

Ecclesiastes 7:1-6

Introduction

There is a definite break between the content and style of the first six chapters and the seventh. While Koheleth (the preacher) continued to make his observations about “*life under the sun*,” he changed to the same format as the book of Proverbs did in chapter 10. While the first six chapters described themes the seventh moves quickly from thought to thought. Sometimes he speaks a wise thought (a proverb) or an observation and advice on how to deal with it. It is much less subject oriented than the previous chapters. We can outline the chapter:

1-10	A comparison of one thing that is better than another thing:	
:1	A Good Name than Precious Ointment	Day of Death than Day of Birth ;
:2-4	House of Mourning than House of Feasting	Sorrow than Laughter Mourning / Mirth
:5-7	Rebuke of Wise than Song of Fools	End of a Thing than its Beginning
:8-10	Patient in Spirit than Proud in Spirit.	Former Days <i>not Better</i> than These

7:11-29	Wisdom
11	Wisdom is Good with an Inheritance ;
12	Wisdom a Defense as Money a Defense
19	Wisdom Strengthens the Wise
23	All this I have Proved by Wisdom. I said, “ I will be Wise; ” But it was Far from Me
25	I Applied my Heart to Know, to Search and Seek out Wisdom and the Reason of Things,

The chapter stands alone. The previous section dealing wealth, possessions and money (**5:10-20; 6:1-12**) has been completed and is now left behind. The futility of placing too much emphasis on possessions and wealth has been thoroughly explored. So now he moved on to a new subject.

1. A good name

Hebrew parents generally gave names from their language that had a meaning. Names generally indicated “*a single decisive characteristic*,” of the child, “*an event or mood*” of the parents when the child was born or “*a statement about an individual*.”

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

Abram (exalted father) had his name changed by God to Abraham (father of a multitude) to more exactly describe him (**Gen 17:5-6**), and Sarai (my princess) to Sarah (a princess - of a multitude). Isaac (to laugh) may have been named for Abraham laughing, Sarah laughing or for the joy they felt when he was born.

*Then Abraham fell on his face and **laughed**, and said in his heart, “Shall a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?” 18 And Abraham said to God, “Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!” Gen 17:17-18*

*(Sarah was listening in the tent door which was behind him.) 11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age; and Sarah had passed the age of childbearing. 12 Therefore Sarah **laughed** within herself, saying, "After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" 13 And the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah **laugh**, saying, 'Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?' 14 Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son." 15 But Sarah denied it, saying, "I did not **laugh**," for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did **laugh**!"*

*And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac. 4 And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac being eight days old, as God had commanded him. 5 And Abraham was an hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born unto him. 6 And Sarah said, God hath made me to **laugh**, so that all that hear will **laugh** with me. 7 And she said, Who would have said unto Abraham, that Sarah should have given children suck? for I have borne him a son in his old age. Genesis 21:1-8*

God changed Jacob's name to Israel(God prevails)

And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed." Gen 32:28

Moses(to draw forth) because he was drawn out of the water(**Ex 2:10**). There have Moses changed Hoshea's name to Joshua, Jesus changed Simon to Peter. Parents have named their children in hope of what their children would grow into being, or events and circumstances at the time of their birth.

And Adam called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. Gen 3:20

And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, "For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed." Gen 4:25-26

And he called his name Noah, saying, "This one will comfort us concerning our work and the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord has cursed." Gen 5:29-30

And the first came out red. He was like a hairy garment all over; so they called his name Esau. 26 Afterward his brother came out, and his hand took hold of Esau's heel; so his name was called Jacob. Gen 25:25-26

And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed." Gen 32:28

But the good name discussed here is not based on the name given by the parents, over which no one has any control. This is the way the name we have is perceived based on our actions. Each person creates a reputation in the eyes of others. When our name is mentioned, what is the response of those who hear. If it is a response of respect and gratitude, it is a good name. If the response is one of distaste or unhappiness then it is not a good name. Which is the secondary meaning of the term "name." that they earn a good reputation. This leads to the second meaning of "reputation," "memory," and "renown." We begin to make a "name" for ourselves as soon as we are introduced to people. Our conduct, attitude, emotions and integrity are all assessed and attached to the feeling and attitude when our name is mentioned. A good name is a name generally stands for all that one has done with their life.

A name can confer sweetness, joy, peace, happiness and love as one ponders the memories shared with the one who holds it. A name can also confer emotions of bitterness, sadness, and even anger, if the person who was given that name has soiled his reputation through acts of unkindness or wickedness. Although it takes a lifetime of effort and toil to create such a name, it is worth every effort to do so. It is a wonderful possession to attain to. Much better than silver and gold which were shown to have no profit in the previous chapters. Hence the idea is that instead of getting someone's attention with a sweet smelling cologne or perfume, seek to have it in the heart. This is very similar to the idea Peter used when speaking to the wives. There is a cheap and easy way and there is a deeper spiritual way.

Do not let your adornment be merely outward — arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel — 4 rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and

quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. 1 Peter 3:3-5

is better than precious ointment,

The term “*better*” and the term “*precious*” come from the same Hebrew word. It is the general word for good. When it is used to describe two things that are contrasting with one another (better), one is good, and the other not as good. When used as an adjective (precious) it is used to describe things that are “*favorable*,” “*pleasing*” “*pleasant*,” and “*delightful*.”

tob “good; favorable; festive; pleasing; pleasant; well; better; right; best.” ... 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 #2896)

Hence this is a special kind of ointment or perfume. The basis of the word is an “*olive*” or “*olive oil*.”

shemen, “(olive) oil; olive; perfume; olive wood.” Cognates of this word appear in Ugaritic, Akkadian, Phoenician, Syriac, Arabic, and Aramaic. This word appears about 190 times and in all periods of biblical Hebrew.... *shemen* means olive “oil”: ... *shemen* is used as a preservative on shield-leather... and in baking... and as a medication ... This “oil” is burned for light ... Its many uses made olive oil a valuable trade item... *shemen* is “a kind of perfume,” or olive oil mixed with certain odors to make a perfume, in passages such as Song of Sol. 1:3: “Because of the savor of thy good ointments [NASB, “oils”] thy name is as ointment poured forth....” (Vine’s # 8081)

Most cultures see the saviors of spices and herbs in proper combinations and mixed with oils of varying thickness as a very precious commodity. Our own culture has also placed a high premium on them. Walk through a higher quality department store and marvel at the price on the tiny bottles of perfume. Solomon used the natural feeling of man toward pleasant odors to illustrate things of greater value. Precious oils have a long history with Israel, from the daily anointing to keep the skin moist up to the recipe for the holy anointing oil that God gave to Moses.

Moreover the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 23 “Also take for yourself quality spices — five hundred shekels of liquid myrrh, half as much sweet-smelling cinnamon (two hundred and fifty shekels), two hundred and fifty shekels of sweet-smelling cane, 24 five hundred shekels of cassia, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, and a hin of olive oil. 25 And you shall make from these a holy anointing oil, an ointment compounded according to the art of the perfumer. It shall be a holy anointing oil. Ex 30:23-26

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

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

The point of comparison is on the emotional and intellectual response to the fragrance. When we first smell an odor, it creates feelings of gladness and well-being. This is especially true when the person we already care for is wearing it. All of this is involved in the comparison. While an expensive perfume will leave a good initial impression, a good name will last a lifetime and beyond a lifetime.

The names of good men and women are recorded in both biblical and secular history. Today we place them on monuments and in granite and remember their birthdays. We all recognize therefore the truth of this verse. But do we live it ourselves? How important is a good name to us and how hard are we working to make ours a good name?

A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, Loving favor rather than silver and gold. Pr 22:1

Anyone who carefully considers this truth know it is true. The mere mention of some names is sweeter than any perfume or ointment no matter how costly.

I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. Gen 12:2

Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” Acts 4:12

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, 11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Phil 2:9-11

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

God here revealed something that is difficult to understand. The point of the comparison is easy to see. Just as a good name is better than precious ointment, the day of one's death is better than the day of their birth. But when we think carefully, the first part of the comparison is easy to see and understand, the second takes more time and thought. But it is a most logical conclusion once we accept the opening words of the book.

"Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher; "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." 3 What profit has a man from all his labor In which he toils under the sun? Eccl 1:2-3

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. Eccl 1:14-15

If we accept the above, then the most natural conclusion is that the sooner we can leave all that is temporary and futile and move to that which is permanent and established the better. As a matter of fact, our attitude toward this proverb will tell us a great deal about whether or not we have accepted the conclusions of the book. Paul spoke of this many years later after Jesus had brought "life and immortality to light by the gospel." (2Tim 1:10).

Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. 17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, 18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. 2 Cor 4:16-18

For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. 23 For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Phil 1:21-24

Ecclesiastes revealed the unvarnished truth about "life under the sun." It is so futile and empty, that God revealed that the day of our death is better than the day of our birth. Those "under the sun" have consistently forced God to intervene in punishment. From the curse to the flood, from the tower of Babel to Sodom and Gomorrah and from the ten plague in Egypt to the destruction of Jerusalem under Babylon and Rome, it is clear that God has found it necessary to make life very difficult for man. We always bring it upon ourselves, but although there are times in history when life is good, for the most part, life is harsh and difficult, and the day we leave is better than the day we entered. One of the Psalms, thought to be written by Moses captures this well:

For we have been consumed by Your anger, And by Your wrath we are terrified. 8 You have set our iniquities before You, Our secret sins in the light of Your countenance. 9 For all our days have passed away in Your wrath; We finish our years like a sigh. 10 The days of our lives are seventy years; And if by reason of strength they are eighty years, Yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; For it is soon cut off, and we fly away. 11 Who knows the power of Your anger? For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath. 12 So teach us to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom. Ps 90:7-12

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

All things come alike to all: One event happens to the righteous and the wicked; To the good, the clean, and the unclean; To him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As is the good, so is the sinner; He who takes an oath as he who fears an oath. 3 This is an evil in all that is done under the sun: that one thing happens to all. Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness is in their hearts

while they live, and after that they go to the dead. Eccl 9:2-4

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

7 Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, And the spirit will return to God who gave it. 8 "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "All is vanity." Eccl 12:7-8

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

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

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

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

Most of the time this term describes mourning and wailing accompanying death of a loved one. It was also used of the mourning among Jews after the decree was signed for their destruction (**Est. 4:3**), and Job's sorrow over all his afflictions (**Job 30:1**). Whenever a terrible calamity occurs, we mourn.

Death is the worst of all calamities, but loss of health, crushed dreams, or financial ruin can also lead to mourning. God has designed the curse to bring man into this state of mourning. For while we live "*under the sun*," we need mourning to give us wisdom. God therefore pronounced it "better" for a man to enter into a house of mourning.

When we "*pay our last respects*" at a funeral, we are fulfilling this verse. It is the central meaning of the verse in the context of it being the end of all men and the living taking it to heart. Yet there is a secondary application. It is also better to the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and others in their time of need.

Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world. James 1:27

Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35 for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; 36 I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' Matt 25:34-36

For in the broader sense of the term, a house of mourning is any home that has suffered tragedy! Immediately after that tragedy, those who are wise come to visit and stay to comfort and relieve.

