

The Book of Ecclesiastes

A Translation by Bart Marshall

Chapter One

1:1

The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem:

1:2

“Vanity of vanities,” saith the Preacher, “Vanity of vanities. All is vanity.”

1:3

What profit has a man for all his labors under the sun?

1:4

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

1:5

The sun also rises and the sun goes down,
and hastens to the place from whence it arose.

1:6

The wind goes toward the south and turns about to the north.
It whirls continually, and returns again according to its circuits.

1:7

All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full.
Unto the place from whence rivers come, there they again return.

1:8

Everything is wearisome beyond description.

The eye cannot be satisfied by seeing.

The ear cannot be filled with hearing.

1:9

That which has been, is that which shall be.

That which is done, is that which shall be done.

There is nothing new under the sun.

1:10

Is there anything of which it can be said, “See, this is new”?

Anything that has not already been in the ages before us?

1:11

There is no remembrance of things past.

Neither shall there be any remembrance of things today
by those who live after us.

1:12

I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem.

1:13

With all my heart and wisdom, I applied myself
to searching out the truth of all things that are done under heaven.
God has given this sore travail to the sons of man to keep them occupied.

1:14

I have seen all the works that are done under the sun,
and behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.

1:15

That which is crooked cannot be made straight.
That which is not there cannot be numbered.

1:16

I communed with my heart, saying, "Lo, I have come to great estate,
and have gained more wisdom than all who ruled before me in Jerusalem.
Yea, my heart has absorbed great wisdom and knowledge."

1:17

I gave over my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly.
And I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit.

1:18

For in much wisdom is much grief,
and he who increases his knowledge, increases his sorrow.

Chapter Two

2:1

I said in my heart, “Very well, I will seek pleasure and enjoy myself.”
But this also proved to be meaningless.

2:2

I said of mirth, “It is madness,” and of pleasure, “What is gained by it?”

2:3

I gave myself over to wine – with wisdom yet guiding me –
and even tried living foolishly.
I wanted to know how man might best spend his short life on earth.

2:4

I created great works. I built great houses. I planted great vineyards.

2:5

I planted gardens and orchards, with all kinds of trees and fruits.

2:6

I made collection pools for water, to water the flourishing groves.

2:7

I acquired servants and maidens, and servants were born into my house.

2:8

I possessed numerous flocks and herds,
greater than all who ruled in Jerusalem before me.
I gathered for myself silver and gold, and the treasure
of many kings and provinces. I had men singers and women singers,
and musicians of all kinds, and many beautiful concubines.
I had all the delights of men.

2:9

I became great, far greater than all who ruled in Jerusalem before me.
Even so, my wisdom remained with me.

2:10

Whatever my eyes desired, I did not deny them.
I withheld from myself no pleasure,
for my heart rejoiced in all my labors, and this was my reward.

2:11

Then I looked upon the works my hands had wrought,
and on the labor I had struggled to perform, and behold,
all was vanity and vexation of spirit – a chasing after wind –
and there was nothing under the sun to be gained by it.

2:12

So, I decided to look directly at wisdom, and madness, and folly.
Else, what further can a man do after he's become king,
other than more of that he has done before.

2:13

I saw that wisdom excels folly, by as far as light excels darkness.

2:14

I saw that the wise have eyes in their heads, while fools walk blind.
Yet I also perceived that the same fate awaits them all.

2:15

And I asked myself, "If what befalls a fool is the same as what befalls me,
how then was I more wise?" And my heart answered, "This also is vanity.

2:16

There is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool,
for that which now is, shall all be forgotten in the days to come.
How does the wise man die? The same as the fool."

2:17

And so I came to hate life. Everything under the sun was grievous to me –
nothing but vanity, and vexation of spirit, and chasing after wind.

2:18

Yea, and I hated all the works I had labored at,
for I must leave them to him who comes after me.

2:19

Who knows whether he shall be a wise man or a fool?
Yet he shall have rule over all the work I have done in my wisdom.
This also is vanity.

2:20

And my heart began to despair of all the labors I performed under the sun.

2:21

For here is a man who labored with wisdom, knowledge, and equity,
yet one who has done nothing for it, will have the fruits as his heritage.
This also is vanity. And a great evil.

2:22

What profits a man for all his toil and vexation of heart, with which he labors under the
sun?

2:23

For all his days are sorrows, and his travail, grief.
Even at night his heart cannot rest. This also is vanity.

2:24

There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink,
and find enjoyment in his labors. I saw that these pleasures were of God.

2:25

For who can eat his food or enjoy his pleasures more than I?

