage. When I took a good look at the way of the intellectual and the way of the sensualist and the way of the

I sought in my heart to give myself to wine—yet acquainting my heart with wisdom—and to lay hold on folly; till I might see what was that good for the sons of men which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life. I made me great works, I builded me houses, I planted me vineyards, I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits; I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that brings forth trees. I got me servants and maidens and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me. I gathered me also silver and gold and the peculiar treasures of kings and the provinces; I got me men singers and women singers and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts. So I was great and increased more than all who were before me in Jerusalem—also my wisdom remained with me. And whatsoever my eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labor, and this was my portion of all my labor. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought and on the labor that I had labored to do, and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun. And I turned myself to behold wisdom and madness and folly: For what can the man do that comes after the king? even that which has been already done. Then I saw that wisdom excels folly as far as light excels darkness. The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness: and I

materialist, I said to myself: How useless it is for lowly man to challenge Superior Authority, to question that which was decided long ago. I realized then that the gulf separating wisdom and materialism is as great as the difference between light and darkness. The eyes of the wise are in his head but the fool walks in darkness—

And both of them suffer a common fate. I said to myself: "That which will happen to the fool will happen to me. Why have I been so anxious to become wise?" I decided that this, too, is vapor. For there is no eternal remembrance of either wise man or fool. It is clear from past experience that, in the days to come, everyone now existing will be forgotten. Alas, the wise man dies as does the fool. So I came to hate life itself for I saw no good in anything which is done under the sun; for it is all evanescent and like grasping after wind. And I detested all the material possessions for which I had labored under the sun, since I would have to leave them to a man who would live after I was gone. And who knows whether this man will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have power over the wealth for which I sweated and schemed under the sun. This, too, is vapor. My heart began to despair concerning all my labor under the sun. There are those who conduct their affairs with wisdom and knowledge and expertness and yet have to turn their fortune over to others who have contributed nothing toward it. This is vapor and very unjust.

What a misfortune for man is all his labor and his ambition with which he concerns

myself perceived also that one event happens to them all.

Then said I in my heart, "As it happens to the fool, so it happens even to me"; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart that this also is vanity. For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool forever, seeing that that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dies the wise man? as the fool. Therefore I hated life: because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous to me, for all is vanity and vexation of spirit. Yes, I hated all my labor which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it to the man who shall be after me. And who knows whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? Yet shall he have rule over all my labor wherein I have labored and wherein I have showed myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity. Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labor which I took under the sun. For there is a man whose labor is in wisdom and in knowledge and in equity, yet to a man who has not labored therein shall he leave it for his portion. This also is vanity and a great evil.

For what has man of all his labor and of the vexation of his heart wherein he has labored under the sun? For all his days are sorrows, and all his travail grief; yes, his heart takes not rest in the night. This also is vanity. There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labor. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God.

himself under the sun. He is unhappy all his life; trouble is his constant concern; at night he cannot rest. This, too, is vapor. There is no genuine enjoyment in life except that which comes from eating and drinking and getting what satisfaction one may from his work. This is my understanding of the way that God has handled this matter. For who has more right than I to eat and to enjoy the fruit of my labors? And as for the belief that to the good man God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy and to the sinner He gives the task of satisfying the material wants of the good man, this, too, is vapor and a grasping after wind.

Everything is transient; but there is an appointed time for everything that happens under the sun.

*There is a time for birth
and a time to die;*

*There is a time to plant
and a time to uproot that which has
been planted.*

*There is a time to kill
and a time to heal;*

*There is a time to tear down
and a time to build.*

*There is a time to weep
and a time to laugh;*

*There is a time to mourn
and a time to dance.*

*There is a time to cast stones
and a time to gather stones;*

*There is a time to embrace
and a time to refrain from embracing.*

*There is a time to seek to save
and a time to give up as lost;*

For who can eat, or who else can hasten hereto, more than I? For God gives to a man who is good in his sight wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner he gives travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him who is good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit.

To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

*A time to be born,
and a time to die;*

*A time to plant,
and a time to pluck up that which is planted;*

*A time to kill,
and a time to heal;*

*A time to break down,
and a time to build up;*

*A time to weep,
and a time to laugh;*

*A time to mourn,
and a time to dance;*

*A time to cast away stones,
and a time to gather stones together;*

*A time to embrace,
and a time to refrain from embracing;*

*A time to get,
and a time to lose;*

*A time to keep,
and a time to cast away;*

*There is a time to keep
and a time to throw away.*

*There is a time to tear
and a time to mend;*

*There is a time to keep silent
and a time to speak.*

*There is a time to love
and a time to hate;*

*There is a time for war
and a time for peace.*

So what does man gain from his wearisome labor? I have examined the pattern of life which God has established for mankind. Everything He has made fulfills its purpose at the appropriate time; He has also put the hope of eternity in their heart, which makes it impossible for mankind to comprehend what God has done or will do from the beginning to the end. I concluded that there is nothing worthwhile in any of life's endeavors, except to be happy and to enjoy life. Indeed, any man who is able to eat and drink and to get satisfaction out of his work is enjoying a privilege which only God can grant. I understood that everything which God has ordained is eternally unchangeable; nothing will ever be added to it or taken from it; and God has ordained that mankind shall live in fear of Him.

