

ECCLESIASTES



SONG OF SOLOMON

The Bible Study Textbook Series

NEW TESTAMENT			
New Testament & History By W. Wartick & W. Fields Vol. I - The Intertestament Period and The Gospels	The Gospel of Matthew In Four Volumes By Harold Fowler	The Gospel of Mark By B. W. Johnson and Don DeWelt	
The Gospel of Luke By T. R. Applebury	The Gospel of John By Paul T. Butler	Acts Made Actual By Don DeWelt	
Romans Realized By Don DeWelt	Studies in Corinthians By T. R. Applebury	Guidance From Galatians By Don Earl Boatman	
The Glorious Church (Ephesians) By Wilbur Fields	Philippians - Colossians Philemon By Wilbur Fields	Thinking Through Thessalonians By Wilbur Fields	
Paul's Letters To Timothy & Titus By Don DeWelt	Helps From Hebrews By Don Earl Boatman	James & Jude By Don Fream	
Letters From Peter By Bruce Oberst	Hereby We Know (I-II-III John) By Clinton Gill	The Seer, The Saviour and The Saved (Revelation) By James Strauss	
OLD TESTAMENT			
O.T. & History By William Smith and Wilbur Fields	Genesis In Four Volumes By C. C. Crawford	Exploring Exodus By Wilbur Fields	Leviticus By Don DeWelt
Numbers By Brant Lee Doty	Deuteronomy By Bruce Oberst	Joshua - Judges Ruth By W. W. Winter	I & II Samuel By W. W. Winter
I & II Kings By James E. Smith		I & II Chronicles By Robert E. Black	Ezra - Nehemiah Esther By Ruben Ratzlaff
The Shattering of Silence (Job) By James Strauss		Psalms In Two Volumes By J. B. Rotherham	Proverbs By Donald Hunt
Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon—By R. J. Kidwell and Don DeWelt		Isaiah In Three Volumes By Paul T. Butler	Jeremiah and Lamentations By James E. Smith
Ezekiel By James E. Smith		Daniel By Paul T. Butler	Hosea - Joel - Amos Obadiah - Jonah By Paul T. Butler
Micah - Nahum - Habakkuk - Zephaniah Haggai - Zechariah - Malachi By Clinton Gill			
DOCTRINE			
Survey Course In Christian Doctrine Two Books of Four Volumes By C. C. Crawford		The Church In The Bible By Don DeWelt	The Eternal Spirit Two Volumes By C. C. Crawford

BIBLE STUDY TEXTBOOK SERIES

ECCLESIASTES

by

R. J. Kidwell

SONG OF SOLOMON

by

Don DeWelt

PARAPHRASE AND ANALYTICAL OUTLINE

by **Arthur G. Clarke**

College Press, Joplin, Missouri

Copyright 1977
College Press

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ECCLESIASTES

Dedication	xiii
Foreword	xv
Introduction	1

OUTLINE

<i>Introduction: 1:1-11</i>	5
A. Author: Solomon (1)	5
B. Thesis: The vanity of all earthly things (2)	8
C. Explanation: (3-11)	12
1. Man cannot show a profit of all his labor under the sun (3)	12
2. Compared with the world, man is transitory and all of his efforts are futile (4-8)	19
3. History repeats itself and man forgets what has gone before (9-11)	23
I. A MAN OF WISDOM WORKS IN HARMONY WITH GOD'S PROVIDENTIAL BLESSINGS, OTHERWISE HE DISCOVERS ALL HIS WORK IS VANITY (1:12—6:12)	27
A. Experiments and Conclusions (1:12—2:26)	27
1. Experiments (1:12—2:11)	27
a. Unlimited resources for research (12)	27
b. Wisdom is used in exploring all that is done under heaven (13-18)	29
c. Wisdom is used in the exploration of sensuous pleasure (2:1-11)	41
2. Conclusions (2:12-26)	55
a. Value of this wisdom and pleasure stop at the grave (12-17)	55
b. The legacy of one's labor is often lost to fools when one dies (18-23)	61
c. Labor is good only when it is acknowledged as from the hand of God (24-26)	65
B. Acknowledgments that we must work under	

