

Ecclesiastes

<CHAPTER 1>

<Prologue 1:1-11>

<Life is perishable>

- 1 The thoughts of Qoheleth,¹ David's son, king in Jerusalem.
- 2 Everything is perishable² says Qoheleth,
Oh, most perishable of perishabilities,³ all is perishable.
- 3 What does a person gain⁴ from all one's labors that is of real value,
during which one labors under the sun?
- 4 One generation goes and another generation comes,
but the earth endures forever.⁵
- 5 The sun rises and it sets,
rushing breathlessly⁶ to the place from which it came.
- 6 The wind blows to the south,
and circles round to the north;
round and round,
and thus the cycle again resumes.
- 7 All streams flow into the sea,
yet the sea never overflows;
running back again to the place from which the streams flow,
and then they start all over.
- 8 All speech is (*or, all words are*) filled with weariness;
more than a person can express.
The eye is never satisfied with seeing,
nor does the ear have enough of hearing.
- 9 What has happened will happen again,
and what has been done⁷ is what will be done again.
There is nothing new under the sun (*or, in the world*).
- 10 There is no phenomenon of which it can be said,⁸
"Look! This is new!"
It has already existed (*or, occurred*),

1 Perhaps "the Assembler of the sayings" or "the philosopher" would be appropriate. The Reformers translated the word "Preacher". The word Qoheleth is a transliteration of the Hebrew word. It may be the nom de plume of the writer.

2 The Hebrew word *-w*(literally means "vapor, breath". The LXX uses the word *ματαιοτης* meaning emptiness, futility, frustration or transitoriness.

3 The Hebrew word is a superlative.

4 **2&5;b** is a commercial word for what is left after expenses are taken into account, thus the translation "gain that is of real value."

5 Jerome wrote: "What is more vain than this vanity: that the earth, which was made for humans stays -- but humans themselves, the lords of the earth suddenly dissolve into dust?"

6 Literally: "panting" or "is breathless."

7 I. e. human and divine action.

8 Many translators pose this as a question. It is a statement in Hebrew.

in a bygone age.
11 There is no memory of the past,
nor will there be any remembrance
of things that have not occurred as yet,⁹
for they will be forgotten by the future generations.

<QOHELETH'S SEARCH FOR ANSWERS>
<Qoheleth considers what is done on this earth 1:12-18>

12 I, Qoheleth was Israel's king in Jerusalem.¹⁰ 13 I dedicated my thoughts to studying and probing all that takes place under heaven, using rational means.¹¹ It is an unhappy¹² task that God has given humanity with which to keep busy. 14 I have seen everything that is done in this world;¹³ and behold, everything is perishable, like chasing (*or, tending, shepherding*) the wind.

15 What is twisted cannot be straightened,
you cannot count what is not there."¹⁴

16 I said to myself, "I have acquired great intellectual superiority over my predecessors in Jerusalem. My mind has absorbed great wisdom and knowledge." 17 So I determined to apply my mind to apprise wisdom and to perceive madness¹⁵ and foolishness. I also learned that even this is only chasing after (*or, tending, shepherding*) the wind.¹⁶

18 The more wisdom you have, the more grief;
and whoever increases knowledge increases sorrow.¹⁷

<CHAPTER 2>
<Testing pleasure 2:1-11>

1 I thought I would check out¹⁸ pleasure to discover if it is good:
but again, this also is perishable (*or, emptiness*).¹⁹
2 I discovered about laughter, "It is madness!"
And of merriment: "What does it accomplish?"
3 I tried to discover how to stimulate (*or, refresh*)²⁰ my body with wine ---

9 Literally: "will not be remembered like."

10 Rabbinic tradition describes Qoheleth as a professional sage and teacher since no reference to Qoheleth is found in the Davidic line.

11 MT: "by (or with) the wisdom."

12 Literally: "evil."

13 Literally: "under the sun."

14 MFT translates: "nor can you count up the defects in life."

15 Vulgate: "errors." This could be translated: "wisdom and perception, madness and..." The Hebrew word translated "madness" implies stupidity.