That which has been was even before that and that which is to be has already been; and the wheel of life revolves eternally.*

Furthermore, I saw under the sun that instead of justice there is injustice and instead of righteousness there is unrighteousness. I said to myself concerning mankind: "God

*A time to rend,
and a time to sew;*

*A time to keep silence,
and a time to speak;*

*A time to love,
and a time to hate;*

*A time of war,
and a time of peace.*

What profit has he who works in that wherein he labors? I have seen the travail which God has given to the sons of men to be exercised in it. He has made everything beautiful in his time; also he has set the world in their heart so that no man can find out the work that God makes from the beginning to the end. I know that there is no good in them but for a man to rejoice and to do good in his life. And also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor; it is the gift of God. I know that, whatsoever God does, it shall be forever: nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it: and God does it that men should fear before him.

That which has been is now; and that which is to be has already been; and God requires that which is past.

And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there. I said in my heart, "God shall judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work." I said in my heart, concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts. For that which befalls the sons of

tests them and shows that they are beasts." Man and beast share a common fate; as one dies, so dies the other; they have much the same nature; man has no advantage over the beast; for everything that is is vapor. All go to one place; everything comes from mud and everything returns to mud. What rational basis is there for believing, as some believe, that the *anima*, the living spirit of a man, ascends unchanged into Heaven while the life-spirit of a beast is reabsorbed into the undifferentiated mass of earthly life-energy?

I have come to the conclusion that there is nothing better than that a man should find satisfaction in what he is doing; this is his appointed destiny; there is none who will reveal to him what the future years hold in store.

* Lit: "and God seeks that which has already gone by."

Once again I reflected upon all the wrongs which are committed under the sun; behold the tears of the oppressed—and no one offers them consolation; their oppressors handle them violently—and no one offers them help. And I felt that those who are already dead are better off than those who are yet alive. More fortunate than both of them is he who has not yet been, who has not seen the evil deeds which have been done under the sun. I saw that every achievement and every successful accomplishment serves only to create jealousy between one man and another; this too is vapor and grasping at the wind.

The fool folds his arms together and eats his own flesh.

men befalls beasts; even one thing befalls them: as the one dies, so dies the other. Yes, they have all one breath, so that a man has no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go to one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knows the spirit of man who goes upward and the spirit of the beast that goes downward to the earth?

Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion; for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?

So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun, and beheld the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter. Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive. Yes, better is he, than both they, who has not yet been, who has not seen the evil work that is done under the sun. Again, I considered all travail, and every right work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbor. This is also vanity and vexation of spirit.

The fool folds his hands together and eats his own flesh.

Better is a handful of tranquility than two handfuls of meaningless success.

I continued my investigations and discovered another form of vapor beneath the sun. This is the predicament of the man who is completely alone in the world, who has neither son nor brother; yet there is no limit to his labors; his lust for wealth is insatiable. Does he ever ask himself: "For whom do I toil? For whom do I deny myself the comforts which I can well afford?" This, too, is vapor. It is a bad situation to be in. Two are better than one; their joint efforts will be well rewarded. If one fails, the other will lift him up; unfortunate, indeed, is he who falls and has no one to pick him up. Two who lie down to sleep together keep warm; but how may one sleeping by himself hope to keep warm? One may be overpowered where two will triumph; a cord of three strands cannot be pulled apart quickly.

A poor but wise young man is better than an old but foolish king who is incapable of making sound decisions. From the prison-house he went forth to rule, even though he had been born in humble surroundings. I saw all the people who were walking about under the sun with the second young man who shall rise in his stead. The masses of people who helped bring them to power seemed to be infinite in number; yet a later generation will not be happy with their government; this, too, is vapor and a striving after wind.

Better is a handful with quietness than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit.

Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun. There is one alone, and there is not a second; yes, he has neither child nor brother: yet is there no end of all his labor, neither is his eye satisfied with riches, neither says he, "For whom do I labor and bereave my soul of good?" This is also vanity, yes, it is a sore travail. Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat; but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

Better is a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king who will no more be admonished. For out of prison he comes to reign; whereas also he who is born in his kingdom becomes poor. I considered all the living who walk under the sun, with the second child who shall stand up in his stead. There is no end of all the people, even of all who have been before them; they also who come after shall not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and vexation of spirit.

Be careful of your actions when you go to the house of God; to listen to the instruction given there is more worthwhile than the offering of sacrifices by fools, who have no understanding of the nature or will of God. Do not speak out impetuously; do not be hasty in speaking before God; for God is in the heavens and you are upon earth; therefore let your words be few.

Too much business causes one to have nightmares and too many words is the mark of the fool.

When you make a promise to God, do not delay its fulfillment, for God dislikes insincerity; whatever you promise Him to do, do. It is better not to promise than to promise and not do. Do not permit your mouth to get you into trouble; do not tell the charity collector that your charity pledge was not meant to be taken seriously. Why provoke the anger of God by your words? Why destroy whatever good reputation you may now have? Rather than become involved in a multiplicity of delusions and vain ambitions and other worldly matters, strive to fear God.

If you see that the poor in the land are oppressed and that justice and righteousness have been stealthily removed, do not be surprised at this state of affairs; for he who has power is being watched by one more powerful than he; and above them both are others even more powerful.

Keep your foot when you go to the house of God and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with your mouth and let not your heart be hasty to utter anything before God; for God is in heaven, and you upon earth, therefore let your words be few.

For a dream comes through the multitude of business, and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words.

When you vow a vow to God, defer not to pay it, for he has no pleasure in fools: pay that which you have vowed. Better is it that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. Suffer not your mouth to cause your flesh to sin, neither say before the angel that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands? For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also diverse vanities: but fear you God.

If you see the oppression of the poor and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter, for he who is higher than the highest regards, and there be higher than they.

Those things in the world which seem to be superfluous have a definite place in the world plan; even a king needs to make himself the servant of his own field. Those who love money cannot satisfy their appetites by eating it; those whose wealth consists of non-edible goods have a fortune which is absolutely worthless. Where there is much good food to eat, there are also many eaters; and what advantage has he who owns it except the pleasure of looking at it? Pleasant is the sleep of the laborer, whether he has eaten little or much; but the superabundance of the rich man does not afford him a restful slumber.

I have seen a deadly evil under the sun: wealth which brings ruin to him to whom it has been entrusted. The wealth is lost in a corrupt business deal and the man is left penniless, unable to support his family. Just as one comes naked from the womb of his mother, in like condition does he set forth on the return journey; he carries nothing with him which he has acquired through his earthly labors. This, too, is a deadly evil: He leaves with exactly what he had when he arrived; how profitless and fruitless have been his labors.

All his life man eats in darkness and is greatly troubled by anxiety and frustration.

It is my opinion that what is best for a man is to eat and to drink and to get what satisfaction he can out of all his labor that he labors under the sun; for this is his earthly lot, whatever be the number of days of life that

Moreover the profit of the earth is for all, the king himself is served by the field. He who loves silver shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he who loves abundance with increase: this is also vanity. When goods increase, they are increased who eat them, and what good is there to the owners thereof saving the beholding of them with their eyes? The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much, but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep.

There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt. But those riches perish by evil travail: and he begets a son, and there is nothing in his hand. As he came forth from his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came and shall take nothing of his labor which he may carry away in his hand. And this also is a sore evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go: and what profit has he who has labored for the wind?

All his days also he eats in darkness, and he has much sorrow and wrath with his sickness.

Behold that which I have seen: It is good and comely for one to eat and to drink and to enjoy the good of all his labor that he takes under the sun all the days of his life, which

God has apportioned to him. And, as for him to whom God gives money and property and the ability to be sustained by them and who accepts his lot and is happy in his work, such a one has received a special gift from God. He does not give much thought to the brevity of life, because God keeps him busy doing those things which bring him pleasure and satisfaction.

There is an evil situation which I see under the sun, an evil situation which one encounters very often. This is the predicament of a man to whom God has given riches and property and honor and whose every material want is satisfied; and God does not permit him to enjoy his good fortune; but a man with whom he has nothing in common will enjoy it; this is vapor and a disastrous affliction.

If a man begets a hundred children and lives many years and yet is never satisfied with what he has and, in addition, does not have a decent burial, I declare that an aborted fetus is better off than he. For it comes with the mist and departs with the darkness and in the darkness its remembrance is swallowed up. It never really comes to life. Is not the lot of the fetus better than that of the discontented rich man? If one live a thousand years twice over—and does not enjoy living? ... Does not everyone and everything eventually reach the same destination?