Than to go to the house of feasting,

A house of feasting is a home where just the opposite of the above is occurring. The term "feast" is used of those joyous times when we "*eat, drink, and be merry.*"

Besides the common, expected use ... (e.g. Gen 9:21; Gen 24:14; Gen 30:38), there are sometimes special circumstances surrounding its use as well as special expressions which invite attention. "Eating, drinking, and rejoicing" is used with variations to describe the feasting associated with celebrations (1 Sam 30:16; 1 Kings 1:25). In 1 Kings 4:20 it describes conditions during Solomon's reign as being prosperous and peaceful, as though it were a perpetual celebration. It may express a heedless unconcern for one's soul as in Isa 22:13, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we may die" (cf. also Isa 56:12; Luke 12:19; Luke 17:26-29). ... Drink, banquet, feast. In Dan 1:5,8,16 and in Ezra 3:7 refers to that which is drunk, such as wine. Elsewhere it means a "banquet" or a "feast." It is used of a special meal prepared for honoured guests, as in Gen 19:3, in which Abraham hosts the angels (cf. also Gen 26:30 and 2 Sam 3:20). It is used also of wedding feasts such as Jacob's in Gen 29:22 and the seven day wedding feast of Samson in Judg 14:10-17. Anything that called for a celebration might be marked

by a feast..." (TDWOT # 4960)

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

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

And in that day the Lord God of hosts Called for weeping and for mourning, For baldness and for girding with sackcloth. 13 But instead, joy and gladness, Slaughtering oxen and killing sheep, Eating meat and drinking wine: "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!" 14 Then it was revealed in my hearing by the Lord of hosts, "Surely for this iniquity there will be no atonement for you, Even to your death," says the Lord God of hosts. Isa 22:12-14

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

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

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

cuwph- to cease, come to an end b) to make an end. (BDB #5486)

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

God did not create death to be ignored. He created it to be pondered and to be prepared for it. It is therefore better for us to enter into the house of mourning to remind us of where our own life will end. We need to gain a heart of wisdom, to number out days and to always be aware prepared.

The days of our lives are seventy years; And if by reason of strength they are eighty years, Yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; For it is soon cut off, and we fly away. 11 Who knows the power of Your anger? For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath. 12 So teach us to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom. Ps 90:10-12

It is good for us to see how easily one can be snatched away. When we see someone we knew lying in a casket, or speak to his loved ones about his death, it is impossible not to take it to heart. There is something about being in the home of another who has suffered a death in their family, or in attending a funeral that brings our own mortality into clearer focus.

Death is the great event that more clearly than anything else shows us that all is not right in this world, that all is vanity and a striving after wind. We cannot control it, but we can plan for it. We can take it to heart and be ready when it comes for us. It is the end of all men, and it will be our own end. It is better than the day of our birth and it is therefore where our hearts ought to be.

3. Sorrow is better than laughter,

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

And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; 4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love

of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. Rom 5:3-5

Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Cor 12:10

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. James 1:2-5

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

For by a sad countenance the heart is made better.

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

panim, “face.” This noun appears in biblical Hebrew about 2,100 times and in all periods, except when it occurs with the names of persons and places, it always appears in the plural. It is also attested in Ugaritic, Akkadian, Phoenician, Moabite, and Ethiopic. In its most basic meaning, this noun refers to the “face” of something. First, it refers to the “**face**” of a human being: ... In a more specific application, the word represents **the look on one's face**, or one's “**countenance**”:... (Vine's #6440)

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

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

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

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

Once again God gives a proverb that goes against the “common sense” of man. God proclaimed that because of the nature of “*life under the sun*” those who have true wisdom keep the meditations and thoughts of their heart in the house of mourning. One of the marks of the wise is set forth to be in their meditations which seldom stray far from the house of mourning. All who are strangers and pilgrims here find it easy to understand exactly what is under consideration here.

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 14 For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. 15 And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them. Heb 11:13-16

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

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there,

buy and sell, and make a profit"; 14 whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. 15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." 16 But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. 17 Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin. James 4:13-17

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

Death: "Life under the Sun" vs "the spirit returns to God who gave it		
Death "under the sun"	Death "spirit returns to God"	
The End	The Beginning	<u>Lk 16:22; 7:59</u>
Final(A Dead End)	A Time of Departure	<u>1Tim 4:6</u>
Return to Dust	Spirit Departs/Returns To God	<u>Jas 2:26; Ecc 12:7</u>
The End of all Association	Beginning of New Associations	<u>Phil 1:23</u>
The Loss of all that is Here.	The Gain of All that is to Come	<u>Phil 1:21</u>
A Bitter Curse	A Blessed Rest	<u>Rev 14:13</u>
A Departure - Leaving	A Departure: Arriving	<u>1Tim 4:6-7</u>
Finishing the Race -	End A Victory and Crown - Begin	<u>1Tim 4:7-86</u>
An Unfortunate Loss	Precious in the Sight of God	<u>Ps 116:5</u>
A Defeat	A Victory	<u>1Cor 15:57</u>
A Time to Leave Home	A Time to go Home	<u>Heb 11:10</u>
Losing Wealth	Gaining True Riches	<u>1 Tim 6:18-19</u>
Termination of Life	Termination of Earthly life	<u>Ecc12:1-7; 13-14</u>
Bereavement -Left Desolate	A Joyful and Happy Reunion	<u>Lk 16:22; Gen 25:8</u>

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

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

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

God's verdict is that one of the marks of a fool by which they can be identified and/or identify themselves centers on where their heart dwells. Those who think often of death and mourning and prepare are the wise. Those who refuse to think about death and only want to party and enjoy life are fools. When we don't want to think about it, and only seek to dwell only in the house of mirth, we are acting foolish. There is a place for "joy," "gladness," "gaiety," and "pleasure," but it is not the main subject for the wise.

simchah- joy, mirth, gladness a) mirth, gladness, joy, gaiety, pleasure ... c) a glad result, a happy issue..." (BDB #8057).

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

Blessed are you who hunger now, For you shall be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, For you shall laugh. 22 Blessed are you when men hate you, And when they exclude you, And revile you, and cast out your name as evil, For the Son of Man's sake. 23 Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, For in like manner their fathers did to the prophets. 24 "But woe to you who are rich, For you have received your consolation. 25 Woe to you who are full, For you shall hunger. Woe to you who laugh now, For you shall mourn and weep. 26 Woe to you when all men speak well of you, For so did their fathers to the false prophets. Lk 6:21-22-26

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

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

After speaking of the solemn and sober attitude of the wise and the careless ease and enjoyment of the fool, he then turned to the outcome. The truly wise man who has his heart continually in the house of mourning is going to speak differently than the fool who is in the house of mirth. The wise see the dangers ahead then warn and rebuke. The fool does not recognize their danger and only has songs. God warned us that the wise will rebuke, and we need to listen to those rebukes, while at the same time becoming wise and also giving rebukes as they are needed. A rebuke is a strong warning that something should not be done. It is "*to reprove as a father his son.*" It generally has "*severity*" and is an attempt to "*check,*" "*curb,*" or "*chastise.*"

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

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

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

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

The problem is the author and therefore the content of the song. Even today, there are songs that extol and glorify things the wise would rebuke. Sex, drugs, wealth and sin are all songs of fools. The fool can extol and celebrate anything in song. They can "*sing the praise*" of "*life under the sun*" and pretend that death is simply a time when it all stops, not a time of danger and eternal destruction.

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

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

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

kiv- that, for, because, when, as though, as, because that, but, then, certainly, except, surely, since ...
c) because, since (causal connection) ... forasmuch as, for therefore (BDB # 3588)

It generally gives the reason why. The cause and purpose why it is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than the songs of fools. The songs of fools are like the crackling of thorns under a pot. Thorns have so little substance to them that they burn up too quickly to give any heat. It would be

impossible to cook anything in a pot that only had thorns as fuel. They give off the crackling sound of a roaring fire, and lead one to believe they are actually doing some good, but they are not.

The parallel is simple. When one hears the song of the fool they are often emboldened and strengthened to do things that are wrong. When one hears the crackling of thorns under a pot, they assume that dinner will soon be ready. It sounds like a roaring fire, but there just isn't any substance to it.

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

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

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

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

Ecclesiastes 7:7-14

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

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

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

Then I returned and considered all the oppression that is done under the sun: And look! The tears of the oppressed, But they have no comforter — On the side of their oppressors there is power, But they have no comforter. 2 Therefore I praised the dead who were already dead, More than the living who are still alive. 3 Yet, better than both is he who has never existed, Who has not seen the evil work that is done under the sun. Eccl 4:1-3

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

If you see the oppression of the poor, and the violent perversion of justice and righteousness in a province, do not marvel at the matter; for high official watches over high official, and higher officials are over them. Ecc 5:8

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

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

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

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

It was used in this sense of David:

Now David took these words to heart, and was very much afraid of Achish the king of Gath. 13 So he

changed his behavior before them, pretended madness in their hands, scratched on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva fall down on his beard. 14 Then Achish said to his servants, "Look, you see the man is insane. Why have you brought him to me?" 1 Sam 21:12-14

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

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

11 But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!" ... 4 So Satan answered the Lord and said, "Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. 5 But stretch out Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse You to Your face!" Job 1:11, 2:4-5

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

And a bribe debases the heart.

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

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

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

And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous. Ex 23:8

You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. 20 You shall follow what is altogether just, that you may live and inherit the land which the Lord your God is giving you. Deut 16:19-20

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

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

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

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

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

re'shiyth, "beginning; first; choicest." The abstract word *re'shiyth* corresponds to the temporal and estimative sense of *ro'sh*. *re'shiyth* connotes the "beginning" of a fixed period of time: "...the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year" Deut. 11:12. The "beginning" of one's period of life is intended in Job 42:12: "So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning...." This word can represent a point of departure, as it does in Gen. 1:1 (the first occurrence): "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."(Vine's # 7225)

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

"*Vanity of vanities,*" says the Preacher; "*Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.*" Eccl 1:2

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

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

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

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

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

And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, 7 keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation.” Ex 34:6-7 (Cf. Num 14:18; Neh 9:17; Ps 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Nahum 1:3)

Three times with reference to man.

He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, But he who is impulsive exalts folly. Pr. 14:29

A wrathful man stirs up strife, But he who is slow to anger allays contention. Pr. 15:18

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

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

O Lord, You know; Remember me and visit me, And take vengeance for me on my persecutors. In Your enduring patience, do not take me away. Know that for Your sake I have suffered rebuke. Jer. 15:15

Thus one who is patient in spirit is one who is slow to allow the stronger emotions of frustration, bitterness, or anticipation to lead to anger. One who has learned to be patient in spirit, is a man who is slow to become angry or depressed(often the dying embers of anger). One who has schooled themselves in such an attitude find that during provocations or oppressions simply do not feel strong emotions stirring. Such a person is much better than the proud. With this fifth use of the term “better” since the beginning of the chapter, God simply continues to compare qualities and pronounce the greater and more lasting benefits of the one over the other. Cultivating patience is much better than allowing oneself to become proud. One who is proud is one who has a false sense of their own importance and value. Such a person will be completely unprepared for persecution and oppression. This term is used four times in the OT. Two of them help us see exactly what God is warning against here:

Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, Him I will destroy; The one who has a haughty look and a proud heart, Him I will not endure. Ps 101:5

Everyone proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord; Though they join forces, none will go unpunished. Prov 16:5

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

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

When pride comes, then comes shame; But with the humble is wisdom. Prov 11:2

Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall. 19 Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, Than to divide the spoil with the proud. Prov 16:18-19

A man's pride will bring him low, But the humble in spirit will retain honor. Prov 29:23

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

O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps. Jer 10:23

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

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

bahal- to disturb, to alarm, to terrify, to hurry, to be disturbed, to be anxious, to be afraid, to be hurried, to be nervous a) ... 2) to be in haste, to be hasty b) (Piel) 1) to make haste, to act hastily, to be hurried, to be hastened 2) to dismay, to terrify ... (BDB # 926)

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

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

This is the root of the “road rage” phenomena the plagues our roads and highways. There are a lot of people who allow themselves to be easily provoked. The slightest look of frustration or driving too close or a minor mistake and some are immediately ready to harm them through words, actions and even violence. This lead to terrible consequences that would never happen if people would not allow themselves to become quickly angered. God warns against it:

Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; Do not fret — it only causes harm. 9 For evildoers shall be cut off; But those who wait on the Lord, They shall inherit the earth. Ps 37:8-9

A wrathful man stirs up strife, But he who is slow to anger allays contention. Prov 15:18

Make no friendship with an angry man, And with a furious man do not go, 25 Lest you learn his ways And set a snare for your soul. Prov 22:24-25

For as the churning of milk produces butter, And wringing the nose produces blood, So the forcing of wrath produces strife. Prov 30:33

Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control. Pr 25:28

For anger rests in the bosom of fools.