2:26

God gives wisdom, and knowledge, and joy to those who please him.
To the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth,
so that he can take it from him, and give to those who are good in his eyes.
This also is vanity, and vexation of spirit, and chasing after wind.

Chapter Three

3:1

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

3:2

A time to be born, and a time to die.
A time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted.

3:3

A time to kill, and a time to heal.
A time to break down, and a time to build up.

3:4

A time to weep, and a time to laugh.
A time to mourn, and a time to dance.

3:5

A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together.
A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing.

3:6

A time to get, and a time to lose.
A time to keep, and a time to cast away.

3:7

A time to rend, and a time to sew.
A time to keep silence, and a time to speak.

3:8

A time to love, and a time to hate.
A time of war, and a time of peace.

3:9

What profits a man from all his struggles?

3:10

I have seen the work God has given to the sons of men to occupy them.

3:11

He has made everything perfect in its season,
but he has not given man knowledge of his purpose,
nor of his plan from beginning to end.

3:12

I know now that there is nothing better for a man
than to rejoice and do good in his life.

3:13

Every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the fruits of all his labor.
It is the gift of God.

3:14

I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever.

Nothing can be added to it or taken from it.

God does this so that men shall come to revere him and his ways.

3:15

That which has been, is now. That which is yet to be, has already been.

To God, what is, what was, and what will be are not different.

3:16

Moreover, I saw that in the places where there should be justice, there is wickedness, and in places where there should be righteousness, there is wickedness there as well.

3.17

I said in my heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every purpose, and for every work.

3.18

I saw that things are as they are so that God might test the hearts of men, and reveal to them that they are but beasts.

3.19

For that which befalls the beasts, befalls the sons of men.

The death of one is the same as the death of the other.

They all have one spirit. Man has no preeminence over the beasts.

This also is vanity.

3.20

All go to one place. All come from dust, and to dust they all shall return.

3.21

How can anyone say that the spirit of man goes upward, and the spirit of beasts goes downward to the earth?

3.22

Therefore, I perceived that there is nothing better for a man than to rejoice in his own works each day. That is his portion.

For who can say what might come after this?

Chapter Four

4:1

Again, I looked at all the injustices done under the sun.
I beheld the tears of those who were oppressed,
and they had no comforter. On the side of their oppressors
there was power, but they, too, had no comforter.

4:2

Therefore, I deemed the dead, who have already died,
more fortunate than the living, who are yet alive.

4:3

But more fortunate than either is one who has never existed,
who has not seen the evil works done under the sun.

4:4

Again, I saw that all man's labor and achievement stems from his desire
to be envied by his neighbor. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit.

4:5

But the fool who merely folds his hands together, consumes his own flesh.

4:6

Better is a handful of quietness,
than two fists full of travail and vexation of spirit.

4:7

Then I saw another vanity under the sun.

4:8

This is the man alone, with no companion, no children, no brethren,
yet there is no end to all his labor for he is never satisfied with his wealth.
He never thinks, "For whom do I labor, and deprive my soul of good now?"
This also is vanity, and a sore travail.

4:9

Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their labor.

4:10

And if one falls, the other will lift up him up.
But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help.

4:11

If two lie together, then they have heat. But how can one be warm alone?

4:12

A man alone can be overpowered by another, but two can withstand him.
Three is even better. A three-cord braided rope is not easily broken.

4:13

Better a poor and wise youth,
than an old and foolish king who will no longer listen to counsel.

4:14

The poor and wise youth may come to reign though he has been in prison,
while he who was born to reign may become poor.

4:15

I considered all the living who walk under the sun,
and saw them stand with the young king in the old king's stead.

4:16

There is no end to all the people he rules,
but those who come later do not delight in him.
Surely this also is vanity, and vexation of spirit, and chasing after wind.

Chapter Five

5:1

Guard your steps when you enter the house of God.
Be more ready to hear than to offer a fool's sacrifice,
for fools know not that they do evil.

5:2

Do not be rash with your mouth, nor hasty in your heart
to utter things before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth,
therefore, let your words be few.

5:3

Dreams come from the multitude of thoughts.
A fool's speech is known by its multitude of words.

5:4

When you make a vow unto God, defer not to pay it,
for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay that which you have vowed.

5:5

It is better to not vow, than to vow and not pay.

5:6

Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin,
so that you have to tell the angel it was an error.
Why cause God to be angered by your words
and destroy the works of your hands?

5:7

The multitude of dreams and many words arise in emptiness.
Fear God.

5:8

When you see oppression of the poor, and corrupt perversion of justice
in a local province, understand that the higher officials know,
and also the higher officials over them.