ECCLESIASTES — SONG OF SOLOMON

the rule of God's providence (3:1-22)	69
1. Man should adjust to live his life within the framework of God's providence (1-8)	69
2. Working outside the framework of God's providence results in frustration and defeat (9-22)	78
a. Man should work with an awareness of God (9-11)	
b. The ability to enjoy the fruit of one's labor is a precious gift from God (12-15)	
c. God's purpose is thwarted but not defeated by perversion of justice (16-22)	
C. Guidelines for working with God under all circumstances (4:1-16)	89
1. How to work under oppression (1-3)	89
2. Keep your motive for work pure (4-6)	94
3. Attain your riches for practical good (7-12)	96
4. Keep in mind that prestigious positions will soon be forgotten (13-16)	103
D. Guidelines for the work of worship (5:1-9)	107
1. Watch your step in God's house (1a)	107
2. Refrain from making a sacrifice of fools through hasty words (1b-7)	110
3. Recognize God as the Ruler over all (8-9)	119
E. Admonitions concerning the futility of riches (5:10—6:12)	123
1. Riches by themselves are vain (5:10-20)	123
a. They do not satisfy (10-12)	123
b. They may be harmful (13-17)	127
c. Exhortation to enjoy the riches God permits (18-20)	131
2. It is possible to possess riches which cannot be enjoyed (6:1-6)	135
3. Reasons why riches cannot satisfy (7-9)	143
4. Reasons why it is useless to strive for riches (10-12)	147

TABLE OF CONTENTS

II. A MAN OF WISDOM WHO WORKS IN HARMONY WITH GOD REAPS EARTHLY BENEFITS REGARDLESS OF ENVIRON- MENTAL CIRCUMSTANCES (7:1—12:8)	152
A. Adverse circumstances teach worthwhile lessons but if improperly interpreted could lead to despair (7:1-22)	152
1. This lesson is taught by comparisons (1-14)	152
a. A good name is better than precious ointment (1)	152
b. Attendance at a funeral is better than attendance at a birthday party (2)	154
c. Sorrow is better than laughter (3)	156
d. Wisdom is better than folly (4)	158
e. A rebuke from the wise is better than the song of fools (5-7)	159
f. Patience is better than anxiety (8-9)	162
g. The now is better than the former days (10) . . .	164
h. Wisdom is better than hasty judgment (11) . . .	166
i. Wisdom is better than money (12)	167
j. Trusting God for tomorrow is better than knowing about tomorrow (13-14)	169
2. This lesson is taught even when the opposite appears to be true (15-18)	172
a. The wicked are rewarded and the righteous suffer (15)	172
b. Warnings against the wrong interpretations of life (16-17)	174
c. Choose the best in life (18)	177
3. Wisdom leads to proper attitudes and conduct (19-22)	179
a. Wisdom strengthens the wise (19)	179
b. Wisdom leads one to see his own sin (20)	181
c. Wisdom protects against false accusations and self righteousness (21-22)	183
B. Important lessons drawn from these observa- tions (7:23-29)	185

ECCLESIASTES — SONG OF SOLOMON

1. Practical lessons can be learned, but the deeper things are unattainable (23-24)	185
2. Through intensive study, one comes to see the potential within men and women to do evil (25-28)	189
3. A final observation: Men seek evil devices (29) . .	195
C. Admonitions to use wisdom in the work of solving the problems of life (8:1—9:18)	197
1. Work in submission to the king (8:1-8)	197
2. Work even when one discovers the oppression of the righteous (9-13)	209
3. Work even when one cannot understand the working of God (14-17)	217
4. Work regardless of the similar fate of the godly and the ungodly (9:1-10)	221
5. Work with the awareness that God will control the final outcome (11-12)	232
6. Wisdom is declared to be the greatest guide in our work (13-18)	236
D. Illustrations of those who lack wisdom (10:1-11) . .	242
1. The foolish worker is in trouble (1-4)	242
2. Foolishness leads to humiliation (5-7)	246
3. Failures in life result from lack of wisdom (8-11)	248
E. Those who work contrary to wisdom are reprehensible (12-20)	251
1. Talkers and workers (12-15)	251
2. Rulers (16-17)	254
3. Warnings (18-20)	256
F. Exhortations to work in harmony with wisdom (11:1—12:8)	260
1. Trust God and be cheerful in all of your activities (11:1-8)	260
2. Enjoy the days of your youth (9-10)	269
3. Remember God in your youth (12:1)	272
G. Death comes to every man (2-8)	274