16 An apt translation might be: 'trying to shepherd the wind.'

17 The Hebrew word translated 'sorrow' can also be translated as 'pain.'

18 Literally: "consider with goodness."

19 Interestingly, many of the words in this section and elsewhere in Ecclesiastes are spelled as they were in Qumran.

20 +%/U/- so emended to read "stimulate" or "refresh." +/2- = "sustain."

but still have my mind conducting itself with wisdom ---
(*or, my heart behaving itself in wisdom*)
and how to grasp hold of folly
until I might discover whether it was good for mortals
to do under heaven during the limited number of days of life.

4 I multiplied my possessions,
I built houses and planted vineyards for myself;
5 I made myself gardens and parks,²¹
and in them I planted all kinds of fruit trees.
6 I constructed large reservoirs,
sufficient water to irrigate a forest of growing trees.²²
7 I bought male and female slaves,
and had slaves who were born in my house;²³
I also acquired large herds and flocks,
more than any who had preceded me in Jerusalem.
8 I also amassed for myself silver and gold,
from the wealth treasured by kings and provinces;²⁴
I possessed both male and female singers,
and a harem, the delight of any man.²⁵

9 Therefore I became great and amassed more wealth
than any of my predecessors in Jerusalem;
also my wisdom remained with me (*or, did not fail me*).

10 Whatever I saw I tested, denying myself no pleasure
but my true pleasure came from my labor
and this was my real reward.

11 Then I thought about all I had done
and the work I had done to accomplish it
and I concluded that all this was perishable (*or, transitory, futile*).
and like chasing after (*or, shepherding*) the wind,
and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

<Testing wisdom and folly 2:12 - 17>

12 Then I began to think about wisdom, madness and folly,

21 Hebrew: /b2\$95& possibly a Persian loan word. Literally: "paradise." LXX: παραδεισος.

22 Literally: "a forest of sprouting trees."

23 Literally: "children of the house."

24 "The prefects" would describe the sense of the word in ancient times.

25 The meaning of two Hebrew words is uncertain. LXX translates: "cup bearers, male and female. There are two possible Hebrew readings: 1. a kind of chest, or, 2. exquisite delights of the sons of man. NAB translates: "all human luxuries."

for what can (*or, will*) a person do who takes over the throne?
 The person who follows the king can only continue
 in what has been done previously. ²⁶
 13 Then I realized that wisdom has a lasting benefit ²⁷ over folly,
 just as light has a lasting benefit.
 14 The intelligent person sees where he is going,
 but the fool gropes in the darkness,
 yet I know that a single experience (*or, fate*) ²⁸
 will befall both the intelligent and the fool.
 15 Then I thought, "The fate that befalls the fool
 is destined for me;
 What then is the lasting benefit for me?"
 I thought, "This is all perishable (*or, transitory*). ²⁹
 16 There is no abiding memory of the wise or for the foolish.
 In the future all will be forgotten,"
 also, the wise die, just as do the fools.

17 Everything that happens on the earth is distressing. I have despaired of human life. ³⁰ It is impossible to understand, like tending (*or, shepherding*) the wind. This is perishable (*or, transitory*).

<Is toil worthwhile 2:18 - 23>

18 I also came to despise my having labored and having accomplished so much. What I have accomplished I know will be left for my successor. 19 And, who knows if that successor will be wise or foolish? Despite this my successor will own everything ³¹ I worked for. This also is perishable (*or, a frustrating situation*). 20 As a result my thoughts turned to despair (*or, became depressed*) ³² and I regretted my having labored so hard, 21 for persons who make a fortune through wisdom, knowledge and skill must leave all to be enjoyed by another who did not work for it. This also is perishable (*or, emptiness*) and a great misfortune. 22 What do mortals gain ³³ from all the toil and strain of their labors? 23 For life is filled with pain and toil. It brings nothing but heartache each day and worry each night. ³⁴ There is no rest. This is also perishable (*or, emptiness*).