5:9

The bounty of the earth profits all.
The king himself is served by the fields.

5:10

He who loves silver shall not be satisfied with silver,
neither shall he who loves wealth be satisfied with increase.
This also is vanity.

Chapter Six

6:1

There is an evil I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men:

6:2

God gives a man riches, wealth and honor, so that he wants for nothing and has all he desires, yet God does not give him the power to enjoy it, but rather a stranger gets to enjoy it. This is vanity, and a grievous ill.

6:3

Even if a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years, if his soul is not filled with goodness, and no one mourns at his funeral, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he.

6:4

For the stillborn comes in vain and departs in darkness, and his name shall ever remain in darkness.

6:5

Moreover, he has never seen the sun, nor ever known anything. Therefore, he has greater rest than the living,

6:6

who, though he live two thousand years, does not enjoy goodness. Do not all go to the same place?

6:7

All the labor of man is for his mouth, and yet his appetite is not satisfied.

6:8

What has the wise man more than the fool?

What does the poor man gain by knowing how to conduct himself in life?

6:9

Better to enjoy what you have than always wanting more.

This also is vanity and vexation of spirit, like chasing wind.

6.10

Everything that happens was already determined, and what a man is, was already known.

He has no power over the mighty One.

6.11

Since more words and more things only increase the vanity of life, what is best for man?

6.12

Who knows what is good for man in all the days of his vain life, through which he passes like a shadow?

Who can tell a man what comes after him under the sun?

5:11

When goods increase, so do the numbers of those who consume them.
What benefit is there to the owner except to behold them with his eyes?

5:12

The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eats little or much.
But the over-abundance of the rich will not let him rest.

5:13

For there is a sore ill I have seen under the sun,
namely, hoarding riches harms the owner.

5:14

Moreover, those riches can perish by misfortune,
and if he has fathered a son, there is nothing left for him.

5:15

As he came forth from his mother's womb, so shall he leave,
naked as he came. Nothing of all his labors shall he take with him.

5:16

And this also is a sore ill, that in all ways as he came, so shall he go.

5:17

What profits a man for all his chasing after wind,
if all his life he eats in darkness, fear, sorrow and wrath?

5:18

Behold, I have seen that it is good and comely for one to eat and drink,
and to enjoy the good of all his labors on earth
for whatever days of his life God gives him. This is his reward.

5:19

If God gives a man riches and wealth, and the power to enjoy them –
to take his reward and rejoice in his labor – this is a gift from God.

5:20

And he shall not much consider the number of his days,
because God has given him joy in his heart.

Chapter Seven

7:1

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

7:2

It is better to visit the house of mourning than the house of feasting,
for that is the end of all men, and the living should take it to heart.

7:3

Sorrow is better than merriment.
It may sadden your face, but your heart is made stronger.

7:4

The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning.
The heart of the fool is in the house of mirth.

7:5

It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than the song of fools.

7:6

The laughter of fools is like the crackling of thorns in a cooking fire.
This also is vanity.

7:7

Extortion makes a wise man foolish.
A bribe corrupts the heart.

7:8

The end of a matter is better than the beginning.
Better to be patient in spirit than proud.

7:9

Do not be quick to anger. Anger lodges in the bosom of fools.

7:10

Do not ask, "Why were former days better than these?"
Such a question does not come from wisdom.

7:11

It is good to be wise with your inheritance.
By it there is profit to those who see the sun.

7:12

Wisdom provides protection, and money provides protection.
The advantage of wisdom is that it gives life to those who have it.

7:13

Consider the work of God.

Who can make straight what he has made crooked?

7:14

In the day of prosperity be joyful. In the day of adversity,
remember that God sends one as well as the other.

No man can know what comes next for him.

7:15

I have seen all things in this vain life. A just man may perish
in his righteousness, while an evil man lives long in his wickedness.

7:16

Do not be overly righteous, or overly wise. Why destroy yourself?

7:17

Neither be overly wicked or foolish. Why die before your time?

7:18

It is good that you take hold of the one without letting go of the other.
He who fears God shall escape it all.

7:19

Wisdom strengthens a wise man
more than ten mighty men strengthen a city.

7:20

There is no man on earth so righteous
that he does only good and never sins.

7:21

Do not listen to the conversations of others,
lest you hear your servant curse you.

7:22

For you know in your heart that you have likewise cursed others.

7:23

All these have I proven by wisdom.
I said, "I will be wise," but it was far from me.

7:24

That which is far from us, and exceeding deep, who can find it out?

7:25

I applied my heart to know, to seek out wisdom and the reason of things,
to know that wickedness is folly, and folly is madness.