After reading the above Scriptures and seeing their truth all around us, what other conclusion could we possibly draw? No matter who we are and what our position in life might be, when anger is in our heart, we are going to act like a fool. When anger is at the helm, one becomes a “*stupid fellow;*” and a “*dull person.*” Their “*knowledge of God*” has been distorted by anger and they “*do not properly evaluate or understand what they know.*”

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

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

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

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

But Ecclesiastes 3:2-11 makes it very clear that there will be times in history that are better than other times, or things in life that make an earlier period of life better than another. When there are such a variety of times as a time to plant or uproot, heal or kill, tear down or build up, weep or laugh, search or give up as lost, sew together or tear apart, love or hate, war or peace, it is obvious that all of us will find things or hear from others about the past that they liked better than now. Yet even when the times of the past were actually better than the present, God’s warning and advice is still true.

What good are we doing to ourselves and others to dwell on how much better it used to be. It only leads to bitterness and frustration or unhappiness and depression. We must live in the time God has given us and use it to the best of our ability. Anything less is not inquiring wisely about the past.

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

“The Former Days were Better than These?”

Life “*under the sun*” begins with “*rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes.*” It ends as “*the evil days come*” and we say “*I have no pleasure in them*”(Ecc. 11:9; 12:1-5).

Not only do we experience change, so also does our world. Parents and grandparents age and die. Friends move away, the freedom of youth gives way to the stresses of an adult. The comfortable manners and attitudes of our generation give way to those of the next generation. The vigor of youth, and the anticipation of the future slowly give way to memories of days long past. As we see the dark days dawn we have two choices. We can continue to look forward or we begin to look back with regret and sorrow for things that will never be again.

The dark side of this nostalgia is pessimism or discouragement. Even the best parts of it can be dangerous and God warned us to avoid it. “*Do not say, Why were the former days better than these? For you do not inquire wisely concerning this*” (Ecc. 7:10).

Though those living in the dark days know their former days were better, God wants them to ignore it. He wants us to live in the present and plan for the future. There is too much today to waste time on yesterday. What might have been and what was must not compete with what can be. Listen to Paul: *“forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, ... press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”* (Phil. 3:13-14).

There is a great temptation for some in the church to want to live in the past and say *“the former days were better than these.”* The changes in our nation in a few generations are profound. Along with our outer man, the morals and ethics of our nation have also decayed. The absolutes of truth we learned in our youth are mocked. Honesty, integrity and hard work are giving way to selfish disregard for the needs of others.

It is easy to bemoan the good old days in evangelism. In the 1950's, gospel meetings, Jule Miller filmstrips and cottage classes converted tens of thousands. A knowledge of Bible authority, denominational doctrines, and the plan of salvation would equip one to go into all the world and preach the gospel. All one needed to do in those days was ask to study the Bible. It was easy to get classes and many turned out positive. Most churches baptized ten or more each year, quickly growing from small groups into large assemblies. Those days are now gone and those methods are no longer as effective.

We are not the first generation to see things change so quickly. As Israel left Egypt, that generation was rebellious and died in the wilderness. Only Joshua and Caleb lived to see Canaan where *“Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua”* (Josh. 24:31). Yet those who took Canaan lived to see *“another generation arose after them who did not know the LORD”* (Judg. 2:10-11). What a bitter time to live through.

David and Solomon brought Jerusalem to its zenith yet the next generation saw Jeroboam lead the ten tribes into apostasy. How tempting to see the former days as better when *“the Levites left their common- lands and their possessions and came to Judah and Jerusalem, for Jeroboam and his sons had rejected them from serving as priests”* (2Chr. 11:14)? Yet to become bitter or despondent would change nothing. It is difficult to joyously serve the Lord while bemoaning the *former days*.

In the early days of the church young men saw it grow under the apostles inspired teaching. It must have been an exciting time. Yet those same men saw Jerusalem destroyed and a terrible persecution that martyred many of the godliest in the church. As their outer man decayed they saw the church weaken and stray into apostasy. Yet God still needed them to continue their labor.

Though the returns were meager, God needed Moses to lead that wicked generation toward Canaan. He needed Noah to bring Shem, Ham and Japheth into the purged world after the flood and Jeroboam to prophesy.

This is what God needs us to do. He knows we can't control the changes in our body and mind or the attitudes of a new generation. But he wants us to be active, living with the present challenges and working as hard as we can regardless of obstacles or changes now barring the way. We must seek the wisdom to make whatever adjustments are needed to continue to be the light of the world and salt of the earth. The gospel must be preached as effectively as possible in every generation.

So what will we do? Bemoan the weakness of our body and the ungodliness of our age and do nothing? Or, will we *“forget those things which are behind and reach forward to those things which are ahead?”*

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

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

Now for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be burdensome to you; for I do not seek yours, but you. For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children. 15 And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the

less I am loved. 2 Cor 12:14-15

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

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

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

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

Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of correction will drive it far from him. Pr. 22:15

My son, hear the instruction of your father, And do not forsake the law of your mother; 9 For they will be a graceful ornament on your head, And chains about your neck. Pr. 1:8-9

When I was my father's son, Tender and the only one in the sight of my mother, 4 He also taught me, and said to me: "Let your heart retain my words; Keep my commands, and live. 5 Get wisdom! Get understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth. 6 Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you; Love her, and she will keep you. 7 Wisdom is the principal thing; Therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding. 8 Exalt her, and she will promote you; She will bring you honor, when you embrace her. Pr. 4:3-9

My son, keep your father's command, And do not forsake the law of your mother. 21 Bind them continually upon your heart; Tie them around your neck. 22 When you roam, they will lead you; When you sleep, they will keep you; And when you awake, they will speak with you. 23 For the commandment is a lamp, And the law a light; Reproofs of instruction are the way of life, Pr. 6:20-23

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Only do not rebel against the Lord, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the Lord is with us. Do not fear them.” Num 14:9

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. 1 Tim 4:8-9

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

Happy is the man who finds wisdom, And the man who gains understanding; 14 For her proceeds are better than the profits of silver, And her gain than fine gold. 15 She is more precious than rubies, And

all the things you may desire cannot compare with her. 16 Length of days is in her right hand, In her left hand riches and honor. 17 Her ways are ways of pleasantness, And all her paths are peace. 18 She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, And happy are all who retain her. Pr. 3:13-18

Those who find this wisdom and gain this understanding will follow God's commands and enjoy life. Those who have this wisdom to avoid alcohol, sexual gratification outside of marriage, drugs, fighting, the wrong crowd and fast cars, are going to have a defense that keeps them from many dangers and gives them life. Second those with wisdom follow God and all His laws, this promotes the happiest of all lives here and then gives one eternal life at the end of this one. Wisdom is the greatest of all possessions and the greatest of all legacies and inheritances one could give to their children. Nothing can compare or vie with her. This obviously compensates for the increased grief it brings to its possessor. Ecc 1:18.

13. Consider the work of God;

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

"Ra'ah (raw-aw) ... to see with thought and reflection, with attention; to take good notice; to look upon with a kind, friendly, compassionate affection; to respect to regard..." (Wilson p 92-93)

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

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; 14 whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. 15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." 16 But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. Jas 4:13-17

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

For who can make straight what He has made crooked?

This is a short summation of Ecc. 1:13-15. Everything that God made crooked is still crooked. Man cannot straighten it back out. Man must learn to be humble and admit it. The curse God set in motion due to sin that made all these things crooked is a just punishment for what man has done. Many have tried to set aside such things, and have accomplished nothing, worse many have broken themselves trying to fix what cannot be fixed or straighten what can't be straightened.

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

might overthrow our reasoning ability(Ecc. 7:7).

14. In the day of prosperity be joyful,

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

tob, “good; favorable; festive; pleasing,; pleasant; well; better; right; best.”... This adjective denotes “good” in every sense of that word. For example, tob is used in the sense “pleasant” or “delightful”:... Its first occurrence is in Gen. 1:4: “God saw that the light was good” (NASB). God appraises each day’s creative work as being “good,” climaxing it with a “very good” on the sixth day Gen. 1:31. (Vine’s # 2896)

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

But in the day of adversity consider:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ecclesiastes 7:15-18

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

Though the translators have placed a paragraph break here, there is clearly a progression and continuation of the subject. He is still expounding on the problems related to adversity and prosperity. The “all things” he has seen center them.

*13 Consider the work of God; For **who can make straight** what **He has made crooked**? 14 In the **day of prosperity** be joyful, But in the **day of adversity** consider: Surely God has appointed the one as well as the other, So that **man can find out nothing that will come after him**. 15 I have seen everything in my days of vanity: There is **a just man who perishes in his righteousness**, And there is **a wicked man who prolongs life in his wickedness**. Ecc. 7:13-15*

“Life under the sun” cannot be made into a simple “two plus two equals four” proposition. The more Koheleth has seen, the more obvious this truth has become to him. He states he has seen it all! Both in his own life and in the lives of others. He calls his own life “my days of vanity,” for by inspiration he has learned the truth that “all is vanity,” and he has made application to his own life. Are we ready to say the same? Have we learned by this point in the book that our days too are “days of vanity?” Full to the brim of futility and emptiness.

With his new perspective on life, he has reconsidered all that he has seen and now must reveal a profound conclusion. Anyone who has lived long enough and looked carefully at his/her own life, or the lives of those around them will feel the visceral response it creates. There are so many inequities in life, so many unfair things. When they happen to us or those we love our mind screams out in anguish and bitterness that life is not fair! There are so many “crooked things” that happen to the wrong people at the wrong time. There is a time for every purpose under heaven, but they do not come fairly or equitably to all. Yet it was God who placed them all side by side, and man is completely incapable of changing them. We must content ourselves that these mindless and pointless things that happen as a result of simple time and chance(9:11) have a valid purpose. A purpose which leads a man to know:

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

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

The two things he placed side by side are very difficult to understand, and even harder to explain.

- 1. The righteous whose lives end with trouble and adversity which we would have expected the wicked to receive. (See Job and Heb. 11-12)**
- 2. The wicked whose lives end in peace and prosperity in the manner we would have expected the righteous to receive. (See Ps 73)**

The book of Job was written to deal with the incongruity of the first, and the book of Hebrews gives additional information in the 11th and 12th chapters. There it is explained that the appearance of the righteous seemingly receiving the punishment of the wicked is an illusion. God was simply using the negative events of life to chasten and strengthen His people. The 73rd Psalm was written to address the second problem of the wicked prolonging their lives in prosperity and ease, appearing to receive the reward of the righteous.

The real problem to both the wicked and righteous is the first but false impression these things give that there is no moral component to the consequences of “life under the sun.” If our eyes have been opened through the Scriptures, are open, we are truly aware of what is truly occurring, we will see and avoid this danger, but like the Psalmist, at some point in our lives must work this out and understand where the fallacy lies. The subject is so important that while it is introduced here in a general way, he will return to again.