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Conclusion: 12:9-14

A. Man is admonished to work in harmony with God through the words of one Shepherd (9-12)	284
B. Man is admonished to fear God and keep His commandments (13)	289
C. Man is admonished to work in harmony with God because God will bring every work into judgment (14)	292
Epilogue	293
Bibliography	295

SONG OF SOLOMON

Preface	301
Introduction	305

THE SONG OF SONGS

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

by Arthur G. Clarke

Title — 1:1	315
I. <i>FIRST SCENE — The King's Palace — 1:2 to 3:5</i> . . .	316
A. <i>Shulammite:</i>	
1. Sililoquy, 1:2-4	316
2. Appeal, 1:5-6	322
3. Sililoquy, 1:7	326
B. <i>Court Ladies:</i>	
1. Response, 1:8 (ironical)	328
C. <i>Solomon:</i>	
1. First Advance to Shulammite, 1:9-11	331
D. <i>Shulammite:</i>	
1. Narration to Court Ladies, 1:12 to 2:7	334
a. Explanation of her situation, 1:12	334
b. Estimation of her beloved, 1:13, 14	336

ECCLESIASTES — SONG OF SOLOMON

c. Description of a conversation, 1:15 to 2:6	339
1. Dialogue: Shepherd, 1:15	339
Shulammite, 1:16 to 2:1	339
2. Dialogue: Shepherd, 2:2	344
Shulammite, 2:3a	344
3. Aside to Court Ladies, 2:3b	344
4. Appeal, 2:5, 6	344
d. Adjuration to Court Ladies, 2:7 (first)	344
E. <i>Shulammite</i> :	
1. Narration to Court Ladies (perhaps later), 2:8 to 3:5	351
a. Invitation from the beloved, 2:8-14	351
b. Intervention of the brothers, 2:15-17	358
1. Their behest, 15	358
2. Her avowal, 16	358
3. Her request to the shepherd, 17	358
c. Relation of a dream, 3:1-4	361
d. Adjuration to Court Ladies, 3:5 (second)	361
II. <i>SECOND SCENE — The Royal Procession — 3:6-11</i>	
A. Remarks of the Spectators	367
1. <i>First Speaker</i> : v. 6	367
2. <i>Second Speaker</i> : vv. 7, 8	367
3. <i>Third Speaker</i> : vv. 9, 10	367
4. <i>Fourth Speaker</i> : v. 11	367
III. <i>THIRD SCENE: The Lovers' Interviews — 4:1 to 5:1</i> .	375
A. <i>First Meeting</i> (Jerusalem?)	
1. Shepherd's monologue, 4:1-7	375
B. <i>Second Meeting</i> (Jerusalem)	
1. Prolepsis, 4:8 to 5:1	382
(Chronologically coming between 8:4 and 8:5?)	
2. Dialogue: Shepherd, 4:8-16a	382
Shulammite, 4:16b	391
Shepherd, 5:1a	391
3. Comment: Remarks of Wedding Guests or Shepherd's Companions, 5:1b	391