<Enjoy life 2:24 - 26>

24 The best that we can do as mortals is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in our toil. This I

26 Hebrew difficult and unclear. Surely: a person who inherits the throne should follow the example of the previous ruler.

27 Hebrew: 0&9;b,S = "there is a lasting benefit."

28 The Hebrew word can mean "accident, chance, fortune."

29 Difficult text because two different verbs have a common object.

30 Literally: "it was evil to me."

31 Literally: "have dominion over."

32 Usually translated: "remorse, give up, despair."

33 Literally: "for what is to a person."

34 This could be translated: "During his days his occupation is painful and vexing."

realized is what God intends for us; ³⁵ 25 for without God, ³⁶ who can eat or who can find enjoyment. ³⁷ 26 God provides wisdom, knowledge and enjoyment to those who please him, but to the evil doers he gives the task of amassing wealth only to turn it over to the one who pleases God. This also is perishable (*or, emptiness*) and like chasing (*or, shepherding*) the wind. ³⁸

<CHAPTER 3>
<GOD APPOINTS A TIME FOR EVERYTHING>
<A time for everything 3:1 - 8>

- 1 There is an appointed time ³⁹
for every activity (*or, experience*) ⁴⁰ under heaven: ⁴¹
- 2 a time to give birth, and a time to die;
a time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted;
- 3 a time to kill and a time to heal; ⁴²
a time to dismantle and a time to build up;
- 4 a time to weep and a time to laugh;
a time to wail and a time to dance.
- 5 A time to throw away stones and a time to gather them; ⁴³
a time to embrace and a time to shun embracing;
- 6 a time to search and a time to give up searching (*or, recognize loss*);
a time to keep and a time to discard;
- 7 a time to tear and a time to mend;
a time to be silent and a time to speak;
- 8 a time to love and a time to hate;
a time for war and a time for peace. ⁴⁴

- 9 What value have (*or, what is gained for*) the workers for their labor?

35 Hebrew text difficult. The best Hebrew Manuscripts & LXX: "It is not good on man's part that he should eat." RSV & many other translations rely on an emendation which is generally accepted by scholars.

36 So: LXX, Syriac. Hebrew: "apart from me."

37 Hebrew uncertain. LXX: "drink."

38 Several scholars feel this verse is a later addition to the Hebrew text.

39 The Hebrew word 'l' is generally translated as "season." The root word, however, means: "devise, plan" thus giving the concept of "to be fixed or appointed." Qoheleth is declaring that whatever occurs has been determined or fixed by God. Paul Voltz in *Hiob und Weisheit* translates: "For everything there is an inexorable law."

40 The root word is "matter" but in this form it means "pleasure, will, purpose."

41 NJV footnote: "I. e. all human experience is preordained by God. see v. 11." Some scholars feel this verse is a later addition.

42 A possible emendation: "a time for wrecking and a time for repairing."

43 Numerous attempts to explain this line have been presented in commentaries. The most recent, and most accepted at this time is that it is a euphemism based on the Midrash Qoheleth Robbek: time to cast away stones = a metaphor for sexual intercourse; to gather stones = a time to refrain from this action.

44 The Hebrew word implies not simply cessation of battle but describes a situation of total well-being.

<Reflecting on time 3:10 - 15> ⁴⁵

10 I have observed the business that God has given to people to be concerned about.

11 God has made everything appropriate ⁴⁶ for its time; also he has put an understanding of eternity into people's minds, but even so people cannot fully comprehend the extent of all God does.

12 I have come to realize that the only worthwhile thing for people is to live in such a manner that they can enjoy doing good during their life time; ¹³ moreover it is God's gift to people that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in everything they work for.

14 I have realized that everything God does endures forever;
nothing can be added to it,
not anything taken from it;
God has made it so in order that we should revere (*or, be in awe of*) him.