There is a vanity which occurs on earth, that there are **just men to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked**; again, there are **wicked men to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous**. I said that this also is vanity. Eccl 8:14

All things come alike to all: One event happens **to the righteous and the wicked**; To **the good, the clean, and the unclean**; To **him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice**. **As is the good, so is the sinner**; He who **takes an oath as he who fears an oath**. ³ **This is an evil in all that is done under the sun**: that one thing happens to all. Truly the **hearts of the sons of men are full of evil**; **madness is in their hearts while they live**, and after that they go to the dead. Eccl 9:2-3

I returned and saw under the sun that — The **race is not to the swift**, Nor the **battle to the strong**, Nor **bread to the wise**, Nor **riches to men of understanding**, Nor **favor to men of skill**; But **time and chance happen to them all**. ¹² For man also does not know his time: Like fish taken in a cruel net, Like birds caught in a snare, So the sons of men are snared in an evil time, When it falls suddenly upon them. Eccl 9:11-12

ALL things come alike to ALL / TIME and CHANCE happen to ALL

- ◆ There is a **just man who perishes in his righteousness**, And there is a **wicked man who prolongs life in his wickedness**. Ecc. 7:13-15
- ◆ that there are **just men to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked**; again, there are **wicked men to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous**. Eccl 8:14
- ◆ One event happens **to the righteous and the wicked**; To **the good, the clean, and the unclean**; To **him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice**. **As is the good, so is the sinner**; He who **takes an oath as he who fears an oath**. Ecc 9:2
- ◆ **This is an evil in all that is done under the sun**: that one thing happens to all. Truly the **hearts of the sons of men are full of evil**; **madness is in their hearts while they live**, and after that they go to the dead. Eccl 9:3
- ◆ I returned and saw under the sun that — The **race is not to the swift**, Nor the **battle to the strong**, Nor **bread to the wise**, Nor **riches to men of understanding**, Nor **favor to men of skill**; But **time and chance happen to them all**. Eccl 9:11

As one reads these passages over and over, the incongruity of “*life under the sun*” centers on the truth that there is very little difference for the good and the evil or the righteous and the wicked regarding death. Much of the time “*life under the sun*” comes to an end without good being rewarded and wickedness being punished. Often it is just the opposite. The wicked die in peace, prosperity, and popularity while the righteous die in turmoil, poverty and persecution. This may lead man to draw a very wrong conclusion. It is this wrong conclusion that Koheleth begins to deal with. The sad truth is that this subject has led to “*madness*” in the hearts of many righteous men and women who have been confronted by its truth in the lives of their own spouses, parents or children. They witness the terrible end of a righteous loved one and the terrible cry of anguish and accusation “**WHY**” comes to their lips and hearts. At the same time many wicked people have hearts “*full of evil*” and also afflicted with “*madness*” because their evil deeds have not been properly requited and they truly believe there is no retribution. Yet the a partial answer lies in chapter 9:11-12, for it is not just the righteous and the wicked, but also the swift, the strong, the wise, the men of understanding, the men of skill who are also impacted by it. With all that is crooked, lacking, and wanting and a time for every purpose under heaven, time and chance are going to happen to all.

There is a just man who perishes in his righteousness,

In both Hebrew and English the terms “just,” “justice,” “righteous” and “righteousness” are synonyms. In Hebrew the term “righteousness” carries the sense of “*loyalty*” to God. In the relationship of “*a man to his God*” it describes the concept of being “*faithful to each others expectations*.” It also “*embodies all that God expects of His people*.”

tsedeq 6664; *tsedaqah*, “righteousness.” ... carries the sense of “loyalty” demonstrated by a king or priest

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

Hence what Solomon had seen was someone who was "loyal," "faithful," and meeting "all that God expects" of him, yet perished not after he fell away, but while he was still in his righteousness. Righteous people perish even though they are righteous. Sometimes(as in the case of Jesus and Stephen) they even perish because they are righteous! This is one of the most perplexing of all the circumstances set in motion by sin's curse, and God's desire to save as many as possible. It is also one of the greatest of the contributing reasons why life "under the sun" is futile. **When something as critical to life as living for God and in harmony with His will cannot even help make "life under the sun" more safe, secure, and prosperous, then truly, there is nothing we can do in this life to be secure!**

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

Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. 36 Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented — 38 of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. Heb 11:35-38

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

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

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

One would think that God would deal with such people "under the sun," but He doesn't. There are people like this who are blessed in every possible way "under the sun," yet God makes it clear that all this will be resolved after this life is over.

But to the wicked God says: "What right have you to declare My statutes, Or take My covenant in your mouth, 17 Seeing you hate instruction And cast My words behind you? 18 When you saw a thief, you consented with him, And have been a partaker with adulterers. 19 You give your mouth to evil, And your tongue frames deceit. 20 You sit and speak against your brother; You slander your own mother's son. 21 These things you have done, and I kept silent; You thought that I was altogether like you; But I will rebuke you, And set them in order before your eyes. 22 "Now consider this, you who forget God, Lest I tear you in pieces, And there be none to deliver: Ps 50:16-22

It was this type of person who caused the feet of the inspired Psalmist to almost slip.

Truly God is good to Israel, To such as are pure in heart. 2 But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; My steps had nearly slipped. 3 For I was envious of the boastful, When I saw the prosperity of the wicked. 4 For there are no pangs in their death, But their strength is firm. 5 They are not in trouble as other men, Nor are they plagued like other men. 6 Therefore pride serves as their necklace; Violence covers them like a garment. 7 Their eyes bulge with abundance; They have more than heart could wish. 8 They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression; They speak loftily. 9 They set their mouth against the heavens, And their tongue walks through the earth. 10 Therefore his people return here, And waters of a full cup are drained by them. 11 And they say, "How does God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?" 12 Behold, these are the ungodly, Who are always at ease; They increase in riches. 13 Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain, And washed my hands in innocence. 14 For all day long I have been plagued, And chastened every morning. 15 If I had said, "I will speak thus," Behold, I would have been untrue to the generation of Your children. 16 When I thought how to understand this, It was too painful for me — 17 Until I went into the sanctuary of God; Then I understood their end. Ps 73:1-17

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

The sad reality about "life under the sun" is, there is nothing we can do to change what tomorrow will bring. Neither righteousness or wickedness can help. Therefore consider the works of God and realize you are not going to know what tomorrow is going to bring, and no matter how hard you try you will never change it. If these most obvious cause and affect principles do not operate, then no others will either. You cannot prepare for the future by any means known to man and expect this life to be good to you. Whether you are righteous or wicked, rich or poor, strong or weak, wise or fool, you will see adversity and prosperity in varying degrees at different times in your life.

16. Do not be overly righteous,

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

As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; 11 There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. 12 They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one.But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, Rom 3:10-12, 21-23

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

and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; Phil 4:9

For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for

righteousness.” Rom 4:3-4

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

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. 20 Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. Rom 3:19-20

Koheleth was not teaching something different here. Therefore, when seeking an explanation concerning how one might be overly righteous, the Holy Spirit is not offering to man a moderate life. He is not saying that one can take true religion as revealed by God too seriously and become a fanatic. He is not offering those “under the sun” the right to modify doctrine and morality and look upon those who do not as “overly righteous” This flies in the face of all that the Bible demands. We are the love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

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

Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Mt 5:19-20

Where then can one draw a line. **Can we lessen our righteousness to keep from losing our life or avoiding persecution? NO:**

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

Yes, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. 2 Tim 3:12

Can we lessen our righteousness to avoid loss of liberty or physical comfort? NO:

For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. 4 You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. Heb 12:3-5

Can we lower our righteousness to keep from losing friends and relatives? NO:

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

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

Now that we have spent nearly two pages discussing what the verse cannot mean, we must now seek for an explanation of what it does mean. Since the warning is obviously against some type of excess, we must contemplate whether there are any Scriptures that warn against things that man claims are righteous, and appear on the surface to be good, but which in fact God has no real care and concern about. During the days of Jesus, the Pharisees had developed many onerous additions to the law which seemed good to them but which Jesus would not submit to.

For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders. 4 When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other things which they have received and hold, like the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches. Mark 7:3-4

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

Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations — 21 “Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,” 22 which all concern things which perish with the using — according to the commandments and doctrines of men? 23 These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh. Col 2:20-23

Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, 2 speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, 3 forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. 4 For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; 5 for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. 1 Tim 4:1-5

These are but a few of the many examples in both the Old and the New Testament of those who have added to God’s law in a mistaken idea that this would help them be more righteous. Koheleth call this overly righteous. The definition of the term “overly” confirms our previous conclusion. It is used of “numerical increase” or of things that “multiply, become numerous, become great.”

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

Hence we are not to multiply our righteousness above and beyond what God has demanded. It is set and is to not be added to or taken from. If we seek to increase our righteousness above what is written, then we are simply decreasing the enjoyment of life to no purpose. We cannot be more righteous than what God has asked us to be.

Nor be overly wise:

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

So that you incline your ear to wisdom, And apply your heart to understanding; 3 Yes, if you cry out for discernment, And lift up your voice for understanding, 4 If you seek her as silver, And search for her as for hidden treasures; 5 Then you will understand the fear of the Lord, And find the knowledge of God. 6 For the Lord gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding; 7 He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly; Pr. 2:2-7

Happy is the man who finds wisdom, And the man who gains understanding; 14 For her proceeds are better than the profits of silver, And her gain than fine gold. 15 She is more precious than rubies, And all the things you may desire cannot compare with her. 16 Length of days is in her right hand, In her left hand riches and honor. 17 Her ways are ways of pleasantness, And all her paths are peace. 18 She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, And happy are all who retain her. Pr. 3:13-18

5 Get wisdom! Get understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth. 6 Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you; Love her, and she will keep you. 7 Wisdom is the principal thing; Therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding. 8 Exalt her, and she will promote you; She will bring you honor, when you embrace her. 9 She will place on your head an ornament of grace; A crown of glory she will deliver to you.” Pr. 4:5-9

10 Receive my instruction, and not silver, And knowledge rather than choice gold; 11 For wisdom is better than rubies, And all the things one may desire cannot be compared with her. 12 “I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, And find out knowledge and discretion. 13 The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverse mouth I hate. 14 Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom; I am understanding, I have strength Pr. 8:10-14

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

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. James 1:5

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

Why should you destroy yourself?

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

"Your words have been harsh against Me," Says the Lord, "Yet you say, 'What have we spoken against You?' 14 You have said, 'It is useless to serve God; What profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, And that we have walked as mourners Before the Lord of hosts? 15 So now we call the proud blessed, For those who do wickedness are raised up; They even tempt God and go free.'" Mal 3:13-15

Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their own craftiness"; 20 and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile." 1 Cor 3:18-20

17. Do not be overly wicked,

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

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

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

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

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

The wicked are not so, But are like the chaff which the wind drives away. 5 Therefore the wicked shall not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. 6 For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the wicked shall perish. Ps 1:4-6

The Lord tests the righteous, But the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates. 6 Upon the wicked He will rain coals; Fire and brimstone and a burning wind Shall be the portion of their cup. 7 For the Lord is righteous, He loves righteousness; His countenance beholds the upright. Ps 11:5-7

The Lord preserves all who love Him, But all the wicked He will destroy. Ps 145:20

20 But the wicked are like the troubled sea, When it cannot rest, Whose waters cast up mire and dirt. 21 “There is no peace,” Says my God, “for the wicked.” Isa 57:20-21

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

Nor be foolish:

Koheleth himself helps clarify the meaning of being foolish:

Even when a fool walks along the way, He lacks wisdom, And he shows everyone that he is a fool. Ecc. 10:3

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

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

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

Why should you die before your time?