TABLE OF CONTENTS

IV. *FOURTH SCENE — The King's Palace —*

5:2 to 8:4 Retrospect

A. *Shulammite:*

1. Narration to Court Ladies of another dream
5:2-7..... 394
2. Adjuration to Court Ladies, 5:8 (third) 400

B. *Court Ladies:*

1. Challenge, 5:9 (ironical) 400

C. *Shulammite:*

1. Description of her beloved, 5:10-16 400

D. *Court Ladies:*

1. Inquiry, 6:1 407

E. *Shulammite:*

1. Answer, 6:2 407
2. Avowal, 6:3 407

F. *Solomon:*

1. Interview with the Shulammite, 6:4 to 7:10..... 407
 - a. Dialogue: Solomon, 6:4-10 407
 - Shulammite, 6:11-13 416
 - Solomon, 7:1-9 419
 - (vv. 1-5 may be remarks of women attendants)
 - Shulammite (interrupting the king) 7:9b, 10 419
 - (Her final avowal of fidelity to her beloved.)

G. *Shulammite:*

1. Invitation to the Shepherd, 7:11 to 8:2 425
2. Aside to Court Ladies, 8:3 425
3. Adjuration to Court Ladies, 8:4 425

V. *FIFTH SCENE — The Homeward Journey — 8:5-14*

A. Villagers (or the Shepherd's Companions):

1. Inquiry, 8:5a 432

B. *The Lovers:*

1. Dialogue, 8:5b-14 432
2. Shepherd, 8:5b 432
3. Shulammite, 8:6-12 432

ECCLESIASTES — SONG OF SOLOMON

a. Aspiration, 6, 7	432
b. Recollection, 8, 9	432
c. Declaration, 10	432
d. Information, 11	432
e. Repudiation, 12	432
4. Shepherd, 8:13	432
5. Shulammite, 8:14	432
Bibliography	445

To
my wife Patsy
and our dear children
Vicky Lynn and Stephen Kehrer
Pamela Kay and Jay Link
and Jay
who together
have risen above the vanity
of this world
and have
“tasted of the heavenly gift.”

FOREWORD

Ecclesiastes is a negative, when once developed, produces an unbelievably sharp picture of modern man. Once the message of the book is sufficiently grasped and perceived, one is astounded at how crisp, up to date, and relevant the pictures are. Little would we suspect that such graphic word photographs were taken nearly three thousand years ago! It is possible, as Robert L. Short¹ has demonstrated, to capture today's various moods of work and play through the lens of his camera, and set the picture along side the corresponding truths of this marvelous book. There is nothing new under the sun!

The untiring and resourceful experiments of "the Preacher" are proposed and carried out with a single objective: to discover if man is capable of finding joy, fulfillment, and lasting satisfaction in things which are purely of a sublunary nature. His conclusion is that not only is such a pursuit futile, it is like "feasting on the wind."

His photographs reveal the true picture of life. He does not attempt to hide selfishness, hypocrisy, greed, oppression, tyranny, ambition, or social inequities. He tells it like it is. He has at least this much in common with the present generation.

He recognizes that God has control of His world. He senses a providential influence in all of life. It is just that his photography never brings God into sharp focus. He is always in the distance. He is there, but one can never quite make out His form. His influence and power are felt but no word is forthcoming to give one direction to life or an interpretation of the pictures of life. It isn't that the Preacher is disinterested in the answers, he simply cannot find them on his own. He writes, "Even though man should seek laboriously, he will not discover" (8:17).

From the beginning, man has had to earn his living by the

¹ Robert L. Short, *A Time to be Born and a Time to Die* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1973). This concept of Ecclesiastes as the "Bible's Negative Image of Christ the Truth" is demonstrated in his book.

sweat of his brow. This labor takes on many forms. It is evident from the Preacher's observations that even when one does not have to resort to physical labor for his daily needs that he still must labor with his mind. The advantage appears to be with the man who labors with his hands. He discovers his sleep to be sweet and peaceful as compared to the man who increases his wisdom and knowledge and at the same time increases his sorrow.

The basic question of the book is: Is there any profit in all of man's work which he does upon this earth?

Hard work! That is the key. Every man who has ever lived can identify with that. Labor and reward, labor and reward. This is the age-old principle, but does it really work? The paradox of life is that the richest men are often the loneliest men and those with the greatest wealth are the ones who possess the greatest need. This is the puzzle that must be sorted out and put together.