15 That whatever is taking place has already taken place (*or, continues to be*);
and whatever is to take place has already taken place;
and God seeks what has been pursued (*or, driven away, persecuted*). ⁴⁷

<Reflections on injustice 3:16 - 21>

16 Moreover, I have observed in this world that
in place of justice there is evil,
and in place of righteousness there is evil.
17 I said to myself, God will judge the righteous and the wicked. There is a properly appointed ⁴⁸ time for every activity and for every event. ⁴⁹ 18 I said to myself with regard to the people; that God is testing us to show us that we are not better than animals. ⁵⁰ 19 For the lot of people and the lot of animals is the same; just as one dies, so does the other. They both breathe in the same way, ⁵¹ and people have no advantage (*or, superiority*) ⁵² over the animals for everything is perishable (*or,*

45 Note: verses 10, 11, 12-13, 14 & 15 set forth the five conclusions Qoheleth draws from the doctrine he has stated in verses 1 - 9.

46 This Hebrew word is the most difficult in Ecclesiastes and is usually translated as "beautiful." Other possibilities are world, eternity or knowledge. The meaning of the word is questioned by scholars based on various possibilities. With different vowel points and division of the consonants into other words it can mean "an understanding of eternity in the human mind." NJV: in a footnote says: "He preoccupies man with the attempt to discover the time of future events."

47 So: LXX, Peshitta & Targums. The verb 5\$91 = to pursue or persecute. Literally: "God seeks that which is pursued." It is difficult to make sense of the Hebrew. Emendations have not been adequate. A possibility: "to hurry along" would be permissible in Hebrew but would be a rare usage. Another possible suggestion would be: "God requests that we pursue the hidden."

48 MT: "there is a time there."

49 A possible translation: "God set a time for every activity and action." Some scholars feel this verse is a later gloss.

50 This verse could be translated: "That God is making it clear to them that they may see that they -- they by themselves -- are animals."

51 I. e. life essence or life force.

52 The Hebrew word 9;b/ usually appears as a different word: 0b9;b which would normally be used. Perhaps this implies a narrower meaning of the possible advantage over animals, as if to say, all human beings and animals possess a similar spirit, therefore human beings don't have an advantage over animals.

transitory). ²⁰ Both go to one place. Both come from the dust, and both return to the dust. ²¹ How can anyone be assured that the human spirit rises upward while the spirit of the animals sinks down into the ground? ⁵³

<*Qoheleth's advice: enjoy life 3:22*>

²² So I determined that the best thing is that all people should enjoy their work, for that is their lot. ⁵⁴ Who can enable people to see what will happen later? ⁵⁵

CHAPTER 4

<*Some life issues 4:1 - 5:20*>

<*Theme 1: The powerless are oppressed 4:1 - 3*>

¹ In addition I observed the many oppressions that are continually perpetrated ⁵⁶ in this world. I also took notice of the anguished tears of the oppressed, with no one to comfort (*or, assist*) them. By contrast their oppressors had power: --- [and these had no one to comfort them]. ⁵⁷ ² I then thought that those who were already dead were more fortunate ⁵⁸ than those who are still alive; ³ but whoever has not yet come into being (*or, has not been born*), and has not witnessed wicked deeds that are being done in this world are even more fortunate.

<*Theme 2: Attitudes toward work 4:4 - 6*>

⁴ I also noticed that all the labor and the skill achieved by a worker which comes as the result of a person's rivalry ⁵⁹ with a neighbor. This also is perishable (*or, empty*) and like chasing (*or, shepherding*) the wind.

Fools fold their hands
and must consume their own flesh. ⁶⁰

⁶ One handful of quietness
is better than two fistfuls of labor
and chasing (*or shepherding*) the wind.

⁵³ LXX poses this as a question, as do most translators.

⁵⁴ Literally: "portion."

⁵⁵ I. e. after death.

⁵⁶ The Hebrew word has the concept of carrying on the oppression to the point of attaining a skill in doing so.