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

Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you. Ex 20:12

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

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

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

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

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

and also not remove your hand from the other

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

For he who fears God will escape them all.

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

Ecclesiastes 7:19-29

Having introduced some of the difficult and/or grave situations that arise in our “*life under the sun*” that defy wisdom’s discerning ability to explain, or wisdom’s ability to avoid God doesn’t want any misunderstandings. In spite of these clear limitations, God’s wisdom has great and lasting value, and even with all the problems and difficulties where it cannot help, still does not minimize.

19. Wisdom strengthens the wise

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

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

Anyone when gaining understanding of God’s solutions will be strengthened! He will gain the power to avoid and respond to dangerous situations in successful ways. The term “strengthen” generally describes being strong enough to “*prevail!*”

ʿazaz- to be strong a) (Qal) to be strong, to prevail b) (Hiphil) to make firm, to strengthen (BDB # 5810)

With wisdom comes greater strength, power and ability to gain the desired end, and prevail over whatever the difficulty or trial. It won’t always happen as noted above, but it gives one a greater potential of doing so. There is great strength and power in wisdom. A strength and power that gives security and firmness to those who possess it. It does this first by averting most of the problems people bring upon themselves by doing foolish things. Secondly, it does it by giving the best possible solutions to any problem that arises which could not be avoided. Thus wisdom should be viewed as a powerful companion and ally that one can take with him into all the difficult circumstances of life.

More than ten rulers of the city.

There seem to be as many explanations of the ten rulers of the city as there are authors to write about them. We need to begin with the basics of the possibilities and then work our way to the best conclusion. First, the “*ten*” is used many times in Scripture to denote the idea of completeness.

Laban changed Jacob’s wages ***ten times***(Gen 31:7, 41).

Israel put God to the test ***ten times***. (Num 14:22).

God gave ***ten commandments***(Deut 4:13).

Job complained his three friends had insulted him ***ten times***(Job 19:3).

Daniel and his three friends were ***ten times*** better than the other wise men(Dan 1:20).

Though there may be a better reason Solomon chose this number no one seems to have found it yet. Hence wisdom has more strength and ability to prevail or escape than the complete number of mighty rulers. These are not simply rulers because of political power. They were rulers because they had “*mastery*” and were “*imperious.*”

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

Hence they were not only rulers, but rulers who had come to rule through their own valor and strength. We have had such presidents in our own history. Some rulers have power only because they were voted into office, others had power not only because they had been voted into office, but because they had already proven themselves in battle. Even with the complete number of the strong rulers, wisdom still has greater strength. one would not be as well protected as he would be with the wisdom he can gain through the study of God's word.

I have more understanding than all my teachers, For Your testimonies are my meditation. 100 I understand more than the ancients, Because I keep Your precepts. Ps 119:99-100

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

This is one of those passages that are obvious in their meaning, but not so obvious in their context. Hence what is said here is not nearly as difficult to understand as the reason why it was placed here. That there is not a just man in all the earth is an often stated truth in Scripture. The first three chapters of Romans makes it abundantly clear that this is the truth.

*What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. 10 As it is written: "**There is none righteous, no, not one;** 11 There is **none who understands;** There is **none who seeks after God.** 12 They have **all turned aside;** They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one." 13 "Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit"; "The poison of asps is under their lips"; 14 "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness." 15 "Their feet are swift to shed blood; 16 Destruction and misery are in their ways; 17 And the way of peace they have not known." 18 "There is no fear of God before their eyes." 19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. 20 Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. Rom 3:9-21*

There never has been and never will be a just man on the earth that does good and does not sin. But why does the Holy Spirit bring this up here?

By using the term "for" it is clear there is a connection between this statement and the previous verse.

*kî ... as though, as, because that, but, certainly, except, for, surely, since, that, then, when, etc. (ASV and RSV similar.) ... **A particle expressing a temporal, causal, or objective relationship among clauses** expressed or unexpressed. In Hebrew *kî* is used in four ways: to introduce an objective clause especially after verbs of seeing, saying, etc. and translated "that"; to introduce a temporal clause and translated "when" (some of these are almost conditional clauses, thus making "if" appropriate); to introduce a causal clause, "because, for, since"; and with 'im to express the reason why some case might not occur "except, but rather." In all four usages *kî* introduces a given which is the result of some other fact or action or will influence some other fact or action. Some would add an asseverative usage giving emphasis to what follows. TDWNT: #3588*

Hence wisdom is so much greater a defense than ten mighty men in a city, because while God's wisdom can never fail or give us a false path or solution, but men will. There is not a just man on the earth who can always be depended upon. Regardless of the might of any man, there is no man who will always give the right answer or do the right thing under all circumstances. Even those trying as hard as they could (Abraham, Job, David, Solomon, Peter & Saul of Tarsus) occasionally failed and fell short in their words or advice. When we rely on men, we are relying on a bruised reed, just as Israel did with Egypt.

Look! You are trusting in the staff of this broken reed, Egypt, on which if a man leans, it will go into his hand and pierce it. So is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who trust in him. Isa 36:6

"Then all the inhabitants of Egypt Shall know that I am the Lord, Because they have been a staff of reed to the house of Israel. 7 When they took hold of you with the hand, You broke and tore all their shoulders; When they leaned on you, You broke and made all their backs quiver." Ezek 29:6-7

If Israel had relied upon God, instead of men, things would have been so much different for them. The same is true of all individuals. The strongest of men cannot help in any way that God can.

But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, 25 and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man. John 2:24-25

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

With another “causal particle,” Koheleth also warns of another side to the wickedness of men.

gam... “again, alike, as, but, even, likewise, in like manner, so much as, then, though, with, yea.” A particle occurring over 750 times, *gam* denotes addition. It is often repeated in a sentence, in which case the most frequent translations are “both... and; either... or; nay... neither; so... and”. Sometimes in English translations *gam* is completely ignored. ***gam* has at least ten distinctive usages in the OT.** (1) Sometimes *gam* simply serves as a particle of addition or accumulation (Gen 7:3). (2) When two or more persons or objects are viewed as functioning together, *gam* may serve as a comprehensive particle (Judg 9:49; Prov 17:15). (3) Like the connective particle *waw*, *gam* may function conjunctively to join two nouns (Joel 1:12) or two verbs (Ps 137:1) or two clauses (Judg 5:4). (4) Like ‘*ap*, *gam* may serve as an intensive particle at the beginning of an emphatic statement (Prov 17:26; Joel 3:2). (5) As an emphatic particle *gam* is used to stress a particular word within the sentence, especially pronouns and nouns with pronominal suffixes (Gen 4:26; Gen 10:21; Gen 27:34). (6). In addition ***gam* has a correlative use which indicates correspondence between two actions** (Gen 20:6). (7) Sometimes *gam* has a consequential force and is used to introduce an action which is a logical consequence of some antecedent action. *gam* is frequently used to introduce the just and appropriate response of God to transgression (Judg 2:21; Jer 4:12) or repentance (2 Sam 12:13). In the same sense *gam* is used to indicate man’s reasonable response to God’s grace (Josh 24:18; 1 Sam 1:28). (8) *gam* also has an adversative use in which it introduces contrariety or antithesis (Ezek 16:28; Ps 129:2). (9) In its confirmatory use *gam* serves to underscore or confirm a direct statement or an impression which has just been made (Gen 29:30; Hos 9:12). (10) *gam* is also used to indicate a climax (Gen 27:33; Deut 23:3-4). ...” (TDWNT #1571)

Since there is “*not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin,*” not only is he unreliable as a source of strength and stability, but his words do not always express his true feelings for more than a few moments. Add to that, many of the things spoken by others are unwise, foolish or even evil.

While God bids us take to heart everything He tells us, (Deut 32:46; Mal 2:2), We are here warned that “life under the sun” is filled with words that ought not to be taken to heart. “Take to heart” is an idiom for things that need mulled over, pondered, taken seriously, accepted and acted upon. This is an important thing to learn and practice.

The casual things people say about “life under the sun,” things they consider to be important or unimportant, strong opinions, likes and dislikes, always need to be taken with a grain of salt. They must not always be taken at face value and marked down as the way someone really is. Too many times people are caught up in the emotions of the moment and say things they later wished they had never said and truly did not mean. He offers one example of how this can happen.

Lest you hear your servant cursing you.

A servant was someone who is under another either by law or by choice. Under the Law of Moses a man might become a servant as a result of debt, violation of law, or simply because he was a slave of war. He could also willingly become the servant of another as Joseph did for Laban.

The point of the comparison may have been the obvious truth that many servants do not always say good things about their master behind his back. Anyone in a position of servitude regardless of the reason will feel frustration and anger at one who is over him from time to time. He may even verbalize those feelings to others. Most of the time these verbalizations are not really true. They are a momentary emotion that is soon gone, and it is foolish to allow such things to hurt the relationship. Everyone feels and sometimes verbalizes such emotions and then later regrets saying them and truly no longer feels (and maybe never) that way. The term “curse” describes that moment when we “*esteem lightly*” another and consequently utter “*violent reproaches*” against them.

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

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

Do not curse the king, even in your thought; Do not curse the rich, even in your bedroom; For a bird of the air may carry your voice, And a bird in flight may tell the matter. Eccl 10:20

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

Who can read this without knowing deep within our heart that it is true. We have all at some time or another allowed the weaknesses in another to move us to speak to others things that never should be said and which most of the time we don't really mean. We find things in others that are their weakest points of character and then grumble about them to others. Even as we are saying them we often regret that we did.

Sometimes we even take them back right after we say them, but the damage is already done. They are words that are out where they can be heard and passed on. Everyone does this from time to time. He does not speak of the rightness or wrongness of this. Only that whether meant or otherwise, it is foolish to take it to heart. Things spoken by our fellow man, unless backed by the wisdom of God's word need to be simply disregarded. We did not really mean it when we did it and they don't either. Most of the time we are simply caught up in an emotional moment and are voicing opinions we do not really hold, or are saying things we do not really mean.

How many times during a conversation have we spoken things about others that were painfully true, but did not need to be said and did not really affect how much we love or respect another. Yet if the person heard it and took it to heart, it would hurt them deeply. It is wise to never express these things, but we all do sometimes. Hence the warning. When such things are said, let them "*go in one ear and out the other,*" let them be like "*water off a ducks back,*" or truly believe that "*sticks and stones can break my bones but words can never hurt me.*" Which are our own rendition of Solomon's warning here.

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

Although he just finished extolling wisdom, he now again speaks of its limitations when directed toward "*life under the sun.*" He was able to "*prove*" "*all this*" "*by wisdom,*" but it did not bring the desired result. All of the things brought out in this book had been proven by this wisdom. These are the observations that will lead one to a healthy and happy life here and to favor with God which secures a favorable verdict at the judgement day. This is what true wisdom is. It begins with a fear of the LORD(Prov 1:7) for any life which does not have at its root a fear and desire to please ones Creator will most certainly end in failure. Yet this was but the beginning of a much larger task which Solomon set for himself. He had proved many things by wisdom, but he set himself a task which proved beyond His ability to fulfill. He said "*I will be wise.*" That was His goal, that was the task he set for himself, but he found it to be "*far from him.*" It was "*remote,*" "*far,*" seen off in the "*distance.*"

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

He could see it, but could never quite reach it. He has already discussed this several times in the book, but now admits that in the overall scheme of what is, what he actually held as wisdom was not enough for him to have the wisdom he sought. What a humbling conclusion. If the the wisest man who ever lived, inspired by the Holy Spirit in all His writings, here admitted in an inspired work that even his wisdom was not enough and true understanding was far off, distant and remote from him. Multitudes of things just beyond his grasp. Some of this is recorded in Scripture. God has kept some things secret and they are off limits and forbidden.