All the discontented rich man's labors are for his mouth; and yet his appetite is never satisfied. What advantage does a

God gives him: for it is his portion. Every man also to whom God has given riches and wealth and has given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labor: this is the gift of God. For he shall not much remember the days of his life, because God answers him in the joy of his heart.

There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men: A man to whom God has given riches, wealth, and honor, so that he wants nothing for his soul of all that he desires, yet God gives him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eats it: this is vanity, and it is an evil disease.

If a man beget a hundred children, and live many years, so that the days of his years be many, and his soul be not filled with good, and also that he have no burial: I say that an untimely birth is better than he. For he comes in with vanity and departs in darkness, and his name shall be covered with darkness. Moreover he has not seen the sun nor known anything: this has more rest than the other. Yes, though he live a thousand years twice-told, yet has he seen no good: do not all go to one place?

All the labor of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled. For what has the wise more than the fool? What has the poor who knows to walk before the living? Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire: this is also vanity and vexation of spirit.

discontented rich man, even though he be worldly-wise, have over a rich fool or over a poor man who has learned how to cope with his lot? It is better to be satisfied with what one has than to strive to satiate one's appetite, which is a vapor and a grasping at the wind.

The nature and fate of man were determined long ago; and man lacks the power to contend with the One Who is mightier than he. The many attempts to prove that this is not so have produced only worthless confusion. What possible advantage can man obtain from refusing to face the truth? No mortal really knows whether man receives any benefit from the experience of living through the days of his fleeting life, days which are as insubstantial as a shadow; no one can tell anyone what will happen under the sun after he is gone.

A good name is more valuable than precious oil; the day of death is better than the day when one was born.

It is better to go to a house of mourning than to a banquet, since death is the final destination of all and the living should keep this always in mind. Righteous indignation is better than meaningless laughter; when the face is sad, the heart is good. The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning; the mind of the fool is in the house of mirth. He who listens to the rebuke of the wise will be better off than he who listens to the singing of fools. As the crackling of burning twigs under a boiling pot is the meaningless laughter of a fool.

That which has been is named already, and it is known that it is man; neither may he contend with him who is mightier than he. Seeing there be many things that increase vanity, how is man the better? For who knows what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spends as a shadow? For who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?

A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of one's birth.

It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to his heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than for a man to hear the song of fools. For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool: this also is vanity.

Fraudulent dealings make fools of the wise;
and a bribe corrupts the mind.

The end of a matter is better than its beginning; better is patience of spirit than haughtiness of spirit. Do not allow yourself to get so angry that you lose your self-control, for that kind of anger is the mark of the fool. Do not say: "How is it that the olden times were better than the present?" A wise person will never make such a remark.

The wise man who lives on inherited wealth is better off than any other earthly being. He is protected by both his wisdom and his wealth. The advantage of having great wisdom is that it continually invigorates those who possess it. Consider the way of God: Who is able to straighten out that which He has made crooked? Enjoy a period of prosperity while it lasts and, in the time of adversity, consider the way of God; God causes these inexplicable opposites to exist in order that man may realize his ignorance of ultimate verities.

It seems fruitless to me to discuss why a completely righteous person dies young, while a completely evil person lives beyond the normal span of years. Be not overly righteous nor overly cunning, unless you want others to avoid associating with you. Do not concern yourself too much with worldly affairs*; do not play the fool; why should you die before your time? The best way to live is to interest oneself in spiritual concerns but also to give a proper place to material concerns; he who truly fears God will not

Surely oppression makes a wise man mad,
and a gift destroys the heart.

Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof, and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. Be not hasty in your spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools. Say not, "What is the cause that the former days were better than these?", for you do not inquire wisely concerning this.

Wisdom is good with an inheritance, and by it there is profit to those who see the sun. For wisdom is a defense, and money is a defense, but the excellency of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to those who have it. Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight which he has made crooked? In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also has set the one over against the other to the end that man should find nothing after him.

All things have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his wickedness. Be not righteous overmuch, neither make yourself over-wise: Why should you destroy yourself? Be not overmuch wicked, neither be foolish: Why should you die before your time? It is good that you should take hold of this, yes, also from this withdraw not your hand, for he who fears God shall come forth from them all.

allow either the one concern or the other to become his master.

* Lit: "Do not be overly wicked"

Wisdom gives more protection to a wise man than ten city magistrates.

There is no one on earth so perfect that he always does the right thing and never does anything wrong. Do not take to heart everything people say about you, or else you will hear your own servant curse you. You know that there have been many times when you have cursed others.