When the book is completed, the reader has discovered that no new road can be traveled. Man has traveled the road before. Each new generation appears to discover something new, but they are merely inventing new names to define and describe ancient pursuits.

The Preacher has succeeded in putting his finger on the emptiness of man. He has actually photographed the vacuum. His greatest contribution, however, is to lead the reader to see that the "want" of man is in the form of Jesus. The vacuum is Christ-shaped.²

² *Ibid.*, p. 100.

INTRODUCTION

It is important that we see in Ecclesiastes more than the woe of a disappointed preacher.

The book has been variously interpreted through the years offering vastly different "keys" to unlock its hidden meanings. Keys are important in interpreting much of the Bible, but they must always be in harmony with the immediate and greater context of the writer. They must never contradict the overriding purpose of God's revelation. Keys, therefore, must fit the lock before they are of value. Many approaches to the book have been discarded simply on the basis that the key did not work. It may be impossible to discover the exact key that satisfactorily reveals every nuance, or meaning, or hidden lesson contained in Ecclesiastes. It would be presumptuous to offer one's interpretation as the "only" workable key. However, there is a certain amount of confidence that must be demonstrated in writing a commentary on a book of the Bible. At the same time one comes to such a responsibility with humility and gravity of mind. It is this author's prayer that nothing offered will be contrary to the greater purposes of God or hinder His blessings on those who study.

The following limited examples of some of the themes pursued in the interpretation of the book run the gamut of human imagination and experience. These include such alleged "keys" as epicurean philosophy, fatalism, hedonism, pessimism, cynical materialism, sensuality and license, and existentialism. "To some it has presented itself as merely the sad outpouring of the deep melancholy of a world-weary monarch, sated with all that life can offer."¹ Others see in it the expressions of a repentant Solomon reconciled at last to the God whom he had forgotten. So divergent have been the interpretations that even skeptics and infidels have rejoiced over the fact that such a book is in the Bible. They see only the superficial meaning of some phrases, when taken out of context, which appear to contradict the rest of the Bible. In addition they hope to see

¹ George Granville Bradley, *Lectures on Ecclesiastes* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1898), p. 6.

ECCLESIASTES

in the book a humanistic and secular approach to life that excludes the necessity of God, and places emphasis on pleasure as the object of man's greatest good.

The purpose of the book is clearly stated in 12:13: "Fear God and keep His commandments."

Secondary purposes or themes are numerous. One prominent idea is that everything of this world is cursed to a transitory nature and thus one cannot find true enjoyments in either the collection of the earth's goods or the pleasure derived from them. To divorce one from a love of earthly things is a worthy endeavor. Another minor theme calls attention to the inequities of life and teaches that the godly ones should not be discouraged when they are caught by them. Numerous lessons may be derived from a study of the book but each should be kept subservient to the major purpose.

There is little dispute over the destiny of the book. It was primarily written to the godly in Israel. Like all other books of the Bible with the qualities of practical application, it must be accepted in the Christian age for its contribution to our understanding of and participation in the redemption process. It has been stated that Ecclesiastes asks the questions that the rest of the Bible answers.

If the book did nothing more than demonstrate the futility of living apart from God's grace and revelation, it would have a pertinent place in every age. If the average non-Christian individual would but read it today, it could bring him much more quickly to Christ. It would save him the difficult, arduous journey of a wasted life. He could see immediately that God is the only alternative to this world and its offerings, and that Jesus is God's first and last argument to man's claim to genuine fulfillment and peace.

The immediate recipients of the book were those godly people of Israel whose needs were to be met by the ministry of the Preacher's words. More than this, there is a message for the Christian and the non-Christian today.

Although there is general acceptance that the book was written to the godly in Israel, there are more important questions

INTRODUCTION

on this subject: to the godly of what age and by whom?