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons

forever, that we may observe all the words of this law. Deut. 29:29

We must accept these limitations as the truth and work within them.

Lord, my heart is not haughty, Nor my eyes lofty. Neither do I concern myself with great matters, Nor with things too profound for me. 2 Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul, Like a weaned child with his mother; Like a weaned child is my soul within me. 3 O Israel, hope in the Lord From this time forth and forever. Ps 131:1-3

This is the comfort of those who trust in the LORD with all their heart and do not lean upon their own understanding. We are perfectly content to allow God to deal with the things that are too profound.

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

He now speaks along the same line as God forced Job to speak in the last few chapters of his book. There are multitudes of things in the material realm that are still far off and exceedingly deep to us. The foundations of the earth (38:4), the morning stars singing together(38:7), The limitation of the seas(38:8-11), the dwelling of light(38:19), the path of a thunderbolt(38:25), the making of the stars(38:31-32), the ordinance of the heavens(38:33), the ways of the animals(39-41). Many of these things cannot be fully comprehended by any man. Once Job was reminded of these things, he drew the proper conclusion which is the same as the one made here.

Then Job answered the Lord and said: 4 "Behold, I am vile; What shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth. 5 Once I have spoken, but I will not answer; Yes, twice, but I will proceed no further." Then Job answered the Lord and said: 2 "I know that You can do everything, And that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You. 3 You asked, 'Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. Job 40:3-5, 42:1-3

The deeper one looks into anything the greater the depth and intensity to which it grows. There is nothing simple in the material universe. All of it is far off and exceeding deep. No one in this life can find it all out. Yet though all of the above is true, even in the book of Job, they were not the central point. All the complexities of the material creation were only illustrative of God's dealings with man. The real issue stems from the moral complexities of the human heart.

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

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

25. I applied my heart to know, To search and seek out wisdom and the reason of things,

He now describes the nature and scope of this search. First, he applied his heart. The term "applied" refers to "a circular movement," or "turning something over"

*cabab, "to turn, go around, turn around (change direction)." This verb occurs only in Hebrew (including post-biblical Hebrew) and Ugaritic. Nouns using these radicals appear in Arabic and Akkadian. Biblical Hebrew attests the word in all periods and about 160 times.... **Basically this verb represents a circular movement...** Perhaps one of the passages where **this meaning is clearest** is Prov. 26:14, which speaks of **the "turning" of a door on its hinges**.... the verb may mean "to roam through" as a scout looking for water:... **cabab** may be used of "turning something over" (Vine's # 5437)*

Solomon drew a circle around a particular thing in his heart and then roamed through it. While on this subject, he determined both to search and seek out. Searching stresses "finding something that is missing," "whose location is unknown." To accomplish this he had to "aim at, devote oneself to, and be concerned about."

*baqash, "to seek, search, consult." This verb occurs only in Ugaritic, Phoenician, and Hebrew. It appears in the Bible about 220 times and in all periods. Basically **baqash means "to seek" to find something that is lost or missing, or, at least, whose location is unknown...** The sense "seek to secure" emphasizes the pursuit of a wish or the accomplishing of a plan. ... This image may have an emotional coloring, such as, "to aim at, devote oneself to, and be concerned about."... Theologically, this verb can be used not only "to seek" a location before the Lord (to stand before Him in the temple*

and seek to secure His blessing), but it may also be used of a state of mind: “But if from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him [daras] with all thy heart and with all thy soul” Deut. 4:29. (Vines # 1245)

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

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

Solomon was on a quest. He had narrowed the inquiry down to a specific thing that he had drawn a circle around, and was working to find what he missed, by devoting himself to spying out and exploring.

He will use wisdom as his ally as outlined in verse nineteen, to find out what he wants to know. When he revealed what he sought, it becomes obvious why he would need wisdom. Only God and His Word can help him identify these things.

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

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

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, 21 because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man — and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. 24 Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, 25 who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. 26 For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. 27 Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. 28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; Rom 1:18-29

Solomon took a similar course.

26. And I find more bitter than death

More bitter than death is perhaps the strongest way to discuss the horror of a situation one could get themselves into. Death is a bitter experience to those who must face it and all who must watch others die. The term “*bitter*” is first used of that are bitter to the taste and cause the face to contort. It is then figuratively applied to those things that do the same thing to us emotionally. Though it generally refers to grief, it can also encompass, other emotions as well. “*To be ‘bitter of soul’ is to be exasperated, angry, disgusted, uneasy, discontented; exceedingly sorrowful.*”

To be bitter, in bitterness; figuratively applied to the severity of sufferings, of sorrow; to be ‘bitter of soul’ is to be exasperated, angry, disgusted, uneasy, discontented; exceedingly sorrowful... bitter herbs...

bitter, poisonous,... sadness, grief..." (Wilson OT Words p 40).

Each person is impacted differently as far as the emotions are concerned, but most see the imminent coming of death with the emotions described above. In death, there is nothing left to look forward to since all that is in this "life under the sun" is forever removed from them.

Hence something **more bitter** than this would be an exceedingly terrible experience. What is it that he has found to be so bitter, so counterproductive to an enjoyable life? So removed from what God intended for "life under the sun" to be?

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

When God made a woman, he made her as the perfect helpmeet for man. She was in every way appealing to him. In the marriage relationship this is the most wonderful of blessings and one of the greatest enjoyments of life. When God is served, when one seeks by wisdom to use God's gifts in the way He intended for them to be used a wonderful thing occurs. The hearts of both knit together and they become one flesh. Such a woman is a blessing to all and she is highly extolled in Proverbs 31. But not all women are like this.

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

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

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

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

The first was used of Samson and the second of Jeremiah.

*When he came to Lehi, the Philistines came shouting against him. Then the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him; and the ropes that were on his arms became like flax that is burned with fire, and his **bonds** broke loose from his hands. Judg 15:14*

*15 Therefore the princes were angry with Jeremiah, and they struck him and put him in **prison** in the house of Jonathan the scribe. For they had made that the prison. 16 When Jeremiah entered the dungeon and the cells, and Jeremiah had remained there many days, 17 then Zedekiah the king sent and took him out. Jer 37:15-17*

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

The Power of Woman's Allurement

The role and power that men and women hold over each other is an amazing and wonderful thing. In the creation God made it clear that he made each sex(male and female) with needs and desires that could on ly be fulfilled in the marriage relationship. Even Adam's choice to eat the forbidden fruit, undeceived, but influenced by Eve(Gen 3:11-17; I Tim 2:11-15). After the curse, the role of man play in the life of a women and of a woman in the life of a man is one of the most compelling themes both in the Bible and in secular history.

The influence can be wonderful uplifting and positive. The worthy woman had a husband who was an elder(Pr 31:23), and men must be married and hold a good relationship with their spouse in order to be an elder today(1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6). But the relationship can also be terribly negative.

Eccl 7:23-26

The Holy Spirit spoke through Solomon to give strong warnings to young men regarding the dangers they face, and to young women about the temptations they must avoid to gain and hold such power. The fate of Joseph, Samson, David, Ahab, and Herod were all woven into the lusts that woman created or failed to create in them. Some succeeded, others failed. Some were sorely tempted by fleshly desire while others fell on the basis of a single glance.

Although Solomon made many mistakes in his own life regarding women, the Holy Spirit inspired him to write some powerful warnings. We all need to take these warning to heart. The strongest and most comprehensive warning is given in Ecclesiastes:

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. 26 And I find more bitter than death The woman whose heart is snares and nets, Whose hands are fetters. He who pleases God shall escape from her, But the sinner shall be trapped by her. Eccl 7:25-26

After searching and seeking for wisdom and the reason behind the things that often happen in this life under the sun, he drew a very important conclusion. Wickedness is folly and that folly often turns to madness. Men and women do things so self destructive to their lives that one would think they were foolish or even crazy, but they are not, they are under the influence of lusts that drown in destruction and perdition.

He then drew the conclusion that is our theme for this lesson. “*More bitter then death*” is a strong and powerful expression for something terrible and evil. It brings to the highest degree the folly that turns to madness. The thing that is “more bitter than death” is a woman whose heart is full of snares and nets(scheming and selfish) and whose hands are fetters. Consider for a moment the three terms to describe her. A snare is often a net or a loop of rope that will capture any bird or animal who touches it. A net is thrown into the water and slowly pulled together and everything in its path is taken. These are the terms used to describe her heart. It is the goal of this woman to capture, captivate and control. In order to facilitate this, her hands are like fetters. This term has two different meanings either of which fits here. The first is the “bonds” or “bands” placed on the hands (handcuffs). The second is that of a “prison.” with bars and locks. Thus her hands hold fast and liberty and freedom are lost forever.

What a terrible description of the heart of a woman who leaves the designated role of her Creator to use her body, soul, and emotions to catch men. Such a woman is more bitter than death to any man as well as to herself. Yet there is a means of escape. Those who please God and who listen to his advice and counsel will escape! Likely for two important reasons. First, they will have enough wisdom and guidance from the Scriptures that they will flee such an influence. Second, because God will not allow us to be tempted above what we are able to bear. Yet even with both of these working at full capacity, the sinner will be taken. We see Joseph escape(Gen 39:7-12) but Herod taken first by Herodias and then by her daughter, does things he would not have done(Mt 14:3-10).

There are many words of warnings in the Proverbs to help us escape from such a woman. Yet there is something under the surface that we must also keep clear in our hearts. There is obviously a strong temptation for women to take this type of control. So not only is this a strong warning for men to be on guard, but also for the woman. When a women feels her heart heading in this direction, she must rule over it or she will become a tool in the devil’s hands to destroy others.

Proverbs 2:11, 16-19

Solomon revealed that it was sexual desire most easily used by a woman to bring a man under her control. Hence immodesty in dress and in conversation, attitude and relationships is the most dangerous thing for woman to use and a man to take interest in. In the Proverbs, the dangers that evil women represent in the quest to gain wisdom are described in referred to in four different sections and over 60 verses. Within these passages are found the wisdom to escape. But these things must be diligently taught to our children. They must be carefully pondered often in our own lives. A momentary lapse of discretion can bring great ruin and destruction. God's first warning is that only through discretion and understanding can we be delivered from such a woman. If we wish we escape such a woman we need to see her words and actions clearly.

11 Discretion will preserve you; Understanding will keep you ... 16 To deliver you from the immoral woman, From the seductress who flatters with her words, 17 Who forsakes the companion of her youth, And forgets the covenant of her God. 18 For her house leads down to death, And her paths to the dead; 19 None who go to her return, Nor do they regain the paths of life — Prov 2:11, 16-19

Such a woman uses her strange and foreign demeanor along with flattery to make her intensely interesting. Many men have been captivated by these things, but those who fear God must be guarded with wisdom and see more clearly by keeping two important truths in mind they will help find the way of escape. First, for such a woman to flatter you in such a way, she must first forsake the friend of her youth. All the wonderful experiences and promises she shared with another man who then became her husband must be treacherously set aside for her to speak to you the way she is. Secondly, she is breaking the covenant she made with God. When we see these two things clearly, most of the illusion she seeks to weave before the eyes is removed and we clearly see only wickedness and folly. God then offers two final points. First those who follow in her path go to the way of the dead and do not return. Second, those who follow her will never attain the paths of life.

Proverbs 5:1-23

In this passage an entire chapter is devoted to the perils and dangers of meeting a certain type of woman. Every man, young or old must "attend to my wisdom" and "incline the ear to my understanding." Again he speaks of the "strange woman." As in the passage above, there is always something enticing and exciting about meeting someone new, beautiful with "lips dropping honey." Again, so many emotions can flare up in an instant. One can believe they are "in love" feeling so important and powerful. Add to this the sexual enticement of lust and allurements because 'the grass is greener' on the forbidden side of the fence. This creates an intoxicating mixture that has led many a young man or woman to their destruction.