I have attempted to approach all this with wisdom; I said to myself, "I must think clearly"; and yet I feel that I am as far away as ever from the ultimate truth. That which happened long ago is completely gone and that which will be is buried in mystery. Who can hope to uncover either the past or the future? My mind has sought in every possible way to understand the logic back of providential rewards and punishments and to comprehend the basic nature of human wickedness, human stupidity and insane folly.

I have discovered that a man's relationship with a wife can be more bitter than the pangs of death, when the woman makes up her mind to ensnare the male and to get him in her clutches; one who is favored by God will escape from her but he who makes the wrong move will be entrapped.

I have tried very hard to find consistency of thought or conduct in the various individuals

Wisdom strengthens the wise more than ten mighty men who are in the city.

For there is not a just man upon earth who does good and sins not. Also take no heed to all words that are spoken, lest you hear your servant curse you. For oftentimes also your own heart knows that you yourself likewise have cursed others.

All this have I proved by wisdom: I said, "I will be wise"; but it was far from me. That which is far off and exceeding deep, who can find it out? I applied my heart to know and to search, and to seek out wisdom and the reason of things, and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness.

And I find more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets and her hands as bands; whoso pleases God shall escape from her, but the sinner shall be taken by her.

Behold, this have I found, says the Preacher, counting one by one to find out the account, which yet my soul seeks but I find not: One man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found. See, this only have I found, that God has made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions.

whom I have known. Despite all my efforts, I have been unable to find more than one man in a thousand whose thoughts and actions are consistent; and among women consistency in thought and action is completely nonexistent. I discerned that God has made this one man in a thousand a straight-thinking person, while the other nine hundred ninety-nine go rummaging for the truth in the most fantastic ways.

Who besides the wise can determine the real meaning of a matter? Wisdom brightens the face and softens the inflexibility of the arrogant. I say: Obey the laws of the ruler because of your sworn oath of allegiance. Do not depart from the presence of the king in a disrespectful manner; do not disagree with him persistently; for whatever he wants to do, he can do. The will of the ruler must prevail. Who dares say to him: "What are you doing?" He who obeys the law will not get into difficulty; the actions of the wise man are based on his knowledgeable calculation of the appropriate time and the appropriate law. There is an appropriate time and an appropriate law for every matter; but the average man is too empty-headed to comprehend this. He is intellectually incapable of calculating when a predictable event will take place. Even after it has occurred, he cannot understand how and why it happened.

Man does not have the power to imprison the wind or to control the day of death or to choose not to fight. (Nor will wickedness deliver the wicked in time of danger.) I

Who is as the wise man? and who knows the interpretation of a thing? A man's wisdom makes his face to shine, and the boldness of his face shall be changed. I counsel you to keep the king's commandment, and that in regard of the oath of God. Be not hasty to go out of his sight; stand not in an evil thing; for he does whatsoever pleases him. Where the word of a king is, there is power; and who may say to him, "What do you do?" Who keeps the commandment shall feel no evil thing, and a wise man's heart discerns both time and judgment. Because to every purpose there is time and judgment, therefore the misery of man is great upon him. For he knows not that which shall be: for who can tell him when it shall be?

There is no man who has power over the spirit to retain the spirit, neither has he power in the day of death; and there is no discharge in that war; neither shall wickedness deliver

considered all this and pondered over everything which happens under the sun: how, at times, one man has the ability to exercise harmful control over another. Indeed, I have seen the wicked buried with honor and their families have continued to thrive while, at the same time, the righteous have died without issue and have been forgotten by the city for whose good they labored; this, too, is vapor.

Because the penalty for committing a crime is not exacted speedily, the minds of men are filled with many schemes for circumventing the law. A wrongdoer can commit a hundred crimes and still live to a very old age. (But I also know that it will be well with those who have feared God and led righteous lives, and it will not be well with the wicked who will not live to a very old age and will pass away like a shadow, because they have not feared God.) There is a cloudy situation upon the earth: There are righteous people who are treated as though they are wicked and there are wicked people who are treated as though they are righteous; I say that this, too, is vapor.

So I think that the best attitude to take is to regard the world with amusement, and that there is nothing better for man under the sun than to eat and to drink and to amuse himself; this attitude will lighten his labor for whatever number of years God has given him under the sun.

When I made up my mind to find wisdom and to understand what is going on in the world—and I devoted myself to this task day and

those who are given to it. All this have I seen and applied my heart to every work that is done under the sun: There is a time wherein one man rules over another to his own hurt. And so I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done: this is also vanity.

Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. Though a sinner do evil a hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with those who fear God, who fear before him. But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow, because he fears not before God. There is a vanity which is done upon the earth, that there be just men to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous: I said that this also is vanity.

Then I commended mirth, because a man has no better thing under the sun than to eat and to drink and to be merry, for that shall abide with him, of his labor, the days of his life which God gives him under the sun.

When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth (for also there is who neither day nor

night—and to determine whether God’s providence is concerned with all this, I concluded that man is able to understand nothing of what goes on under the sun; even though he study and search with all his strength, he will find out nothing; even if the wisest of the wise makes the attempt, he will not succeed. After examining carefully all the available evidence, I decided that the righteous and the wise and everything they do are controlled by God; whether for their benefit or for their hurt, no one knows, for a heavy mist beclouds this matter. The same fate awaits everyone: the righteous, the wicked; the pure, the impure; he who offers sacrifice and he who does not offer sacrifice; it makes no difference whether one is saint or sinner, whether he swears falsely or truly. Nothing that happens under the sun is more pernicious than that the same fate awaits everyone; this thought fills mankind with the corrupting notion that life is merely a frenzied madness, ending in death. However, while there is life, there is hope; a live dog is better off than a dead lion. The living know that they are going to die; the dead know nothing at all; they no longer hope for a Heavenly reward; they are gone and forgotten. Their loves, their hates, their jealousies are ended; never again will they share in anything that happens under the sun.

Go, banquet well and often; drink to your heart’s content; for this is the way, it appears, that God wants you to live. Let your clothes be festive at all times; never appear in public without perfumed oil in your hair. Enjoy life with the woman you love during all your days

night sees sleep with his eyes), then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labor to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yes, farther, though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it. For all this I considered in my heart even to declare all this: that the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God: no man knows either love or hatred by all that is before them. All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked, to the good and to the clean and to the unclean, to him who sacrifices and to him who sacrifices not. As is the good, so is the sinner; and he who swears as he who fears an oath. This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event to all; yes, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead. For to him who is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they shall die, but the dead know not anything, neither have they anymore a reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love and their hatred and their envy is now perished, neither have they anymore a portion forever in anything that is done under the sun.

Go your way, eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God now accepts your works. Let your garments be always white, and let your head lack no ointment. Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of the life of your vanity

of hollow existence, which He has granted you under the sun. This is your lot in life and the sum total of what you will be able to achieve under the sun.

Whatever you are required to do, do effectively; for neither physical labor nor mathematical skill nor common sense nor learning will be required in the hole toward which you are travelling.

I meditated upon the fact that, under the sun, the race is not always won by the swift nor wars by the brave nor do the wise always have enough to eat nor are the intelligent always wealthy nor are those who have knowledge always treated well; time and chance determine the fate of all mankind. No man knows the date of his death; like fish entangled in an escape-proof net and like birds caught in a trap, mankind is hemmed in, as each mortal awaits the hapless day that will come surely and without warning.

I witnessed an incident under the sun in which, it seemed to me, wisdom was employed in a very significant manner. There was a little city with a small population. A great king came and besieged it. He built huge siege towers before its walls. And there was found in that city a poor wise man and, by his wisdom, he saved it. And what that poor man did for the city is now forgotten. As a result of this incident, I noted: Wisdom triumphed over brute strength; and yet the wisdom of the poor man is despised and his deeds are not extolled.

which he has given you under the sun, all the days of your vanity: for that is your portion in this life and in your labor which you take under the sun.

Whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work nor device nor knowledge nor wisdom in the grave whither you go.

I returned and saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill, but time and chance happens to them all. For man also knows not his time: As the fishes that are taken in an evil net and as the birds that are caught in the snare, so are the sons of men snared in an evil time when it falls suddenly upon them.

This wisdom have I seen also under the sun, and it seemed great to me: There was a little city and few men within it, and there came a great king against it and besieged it and built great bulwarks against it. Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city, yet no man remembered that same poor man. Then said I, "Wisdom is better than strength, nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised and his words are not heard."

The words of the wise are listened to quietly, in contrast to the way in which the ruler shouts among his buffoons.

Wisdom can accomplish more lasting good than weapons of war; but one very powerful fool can destroy the work of many less powerful wise men.

As dead flies make the perfumer's ointment stink, so a little foolish behavior may undo a lifelong reputation for good judgment.

The instinctive reactions of the wise are sound; the instinctive reactions of the fool are stupid.

In everything that a fool does he displays his ignorance; by his deeds he tells the world that he is a fool.

If the ruler gets angry at you, do not become panicky; a calm demeanor can soften the ruler's reaction to very disastrous mistakes.