7:26

More bitter than death is the woman who is a trap,
whose heart is a snare, whose hands are like chains.
A man who pleases God shall escape her, but the sinner shall be captured.

7:27

“This is what I have found,” saith the Preacher,
“after looking for meaning in everything.

7:28

My soul continually searches but finds not.
I have found only one true man in every thousand,
and in all the thousands I have not found one true woman.

7:29

This alone I have found: God made man upright,
but he is the victim of his own inventions.”

Chapter Eight

8:1

Who is as the wise man? Who knows the meaning of things?
Wisdom makes a man's face shine, and changes its harsh features.

8:2

Keep the king's commandment as you would an oath to God.

8:3

Do not hasten to leave his presence, and do not stand for an evil cause,
for a king does whatever he pleases.

8:4

The word of a king has power and authority.
Who can say to him, "What are you doing?"

8:5

Obey his commands and you shall meet no harm.

8:6

A wise man's heart discerns the right time and the right way,
for to every purpose there is right timing and right action.

8:7

Man's ignorance of this brings him great misery,
for he knows not what shall be, or when it shall come.

8:8

No one has the power to hold onto the spirit of life.
No one has power over his day of death. There is no discharge from that war,
and your evil shall certainly not save you.

8:9

This I have seen as I applied my heart to every work under the sun:
When one man rules over another with evil intent, he hurts himself.

8:10

I have seen wicked men buried after being carried from a holy place,
while those who lived righteously were forgotten in their city.
This also is vanity.

8:11

Men do evil because punishment for evil is not executed quickly.

8:12

Though a sinner do evil a hundred times, his days may be prolonged.
Yet I know that it shall be well in the end for those who fear God,

8:13

and that it shall not be well for the wicked because they do not fear God.
Though their days may be prolonged, they shall be lived in shadow.

8:14

There are just men who are punished as if they be wicked,
and wicked men who are rewarded as if they be righteous.
This also is vanity.

8:15

So, I commend mirth, because a man has no better thing on earth,
than to eat, drink, and be merry.
That shall sustain him for all the days God gives him under the sun.

8:16

When I earnestly applied my heart to find wisdom, and to know
that which is done on the earth – even going without sleep for days –

8:17

I beheld that the works of God can never be understood by man.
No matter how diligently a man seeks this knowledge, he shall not find it.
Yea, even if a wise man thinks he knows, he does not.

Chapter Nine

9:1

I have considered all this in my heart,
and concluded that the righteous and the wise,
and all their works are in the hands of God alone.
No man knows whether love or hatred awaits him.

9:2

All things come alike to all. The same fate awaits the righteous
and the wicked, the clean and unclean, the one who sacrifices
and the one who sacrifices not. As is the good man, so is the sinner.
As is he who swears an oath, so is he who shuns oaths.

9:3

This is an evil under the sun, that there is one fate for all.
But then, the hearts of men are also full of evil.
Yea, while they live their hearts are occupied with madness.
Then they die.

9:4

But for all who are alive there is hope.
As they say, "A living dog is better than a dead lion."

9:5

For the living know they shall die, but the dead know nothing.
Neither have they anymore reward. Even the memory of them is lost.

9:6

Also, their love, and their hatred, and their envy has perished.
They shall no more have a portion in anything under the sun, forever.

9:7

Go your way. Eat your bread with joy. Drink your wine with a glad heart.
For God has already accepted your works.

9:8

Let your garments always be white. Let your head lack no ointment.

9:9

Live joyfully with the wife you love for all the days of your vain life,
which God has given you under the sun – for all the days of your vanity.
That is your portion in this life, and your labor under the sun.

9:10

Whatever you lay your hand to, do it with all your might.
For there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge,
nor wisdom in the grave to which you are headed.

9:11

And again, I saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift,
nor the battle to the strong. Neither is bread given to the wise,
nor riches to men of intelligence, nor favor to men of skill.
Time and chance happens to them all.

9:12

Man knows not his time. As fish are taken in a net,
as birds are caught in a snare, so is a man caught in an evil moment,
when disaster suddenly befalls him.

9:13

This lesson I have also learned under the sun, and it seemed great to me:

9:14

There was a small city with few men in it. And a great king came against it,
and besieged it, and built great bulwarks around it.

9:15

Now, a poor wise man lived in this city, and by his wisdom alone
he saved the city, yet no one remembered this poor man.

9:16

I have said, "Wisdom is better than strength." Yet, because of his poverty
a poor man's works are forgotten, and his wisdom despised.

9:17

The words of a wise man heard in quiet
are greater than the shouts of a ruler among fools.