⁵⁷ The phrase in brackets is a possible dittography or some verbs have been dropped from the manuscripts. On the other hand, it's purpose may be for emphasis on the needs of the oppressed. As is found above, the reference is still to the oppressed. One possibility is that no one would assist them because of the power of their oppressors. It can surely be understood that those in power abused their privilege. The NEB translates the second "comfort" with the word "avenge" thus changing the meaning of the phrase.

⁵⁸ The basic idea of the Hebrew word is: "they are to be congratulated."

⁵⁹ The Hebrew word (!18 = rivalry, jealousy, envy or it can also mean zeal or passion. The rivalry causes industry and success which springs from competition between persons.

⁶⁰ I. e. reduce themselves to penury because they do not work. Some scholars feel this is a gloss.

<Theme 3: The value of companions 4:7 - 12>

7 Again, I saw emptiness (*or, futility*) within the world: 8 a solitary person who, with neither sons or brothers, yet continues amassing wealth and, never satisfied, continues to look for riches, yet never asks, "For whom do I labor⁶¹ and deprive myself of pleasure?" 9 Two are better than one, for thereby they have a good payment⁶² for their labor. 10 If one would fall, the other would lift up his companion; but woe to the solitary person for, upon falling, there is no one to give aid.⁶³ 11 In addition, if two lie together, they are warm; but how can one who is alone get warm? 12 And if someone were to attack a person who is alone: --- two could resist the attacker.

'A threefold cord is not easily broken.'⁶⁴

<Theme 4: Wisdom and politics 4:13 - 16>

13 A poor but wise youth is better off
than an old but foolish king,
who will no longer accept advice.⁶⁵

14 It could be possible that the youth, having been released from prison,⁶⁶ to gain the throne even though he was born in the kingdom. 15 I observed all those who are living⁶⁷ in the world, as well as the youthful successor (*or, the heir apparent*)⁶⁸ to the king. 16 There was an endless number of people; but he was over them all. Yet the later generations will not rejoice over him. Surely this also is perishable (*or, transitory*) and like chasing (*or, shepherding*) the wind.

<CHAPTER 5>

<The wise person and worship 5:1 - 7 [4:17 - 5:6H]>⁶⁹

1 [4:17H] Guard your demeanor⁷⁰ when you enter the house of God. Drawing near⁷¹ to be attentive is better than is a sacrifice⁷² offered by fools. They do not know how to keep from doing evil (*or, right from wrong*).⁷³

2 [5:1H] Do not speak rashly,
nor make hasty promises to God's presence,

61 Literally: "for whom am I amassing myself?"

62 Literally: "yield."

63 Literally: ""the one who falls, there is no second one to pick him up."

64 Without a doubt an ancient proverb.

65 JLC: "refusing to take advice has become second nature to him."

66 Some scholars consider his to be the womb. The Hebrew root word is "to bind." It would be possible that the youth was a political prisoner.

67 Another possible translation would be: "all of life."

68 MT: "the second."

69 The versification of the Hebrew text and the English text diverges here. Ecclesiastes 5:1-20 in the English versions represents 4:17-5:19 in the Hebrew text. Since the Vulgate follows the Hebrew versification this is reflected in the Roman Catholic translations which hold to the Vulgate versification. Throughout chapter 5 the Hebrew numbering will be in brackets.

70 NJV: "Do not be overeager to go..."

71 The implication of "to draw near" can mean to be near to God or near to listen. Possibly to draw near to God to respond to what God says is the concept of Qoheleth.

72 The Hebrew word (w' = "a whole burnt offering." Qoheleth does not attack the sacrificial system but its misuse. MT: literally: "is better than that fools should give sacrifice."

73 Literally: "they do not know how to do evil." Cf. Alex R. Gordon, An American Translation.

for God is in heaven and you are on earth;
because your words should be few
(*or, Don't promise more than you can fulfill*).