There is an evil I have seen under the sun, a mistake that rulers commit unintentionally: Fools are placed in many important positions, while capable men are given unimportant posts. I have seen knaves riding on horses and princely men trudging along like servants.

He who sets a trap may fall therein; he who breaks into another's property may be bitten by a poisonous snake. He who digs out rocks

The words of wise men are heard in quiet more than the cry of him who rules among fools.

Wisdom is better than weapons of war; but one sinner destroys much good.

Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savor; so does a little folly him who is in reputation for wisdom and honor.

A wise man's heart is at his right hand, but a fool's heart at his left.

Yes also, when he who is a fool walks by the way, his wisdom fails him, and he says to everyone that he is a fool.

If the spirit of the ruler rise up against you, leave not your place, for yielding pacifies great offences.

There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, as an error which proceeds from the ruler: Folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in low place. I have seen servants upon horses and princes walking as servants upon the earth.

He who digs a pit shall fall into it; and who breaks a hedge, a serpent shall bite him. Who removes stones shall be hurt therewith;

may hurt himself; he who chops up wood may put himself in jeopardy.

If an iron tool is blunt because it has not been properly sharpened and, consequently, one must employ greater strength in using it, he who is wisest will have the greatest success.

If a snake bites without having been charmed, there is no advantage in being a snake charmer.

The words of the wise are received graciously; the lips of the fool destroy him. He begins his speech with nonsense and ends his speech with evil madness. The fool talks big, even though mankind knows nothing of the future nor can anyone even surmise what the future may hold in store for him.

The fool is always tired because he does everything the hard way.

Woe unto the land whose ruler is a youth and whose governors banquet early in the day. Fortunate is the land whose ruler is of noble birth and whose governors banquet at the proper time, with dignity and temperately. Because of human indolence, houses fall down; because of human neglect, roofs leak.

If you want to have fun, plan a party; if you want it to be a lively, happy party, bring along a bottle; if you have the money, you can do anything you want.

and he who cleaves wood shall be endangered thereby.

If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength; but wisdom is profitable to direct.

Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment; and a babbler is no better.

The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious; but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself. The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness, and the end of his talk is mischievous madness. A fool also is full of words. A man cannot tell what shall be; and what shall be after him, who can tell him?

The labor of the foolish wearies every one of them, because he knows not how to go to the city.

Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child and your princes eat in the morning! Blessed are you, O land, when your king is the son of nobles and your princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness! By much slothfulness the building decays, and through idleness of the hands the house drops through.

A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes merry, but money answers all things.

Do not rail at the government, even in your thoughts; do not curse the rich, even in the privacy of your home; for there is a special bird that carries your voice, a special bird that reports everything you say.

Ship your products to other countries; this is an excellent long-term business enterprise. Invest your money in seven to eight different commercial ventures; you cannot foretell which of them may meet with some unanticipated misfortune.

When the clouds are filled with rain, they pour it upon the earth; whether a tree falls in the south or in the north, wherever it falls, there it lies.

He who watches the wind will not sow; he who gazes at the clouds will not reap.

Just as we do not know exactly what life is or how the bones of a baby are formed in the impregnated womb, so we have no real comprehension of the doings of God, the Creator of every existing thing.

In the morning of life, sow your seed; in the evening of life, let not your hands be idle; no one really knows whether one time of life is more important than the other; no one really knows whether one time of life is as good as the other. The warmth of life is delicious; it is good when the eyes are able to behold the rays of the sun. No matter how long a man lives, let him try to get satisfaction out of every moment of life; let him be continually

Curse not the king, no, not in your thought, and curse not the rich in your bedchamber, for a bird of the air shall carry the voice and that which has wings shall tell the matter.

Cast your bread upon the waters, for you shall find it after many days. Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for you know not what evil shall be upon the earth.

If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth; and if the tree fall toward the south or toward the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it shall be.

He who observes the wind shall not sow, and he who regards the clouds shall not reap.

As you know not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child, even so you know not the works of God who makes all.

In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening withhold not your hand, for you know not whether shall prosper either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good. Truly the light is sweet and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun, but if a man live many years and rejoice in them all, yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many. All that comes is vanity.

Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your

mindful that the darkness of the grave is endless, that, after life, there is nothing.

Rejoice, young man, in your youth; let your heart be gay in life's most carefree days; do as you wish; go wherever your eyes bid you go (and know that for all this God will hold you accountable). May unhappiness be absent from your thoughts; may nothing evil afflict your body; for childhood and youth pass by so quickly. Bless your Creator in the days of your youth, before the ominous days begin, before the years come when you will be tempted to say that life has lost all zest.