9:18

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

Chapter Ten

10:1

A few dead flies cause the oil of the perfumer to send forth a stinking odor.
So does a little folly in him with a reputation for wisdom and honor.

10:2

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

10:3

Even when a fool walks about, he has no sense of himself.
His foolishness is on display for all to see.

10:4

If the spirit of the ruler rises up against you, do not quit your post.
Quiet composure pacifies great offences.

10:5

There is an evil I have seen under the sun,
an error that proceeds from the ruler:

10:6

Fools are set in great dignity, while the rich are set in low places.

10:7

I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants.

10:8

He who digs a pit shall fall into it.
He who cuts through a hedge shall be bitten by a serpent.

10:9

He who quarries stones shall be hurt by them.
He who chops wood shall be endangered by it.

10:10

If the iron is blunt and you do not sharpen the edge,
you must use more strength. Wisdom is a profitable guide to success.

10:11

If the serpent bites before enchantment, what use is the charmer?

10:12

The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious.
The mouth of a fool will swallow him up.

10:13

He begins by talking nonsense, and by the end is speaking madness.

10:14

A fool is full of many words.

A man cannot know what shall be, or what shall come after him.

But who can tell that to a fool?

10:15

The labor of fools wears them out.

They cannot even find their way back to town.

10:16

Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child

and your princes feast until morning!

10:17

Blessed are you, O land, when your king is the son of nobles,

and your princes eat in due season – for strength not for drunkenness!

10:18

By much slothfulness the building decays.

Through idleness of the hands the roof collapses.

10:19

A feast is made for laughter, wine makes one merry,

and money is the answer to all things.

10:20

Curse not the king, not even in thought, and curse not the rich in your bed.

For a bird of the air may carry your voice, and the matter be told on wings.

Chapter Eleven

11:1

Cast your bread upon the waters, and after many days it shall return.

11:2

Store your wealth in seven, even eight places,
for you know not what evil shall come upon the earth.

11:3

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

11:4

He who observes the wind will never sow.
He who regards the clouds will never reap.

11:5

Just as you know not the way of the wind,
nor how the bones of a child grow in a mother's womb,
so you know not the works of God, who creates all.

11:6

In the morning sow your seeds, and in the evening do not rest your hands.
For you know not which field shall prosper,
or whether they both shall be equally good.

11:7

Truly, light is sweet. It is a pleasant thing for the eyes to behold the sun.

11:8

However many years you live, rejoice in them all, knowing also
there will be many days of darkness. Everything that comes is vanity.

11:9

Rejoice, O young man, and let your heart delight in the days of your youth.
Follow the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes.
But know, too, that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.

11:10

Remove sorrow from your heart, and put away evil from your flesh.
Childhood and youth are vanity.

Chapter Twelve

12:1

Remember your Creator in the days of your youth,
before the days of affliction come upon you, and the years draw nigh
of which you say, "There is no more pleasure in life."

12:2

Rejoice while the sun, and the light, and the moon, and the stars
are not darkened, and the clouds do not return after rain.

12:3

Remember him also in the day when the keepers of the house tremble
and strong men bow themselves, when the grinders cease because
they are so few, when those who look out of windows see only darkness,

12:4

when the doors are shut in the streets, when the sound of grinding
is a whisper, when you listen for the voice of birds,
but these daughters of song have been brought low.

12:5

You shall be afraid of heights, and fear shall mark your all ways.
The almond tree shall flower white upon your head, your grasshopper
shall drag its feet, and even the caper berry cannot arouse its desire.
For you are going to your long home, and mourners shall walk the streets.

12:6

Yea, remember your Creator before the silver cord is loosed,
before the golden bowl is broken, before the pitcher
is shattered at the fountain, before the pulley is broken at the well.

12:7

For then your dust shall return to the earth from which it came,
and your spirit shall return unto God.

12:8

"Vanity of vanities," saith the Preacher. "All is vanity."

12:9

Because the Preacher was wise, he continually gave people knowledge.
He taught with wisdom and integrity, and composed many proverbs.

12:10

The Preacher sought diligently to find the right words to teach
uprightness and truth.

12:11

The words of the wise are like sharp goads guiding sheep.
Their sayings are as secure as nails driven home by master craftsmen.
And they all come from the One Shepherd.

12:12

Beware, my son, of anything beyond this wisdom.
There is no end of books, and much study wearies the flesh.

12:13

Let us hear then the conclusion of the whole matter:
“Revere God and keep his commandments. This is the whole duty of man.”

12:14

For God shall bring your every work into judgment – every secret thing –
whether it be good, or whether it be evil.