3 [2H] Just as dreams come with much brooding
(*or many cares, worries*);
so also a fool's voice will speak many words.
(*or, With many worries you have nightmares,
with many words you speak foolishness.*)

4 [3H] Whenever you make a vow (*or, solemn promise*)⁷⁴ to God do not postpone fulfilling⁷⁵ it
(*or, look for excuses not to be faithful*); for God is not pleased if a fool fails to fulfill a vow. Fulfill
your vow. 5 [4H] It is better not to make a vow (*or, solemn promise*) than to do so and not carry it out
(*or, fulfill, keep it*). 6 [5H] Do not let your speech cause you to sin, and do not declare (*or, confess*)
before God,⁷⁶ "It was a mistake." Why should God be made angry by your words,⁷⁷ and cause your
possessions to be destroyed?

7 [6H] When there are many dreams,
empty words increase;⁷⁸
(*or, In a multitude of dreams
there is futility and ruin
in a flood of words.*)⁷⁹
but are you in awe of God?

<Oppression and justice 5:8-9 [5:7-8H]>

8 [7H] If you witness that in an area (*or, region*)⁸⁰ the poor are oppressed and justice and
rights are violently denied (*or, suppressed*), do not be surprised since one high official is watched⁸¹
by someone higher⁸² and there are still higher officials over them.⁸³ 9 [8H] With all this the king has
the greatest advantage for he is in control of all the arable land. (*or, the profit of the land is among all
of them.*)⁸⁴

<Money cannot satisfy 5:10 - 12 [5:9-11H]>

10 [9H] A lover of money will never be satisfied that he has enough;

74 Literally: "vow a vow ."

75 Hebrew: "complete."

76 Hebrew unclear. LXX: "before God." The Hebrew word might mean "messenger," or "angel." Some scholars relate the translation "messenger" to Malachi 2:7, "the Lord of hosts." Other translators prefer "before God's priest."

77 Literally: "heart." This is sometimes a euphemism for "voice" or "words."

78 Hebrew uncertain. Literally: "in a multitude of dreams and emptiness and many words."

79 Some scholars feel this verse is a later addition.

80 A rare word borrowed from Aramaic.

81 Possibly "protected."

82 Literally: "higher than high."

83 I. e. describing the extent of corruption. A possible translation might be: "One big official protects another and even higher ones protect them."

84 Hebrew uncertain.

nor will the lover of wealth be satisfied with his income.
This is also futile!

11 [10H] When possessions increase,
the consumers⁸⁵ also increase;
so, to what advantage is the success of the owner,
beyond the appearance of wealth?⁸⁶

12 [11H] The sleep of the laborer⁸⁷ is sweet,
whether he has much or little to eat;
but the overabundance of the rich
keeps them awake the entire night.

<Money does not go with us in death 5:13 - 17 [5:12 - 16]>

13 [12H] I have observed a singular evil in this world!

Riches are hoarded to their owner's detriment,
14 [13H] and then those riches are lost in an unfortunate enterprise;⁸⁸
and if the person who had the wealth becomes a parent,
nothing will be left as an inheritance.⁸⁹

15 [14H] A child is born without possessions
and in the same manner departs this world at death
(*or, and everything that has been worked for must be left behind*).

16 [15H] This is also a grave evil:

for we must depart just as we came
and all our labor has gone to nought.⁹⁰

17 [16H] In addition, all our days are spent
surrounded by death and mourning,
being very angry, resentful⁹¹ and ill.

<Qoheleth's advice: Enjoy life 5:18 - 20 [5:17 - 19]>

18 [17H] Take note! The only thing I have found to be good and appropriate is to eat and drink
and find contentment in all the wealth for which we have labored under the sun, during this brief
span

85 The Hebrew word has the concept of "devouring" the resources, thus, those who live off the income.

86 The verse implies either more children, as does the TEV or more slaves and servants and more who act as parasites as JB interprets the verse.

87 The Hebrew word is closely related to the word for slave or servant. Early versions translate "slaves."

88 Literally: "an evil task."

89 Literally: "he has nothing in his hand."

90 Literally: "and what gain has he that he toiled for the wind."

91 So: LXX. Hebrew: "all his days also he eats in darkness." LXX probably presents the original text.