1 My son, pay attention to my wisdom; Lend your ear to my understanding, 2 That you may preserve discretion, And your lips may keep knowledge. 3 For the lips of an immoral woman drip honey, And her mouth is smoother than oil; Prov 5:1-3

Once again, to give the way of escape, God bids us take a few moments to clearly consider what is really happening when such a woman enters our life. What will be the end result if we give in to this temptation and plethora of emotions?

Note first that 'in the end' she is bitter and will cut us like a two-edged sword. He even expresses clearly to goal that we never ponder her way of life!

But in the end she is bitter as wormwood, Sharp as a two-edged sword. 5 Her feet go down to death, Her steps lay hold of Sheol. 6 Lest you ponder her path of life — Her ways are unstable; You do not know them. Prov 5:4-6

Look at the facts, not the illusion! Flee as a serpent or any other terrible form of death. Her feet are going toward death and if you are with her you will walk into that same death. What appears is not

the truth. No one truly knows the way of an immoral woman!

The best thing to do is remove your way far from her and stay away from her home. Because if you do not flee at the beginning your life will be wasted. Your honor, strength and labor will go to benefit others and in the end you will mourn and grief that you ever met her:

Therefore hear me now, my children, And do not depart from the words of my mouth. 8 Remove your way far from her, And do not go near the door of her house, 9 Lest you give your honor to others, And your years to the cruel one; 10 Lest aliens be filled with your wealth, And your labors go to the house of a foreigner; 11 And you mourn at last, When your flesh and your body are consumed, 12 And say: "How I have hated instruction, And my heart despised correction! 13 I have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, Nor inclined my ear to those who instructed me! 14 I was on the verge of total ruin, In the midst of the assembly and congregation." Prov 5:7-14

God gave each man a wife and each woman a husband. This is done for protection, comfort, joy and peace. Avail yourself of what God has given and do not seek for more. Each must learn to be satisfied with the spouse of their youth. Keep eye, heart, emotion and intellect focused on the love, desire and possession of what is lawfully and rightfully ours. Destroy even the thought of enticement or interest in another. Such thoughts are a warning that we are acting foolishly and are not in the path of wisdom.

15 Drink water from your own cistern, And running water from your own well. 16 Should your fountains be dispersed abroad, Streams of water in the streets? 17 Let them be only your own, And not for strangers with you. 18 Let your fountain be blessed, And rejoice with the wife of your youth. 19 As a loving deer and a graceful doe, Let her breasts satisfy you at all times; And always be enraptured with her love. 20 For why should you, my son, be enraptured by an immoral woman, And be embraced in the arms of a seductress? 21 For the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, And He ponders all his paths. 22 His own iniquities entrap the wicked man, And he is caught in the cords of his sin. 23 He shall die for lack of instruction, And in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray. Prov 5:15-23

Proverbs 6:20-35

In this passage once again, the importance of gaining wisdom before the temptation is encountered is set forth. Again it is a woman using flattery, beauty, eyelids and anything else that will allure to bring about snares, nets and bonds.

My son, keep your father's command, And do not forsake the law of your mother. 21 Bind them continually upon your heart; Tie them around your neck. 22 When you roam, they will lead you; When you sleep, they will keep you; And when you awake, they will speak with you. 23 For the commandment is a lamp, And the law a light; Reproofs of instruction are the way of life, 24 To keep you from the evil woman, From the flattering tongue of a seductress. 25 Do not lust after her beauty in your heart, Nor let her allure you with her eyelids. Prov 6:20-26

The consequences are similar to those above, but different enough to ponder and carefully consider. If anyone decides to yield to this temptation, it will be like taking a coal from the fire and hugging it close or walking on hot coals. Then he reminds us that a married woman has a husband, and when that husband finds out that someone has taken his wife and used her sexually he will respond consistently with jealousy, rage and vengeance. There is no gift that will buy mercy or forgiveness. Only destruction, wounds, dishonor and reproach can come from such an action. So the course of wisdom demands that we never lust after her beauty(gives a new and more powerful emphasis to Jesus' warning about lust(Mt 5:27-30). For this lust is the first step toward our complete destruction.

26 For by means of a harlot A man is reduced to a crust of bread; And an adulteress will prey upon his precious life. 27 Can a man take fire to his bosom, And his clothes not be burned? 28 Can one walk on hot coals, And his feet not be seared? 29 So is he who goes in to his neighbor's wife; Whoever touches her shall not be innocent. 30 People do not despise a thief If he steals to satisfy himself

when he is starving. 31 Yet when he is found, he must restore sevenfold; He may have to give up all the substance of his house. 32 Whoever commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding; He who does so destroys his own soul. 33 Wounds and dishonor he will get, And his reproach will not be wiped away. 34 For jealousy is a husband's fury; Therefore he will not spare in the day of vengeance. 35 He will accept no recompense, Nor will he be appeased though you give many gifts. Prov 6:26-35

Proverbs 7:5-27

In this final discussion of the dangers of the woman whose heart is nets and bands and whose hands are bands, he again speaks of the wisdom that if truly listened to and understood would keep him far from such a woman.

My son, keep my words, And treasure my commands within you. 2 Keep my commands and live, And my law as the apple of your eye. 3 Bind them on your fingers; Write them on the tablet of your heart. 4 Say to wisdom, "You are my sister," And call understanding your nearest kin, 5 That they may keep you from the immoral woman, From the seductress who flatters with her words. Prov 7:1-5

This is too important to not see from every angle. So God described an actual encounter and the terrible nature of such a woman. A young foolish man who "went the way to her house." Whether this was by accident or design is not stated. But this woman is the main focus. Her deceitful words and her "nets and bands" of immodesty, with the attire of a harlot and with a crafty heart. The words themselves are brazen and disgusting to those of us looking over the shoulder of this poor foolish young man. First, she kisses him, then begins with a litany of rationalizations and half truths. Such is the woman of nets and bands.

For at the window of my house I looked through my lattice, 7 And saw among the simple, I perceived among the youths, A young man devoid of understanding, 8 Passing along the street near her corner; And he took the path to her house 9 In the twilight, in the evening, In the black and dark night. 10 And there a woman met him, With the attire of a harlot, and a crafty heart. 11 She was loud and rebellious, Her feet would not stay at home. 12 At times she was outside, at times in the open square, Lurking at every corner. 13 So she caught him and kissed him; With an impudent face she said to him: 14 "I have peace offerings with me; Today I have paid my vows. 15 So I came out to meet you, Diligently to seek your face, And I have found you. 16 I have spread my bed with tapestry, Colored coverings of Egyptian linen. 17 I have perfumed my bed With myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. 18 Come, let us take our fill of love until morning; Let us delight ourselves with love. 19 For my husband is not at home; He has gone on a long journey; 20 He has taken a bag of money with him, And will come home on the appointed day." Prov 7:6-20

The words themselves do more damage than her attire. She seduces him and he follows her. But God likens it to the ox going to the slaughter, the fool to the stocks, the arrow striking the liver, or the bird flying into the snare. It will cost this poor foolish young man his life.

21 With her enticing speech she caused him to yield, With her flattering lips she seduced him. 22 Immediately he went after her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, Or as a fool to the correction of the stocks, 23 Till an arrow struck his liver. As a bird hastens to the snare, He did not know it would cost his life.

So one final time the Holy Spirit seeks to get our attention and explain the truth to us with the all the illusion created by the darkness of ignorance and lust removed. You have been warned! She is the wolf in sheep's clothing. The serpent hidden in the grass. The path she walks can only lead to one destination is death! No one is too strong or wise. She has brought down so many mighty and powerful men.

Now therefore, listen to me, my children; Pay attention to the words of my mouth: 25 Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways, Do not stray into her paths; 26 For she has cast down many wounded, And all who were slain by her were strong men. 27 Her house is the way to Sheol, Descending to the chambers of death. Prov 7:21-27

Truly such a woman is more bitter than death.

My son, give me your heart, And let your eyes observe my ways. 27 For a harlot is a deep pit, And a seductress is a narrow well. 28 She also lies in wait as for a victim, And increases the unfaithful among men. Prov 23:26-28

He who pleases God shall escape from her,

What a wonderful promise and testament to wisdom. This woman is as dangerous to a man as a lion or tiger is to an unwary animal. She is lethal and deadly. Those who please God will escape her because of two important reasons. First because God will keep her from our path and never allow us to be tempted above what we are able to bear:

No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. 1 Cor 10:13

Second, with all God's warnings against her, those who please God will keep His commandments and flee before she ever gets any real power to seduce. With all the light God has shown upon her, those who fear God will be aware of her wiles and devices and will flee before she can gain any power. Though she is a deadly snare and net to some, she poses no real threat to those who please God if they always listen to God and flee.

But the sinner shall be taken by her.

It is interesting that in this case, Solomon again leaves "*life under the sun*" and discussed the great spiritual values gleaned by God's wisdom. The saint who pleases God and seeks for more than "*life under the sun*" can escape this terrible death, but not the sinner who only lives "*under the sun.*"

chata' OT:2398, "*to miss, sin, be guilty, forfeit,...*" This verb occurs 238 times and in all parts of the Old Testament. It is found also in Assyrian, Aramaic, Ethiopic, Sabeian, and Arabic. The **basic meaning of this verb is illustrated** in Judg 20:16: **There were 700 left-handed Benjamite soldiers who "could sling stones at a hair breadth, and not miss."** The meaning is extended in Prov 19:2: "*He who makes haste with his feet misses the way*" (RSV, NIV, KJV NASB, "sinneth"). The intensive form is used in Gen 31:39: "*That which was torn of beasts I brought not unto thee; I bare the loss of it....*" 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. The first occurrence of the verb is in Gen 20:6, God's word to Abimelech after he had taken Sarah: "Yes, I know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this, and also I have kept you from sinning against Me" (NASB; cf. Gen 39:9). Sin against God is defined in Josh 7:11: "Israel hath sinned, and they have also **transgressed my covenant which I commanded them....**" (Vine's OT:2398)

Again, this definition based on its usage in the rest of the Scriptures makes clear we are now discussing "*living in the presence of the LORD,*" fully aware of the spiritual and moral nature of our actions. In this case, the sinner is the one who has missed the way to life and is living in "*moral failure toward both God and man,*" having "*transgressed my covenant which I commanded them.*"

This one will be taken by her because he has no defense.

Since God designed male and female so it was not good for them to be alone, He also gave to each strengths and weaknesses that are complemented by one another. Man has the strong sex drive that primarily by the eyes. Even Job understood this and took the necessary steps to avoid the danger.

"I have made a covenant with my eyes; Why then should I look upon a young woman? 9 "If my heart has been enticed by a woman, Or if I have lurked at my neighbor's door, 10 Then let my wife grind for another, And let others bow down over her. 11 For that would be wickedness; Yes, it would be iniquity deserving of judgment. 12 For that would be a fire that consumes to destruction, And would root out all my increase. Job 31:1, 9-12

A Woman has a body to fulfill all those needs and the need to be desired. The wicked woman

understands the power of her body over men and seeks to use it in the above manner.

When a good man marries a good woman, then there is no danger, for her strength complements his weakness, and all is well.

Let your fountain be blessed, And rejoice with the wife of your youth. 19 As a loving deer and a graceful doe, Let her breasts satisfy you at all times; And always be enraptured with her love. 20 For why should you, my son, be enraptured by an immoral woman, And be embraced in the arms of a seductress? Prov 5:18-20

But when an evil woman is hunting for the precious life, a wicked man will be taken. He simply doesn't have the inner strength to avoid it and without God's wisdom and help he will fall.