*Before the sun, moon, and stars darken,
and the clouds return after rain;*

*Before the watchmen tremble,
soldiers stand no more erect,
the millstones stop grinding for
lack of workers;*

*The lattices of the windows are closed,
the doors to the street are blocked;*

*The noise of the millstone is not heard,
and at times he is startled by a chirp ,
at other times unmoved by a chorale.*

*When he is afraid to climb a hill;
walks the street easily frightened.*

*His hair turns as white as the almond blossom;
he drags like a broken grasshopper;
all sexual desire is gone.*

*His journey to the grave has begun;
the weepers route out his funeral.*

*Before the silver cord is snapped,
the golden bowl is crushed,
the pitcher by the well is broken,
the wheel above the well is
shattered:*

youth, and walk in the ways of your heart and in the sight of your eyes; but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from your heart and put away evil from your flesh, for childhood and youth are vanity. Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, while the evil days come not nor the years draw nigh when you shall say, "I have no pleasure in them."

While the sun or the light or the moon or the stars be not darkened,

nor the clouds return after the rain;

In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble,

and the strong men shall bow themselves,

and the grinders cease because they are few;

And those that look out of the windows be darkened,

and the doors shall be shut in the streets;

*When the sound of the grinding is low,
and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird,*

and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low.

Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high,

and fears shall be in the way;

*And the almond tree shall flourish,
and the grasshopper shall be a burden,
and desire shall fail:*

*Because man goeth to his long home,
and the mourners go about the streets.*

*The mud is mixed again with earth;
the life returns to the Power Which
gave it.*

Vapor of vapors, everything is vapor.

Koheles was a very wise man. He taught his people knowledge; he considered and examined everything; he composed many proverbs. Koheles tried to discover the meaning of everything; he was an able expounder of the truth, as he understood it. The words of the wise are like goads and, when the head of a convocation of sages makes known the findings of the convocation, his words are like driven nails. But be careful, my son; there is no limit to the kinds of things you will find written in books; spending too much time on what is written in books can become downright tiresome.

After considering everything that Koheles has to say, one must still conclude that the traditional way is the best way: Fear God; keep His commandments; man has no other choice. Ultimately God may make known the meaning of everything which we do not now understand; whether that will be good or bad, only time will tell.

*Or ever the silver cord be loosed,
or the golden bowl be broken,
or the pitcher be broken at the fountain,
or the wheel broken at the cistern:*

*Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was,
and the spirit shall return unto God who
gave it.*

Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, all is vanity.

And moreover, because the Preacher was wise he still taught the people knowledge; yes, he gave good heed and sought out and set in order many proverbs. The Preacher sought to find out acceptable words, and that which was written was upright, even words of truth. The words of the wise are as goads and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd. And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man; for God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.

David Max Eichhorn: “In order to convey to the reader a reasonably-accurate reproduction of the thoughts and ideas that were on the mind of the original writer, a translation must meet exacting intellectual as well as linguistic standards. The meanings of many words are fraught with implications and nuances; unless the translator is able to capture them in some measure, the reader will get an imperfect reproduction of the original writer’s message. This challenge to the translator is quite marked in the Book of Koheles, which is written in a cryptic Hebrew not typical of the Bible. This translation is an attempt to mirror the *thoughts* of Koheles without doing violence to his words. The original writer might have disapproved of the way some of his teachings are being interpreted in this translation; on the other hand, there is also a good possibility that he would have dismissed with a scornful grin the ‘objective’ translations that have given him the appearance of being irrational, sensual, with some quotable *bon mots* but a philosophy so confused and contradictory that some have not merited it serious consideration.” He extensively studied Talmud, Midrash, LXX, and related tannaim and amoraim.

Edward Lively, rector of Purleigh, and Regius Professor of Hebrew at Trinity College, Cambridge, was director of one of six “companies” of translators commissioned by King James the First of Great Britain and his archbishops newly to translate into English all the Hebrew and Greek Holy Scriptures. The project took seven years.

His company comprised John Richardson, Laurence Chaderton, Roger Andrewes, Thomas Harrison, Robert Spaulding, Andrew Bing, and Francis Dillingham, all fellows of Cambridge University, churchmen, and foremost scholars of semitic tongues. Together they also translated the first and second *Chronicles*, *Ezra*, *Nehemiah*, *Esther*, *Job*, the psalms, the proverbs, and the *Song of Songs*.

King James’s translators worked as “God’s secretaries”, crafting the most literal of any translation (according to the manuscripts and knowledge of their day), and as painters of the majestic, shaping measured periods “suitable to be read in churches”; to do so, they created an English unique for beauty, flexibility, and dignity that has impacted literature from their to our day.