For by means of a harlot A man is reduced to a crust of bread; And an adulteress will prey upon his precious life. Prov 6:26

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

This is his final conclusion to the inquiry that began earlier in this chapter:

All this I have proved by wisdom. I said, "I will be wise"; But it was far from me. 24 As for that which is far off and exceedingly deep, Who can find it out? 25 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. Eccl. 7:23-25

After assessing everything under this heading, the final conclusion centered on four points:

1. My soul is seeking but I cannot find.
2. I found one man among a thousand.
3. I have not found a woman
4. Truly this I have found:
 - a. God made man upright
 - b. They have sought out many schemes

Once again, we are not focusing on "*life under the sun*," but of those who are truly "*living in the presence of Jehovah*." With all his wisdom, he could grapple with the woman whose "*heart is snares and nets, whose hands are fetters*," but to find that specific something in a man or woman, he had found one in a thousand men, but was unable to find a woman. Again, what he had found that though God had made man exactly as he ought to be, man had sought out many ways to evade and sidestep it.

"Adding one thing to another" is an idiom for taking all the facts and trying to fit them into a comprehensive whole. He took every bit of information he gleaned, then started adding them up to find a sum. What he truly wanted was "*the reason*."

*hāšab think, plan, make a judgment, imagine, count. ... hešbôn ... reckoning, account. ... The basic idea of the word is **the employment of the mind in thinking activity**. Reference is not so much to "understanding" (cf. *biʿn*), but to the creating of new ideas. ... Six clear variations of the basic thought of this root can be distinguished in the OT. The most frequently used is that of "planning," "devising." ... The next most frequent use is in the sense of "making a judgment." ... A third use, rather infrequent, is that of merely running thoughts through the mind, meditating ... A fourth variation means "to impute," actually a specialized sense of "to make a judgment." ... A fifth variation means "to invent," a use found only in the Qal. ... The last variation means "**accounting**," "**bookkeeping**," used only in the Piel. In the time of the aged high priest, Jehoiada, when repairs were being made on the temple, the word is used to say that the priests "reckoned" (accounted) not with the workmen in connection with money for the project, because the workers were honest. In the Mosaic legislation, the word is used several times in respect to **the "accounting" necessary for figuring** the fluctuating value of properties and produce, in the light of an approaching year of Jubilee ..." (TDWNT #2808)*

Solomon sought to add up all that he had found just like a bookkeeper, looking at "*the "accounting" necessary for figuring*." So he now gives us this accounting.

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

All the above had come down to one single thing he could not find. It was evidently the linchpin to

all that he wanted to add up, but he could not find it. He had a perfect template for the worthy woman in Proverbs 31 and had described her value.

An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, But she who causes shame is like rottenness in his bones. Pr. 12:4

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

Houses and riches are an inheritance from fathers, But a prudent wife is from the Lord. Pr. 19:14

Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies. 11 The heart of her husband safely trusts her; So he will have no lack of gain. 12 She does him good and not evil All the days of her life. Pr. 31:10-12

By inspiration he knew what he sought, but to find her was something he had been unable to do. Perhaps that is the real meaning of the Song of Solomon. He finally found one!

Many have sought to malign Solomon here. Certainly his own life among woman made him a very poor candidate for such a search. Yet one forgets the inspiration which covers the writing of this book. Solomon was a man with a man's weaknesses and folly. He did not practice what he preached here and ultimately fell to the nets, bands and fetters of such women. Yet in the writing of this epistle, he was guided from such things by his own inspiration. These are not just the authors conclusions. These are the conclusions of the Spirit of God.

One man among a thousand I have found,

He had found one such good man among a thousand. This is a terrible percentage among the men of Israel at the height of its prosperity and power, but is not very startling. Only the remnant were ever truly the children of Jehovah. This conclusion does not meet with incredulity. It is not only within the realm of possibility, but made absolutely sure by other statements in Scripture. It was only a few hundred years later that God asked Jeremiah to do the same thing and he could not find even one.

"Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem; See now and know; And seek in her open places If you can find a man, If there is anyone who executes judgment, Who seeks the truth, And I will pardon her. 4 Therefore I said, "Surely these are poor. They are foolish; For they do not know the way of the Lord, The judgment of their God. 5 I will go to the great men and speak to them, For they have known the way of the Lord, The judgment of their God." But these have altogether broken the yoke And burst the bonds. Jer. 5:1,4-5

Even the Lord made it clear that there will only be a few.

"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. 14 Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. Mt. 7:13-14

But a woman among all these I have not found.

This is a startling statement, and had caused deal consternation among many who read it. Many have sought to nullify these words. Some simply make it figurative and claim that this woman is true wisdom. Others malign Solomon, questioning his wisdom because of his harem, or minimize his words. But we must be cautious. When we find a passage we don't like and attack the author, we are actually maligning the Holy Spirit. The entire foundation of the inspiration of the Scriptures rests on accepting these words as the inspired conclusion of God himself. This is the Holy Spirit's conclusion not Solomon's. It stresses the supreme difficulty with which a woman has in reaching after her Creator's intent and design for her.

Peter used Sarah as an example of what all women ought to be. Perhaps it is the extra role of submission that makes it so hard to find such a woman.

Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, 2 when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. 3 Do not let your adornment be merely outward — arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel — 4 rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible

beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. 5 For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, 6 as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror. 1Pet. 3:1-6

How many women “call their husbands Lord,” as Sarah did? How many have the “gentle and quiet spirit which is of great price” and manifested in “chaste conduct coupled with fear”?

Her complete picture is offered in Proverbs 31.

Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies. 11 The heart of her husband safely trusts her; So he will have no lack of gain. 12 She does him good and not evil All the days of her life. 13 She seeks wool and flax, And willingly works with her hands. 14 She is like the merchant ships, She brings her food from afar. 15 She also rises while it is yet night, And provides food for her household, And a portion for her maidservants. 16 She considers a field and buys it; From her profits she plants a vineyard. 17 She girds herself with strength, And strengthens her arms. 18 She perceives that her merchandise is good, And her lamp does not go out by night. 19 She stretches out her hands to the distaff, And her hand holds the spindle. 20 She extends her hand to the poor, Yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy. 21 She is not afraid of snow for her household, For all her household is clothed with scarlet. 22 She makes tapestry for herself; Her clothing is fine linen and purple. 23 Her husband is known in the gates, When he sits among the elders of the land. 24 She makes linen garments and sells them, And supplies sashes for the merchants. 25 Strength and honor are her clothing; She shall rejoice in time to come. 26 She opens her mouth with wisdom, And on her tongue is the law of kindness. 27 She watches over the ways of her household, And does not eat the bread of idleness. 28 Her children rise up and call her blessed; Her husband also, and he praises her: 29 "Many daughters have done well, But you excel them all." 30 Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, But a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised. 31 Give her of the fruit of her hands, And let her own works praise her in the gates.

Such a woman is very rare, and Solomon could not find one. This does not mean that she does not exist, but only that of all the women Solomon had met, and even with the help of the Holy Spirit, he had not found one.

Why would such a woman be so very rare? Perhaps because the easier path to a man is the improper use of her body. Because it takes great effort to accept being a servant as the true role of being a woman. The New Testament only heightens the difficulty of her task. She is to submit to man, she is not to teach or take dominion over man, she is to be saved through her childbearing.

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. 24 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. ... 33 let the wife see that she respects her husband. Eph 5:22-24,33

Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head. 5 But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved. 6 For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered. 7 For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. 8 For man is not from woman, but woman from man. 9 Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man. 10 For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. 1 Cor 11:4-11

Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. 35 And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church. 36 Or did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached? 1 Cor 14:34-37

I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting; 9 in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, 10 but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works. 11 Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. 12 And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. 13 For Adam

was formed first, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. 15 Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control. 1 Tim 2:8-15

To deny the truth of Solomon's words simply means that such women will be even more rare for the ones who should be striving for it are scoffing at it.

To accept these things as God's truth takes great faith in God. It requires us to fulfill Prov 3:5 and trust in the Lord with all our heart and not lean on our own understanding. To actively work on them and fulfill them completely takes great character and fortitude. It is hard to find such a woman. She is rare and thus of great value and price. Submission to God carries her a little deeper than man into servitude, and thus makes it more difficult for her as she compares roles. In Solomon's day he simply could not find one. She is getting harder and harder to find today also. She is prone to argue against these conclusions with the contempt of the term "chauvinist." Yet Paul was not a chauvinist and neither was Solomon. They were servants of God sent to reveal the truth. Only Satan has names such as this for a worthy woman. As long as a woman is blind to this truth, the door to greatness is forever closed to her.

29. Truly this have I found:

Before moving to another topic, Solomon offered his final conclusion. He uses the term generally translated to see.

"mar'eh — sight, appearance, vision a) sight, phenomenon, spectacle, appearance, vision b) what is seen, d) sight, vision (power of seeing)..." (BDB OT:4758)

Here it would be translated "Behold!" "Look!" "See!" By using this term, it appears to give it special emphasis as though this is an important conclusion to take a good hard look at to gain special insight, into wisdom and understanding.

That God made man upright,

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

yāšār ... The root y-š-r is employed in at least three ways. ... 1. Literally. "To go straight or direct in the way" (1 Sam 6:12), but more frequently in the intensive (Piel) "to make (a way) straight," i.e. direct and level and free from obstacles, as when preparing to receive a royal visitor. ... 2. Ethically. Uprightness as the manner of life is a characteristic of the blameless (Prov 11:5) and of the man of discernment (Ps 119:128, "I have lived uprightly"). Thus the fact that God has made man upright (Eccl 7:29) is probably to be interpreted as granting him the ability to recognize the divine law, ..." (TDWOT 4334)

Hence God made man "to go straight" in "a direct and level" way. This is clearly captured in God's first words regarding his intent to make man.

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Gen 1:26-27

When God made man and woman in His image and after His likeness, man was straight and true. He was upright and pure, with integrity and sincerity. This is not how man remained.

But they have sought out many schemes.

hiššābôn ... device, invention. ... The basic idea of the word is the employment of the mind in thinking activity. Reference is not so much to "understanding" (cf. bi'ān), but to the creating of new ideas. Six clear variations of the basic thought of this root can be distinguished in the OT. The most frequently used is that of "planning," "devising." ... The next most frequent use is in the sense of "making a judgment." ... A third use, rather infrequent, is that of merely running thoughts through the mind, meditating... A fourth variation means "to impute," actually a specialized sense of "to make a judgment." ... A fifth variation means "to invent," ... (TDWNT #2808)

Most of the definitions of this term would fit here. Man has indeed sought out many “*devices / inventions*” by “*the employment of the mind in thinking activity.*” He has indeed “*created new ideas*” when it comes to the fulfillment of his lusts and desires. Our race has allowed sin to become the the main subject of “*running thoughts through the mind, meditating.*”

From the single thought of desiring to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, in a few generations to “*every intent of the thoughts of his heart were only evil continually!*”

Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. ... 11 The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. 12 So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. Gen 6:5-6, 11-12

Even after God cleansed the world through the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah and the seven nations of Canaan soon descended to the same depths of evil. So many means and ways of sinning and violating God’s ways have been sought for. Man has found a multitude of wrong ways to live and paths that seem right but end in death. He has sought for many ways to ruin himself the fall in the garden. The misery of man has been multiplied. This is what Solomon’s search for wisdom had led him to. Man has truly corrupted himself. It took the wisdom and power of God to devise the means to bring him back

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