Opinions on these two questions generally center in two camps. The one holds the more traditional view that Solomon is the author and that he wrote to those of his own day. The other view, more widely accepted since the middle of the seventeenth century, subscribes to the theory that the book was written by one who impersonates Solomon, choosing to refer to himself as "the Preacher," or by the Hebrew term "Kohleth." They would say that the godly of Israel were those who lived under Persian or Greek rule from 400-200 B.C. For an example, let us give the words of Robert L. Short who maintains this view. He writes, "So, then, who was Ecclesiastes really? Ecclesiastes was an upper-class teacher of wisdom who lived in Jerusalem about three centuries before Christ. Beyond this there is little more about the man that we need to know—or indeed can know—in order to appreciate his book."² Although during the last three centuries the consensus of writers has been against the Solomonic authorship of Ecclesiastes, a new trend is developing in favor of ascribing the book to him. It is a well accepted fact that the universal consent of antiquity attributed the authorship of Ecclesiastes to Solomon. The traditional Jewish view subscribed to Solomonic authorship.

Our discussion shall assume Solomonic authorship. The date, therefore, would be approximately 985 B.C., or toward the end of his life. The original readers of his words would be those of his own day. Throughout the book Solomon may be variously referred to as the Preacher, Kohleth, Ecclesiastes or Solomon. Ecclesiastes is a transliteration in the English of the Greek equivalent for the Hebrew title. The Hebrew name for the book is Kohleth. It means to assemble as a congregation, and many believe for the purpose of receiving a message. Martin Luther rendered the title, *Der Prediger*, which simply means The Preacher. This title is consistent with the fact that in 1:1 the Preacher has certain words to

² Short, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

ECCLESIASTES

communicate to his audience and in 12:10 the Preacher "sought to find delightful words and to write words of truth correctly."

Ecclesiastes falls into two equal parts. The first six chapters establish the premise that all earthly things are futile and that the only way man can have personal satisfaction is to live within God's providential blessings. The last six chapters, or second half of the book, assume this premise and therefore proceeds to demonstrate that man can still reap earthly benefits regardless of environmental circumstances. Once man is led to see that earthly values cannot satisfy, he is ready for the conclusion of the book. The conclusion is really a three-fold admonition: (1) to work in harmony with God through the words of one Shepherd; (2) to fear God and keep His commandments; and (3) to realize that God will bring every work into judgment.

ECCLESIASTES

INTRODUCTION: 1:1-11

A. AUTHOR: SOLOMON, 1:1

TEXT 1:1

1 The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 1:1

1. Name three distinctions claimed by the author.
2. What Bible character fits the description given in this verse?
3. From the evidence of this verse, would Solomon qualify as the Preacher?
4. Read 12:9-10 and list the goals the Preacher sets for himself.

PARAPHRASE 1:1

These are the words of the one who assembled the people in order to preach to them. In addition to being identified as a preacher, he is David's son and king in Jerusalem.

COMMENT 1:1

v. 1 This verse identifies the author of Ecclesiastes as "the Preacher," and "son of David, king in Jerusalem." Views vary sharply concerning the actual author of Ecclesiastes, but there is little doubt that Solomon fits this description. The name "Solomon" never appears in the book. This does not mean, however, that he is thus discounted as the author. The Jewish tradition held to the Solomonic authorship as did most non-Jewish writers until Hugo Grotius argued against this

possibility in 1644 A.D. Since that time modern critics have woven fanciful theories concerning possible authors. Even among conservative writers, there is an uncertainty as to whom the book should be ascribed. Recent tendencies, however, on the part of conservative scholars fashion a return to the more traditional view that Solomon wrote the book.

An overwhelming amount of evidence within Ecclesiastes sustains the contention for Solomonic authorship. The following list of internal evidence, consistent with Solomon and his day, is offered as worthy of serious consideration: (1) Verse one identified Solomon precisely; (2) The statement in 1:12 requires that the author be identified as a king in Jerusalem over Israel; (3) The extensive and elaborate experiments recorded in chapters one and two required wealth and opportunity available only to one of Solomon's greatness; (4) References such as 1:16 necessitate an authoritative position and identifies Jerusalem as the base of activity; (5) Collaborating evidence from I Kings, Song of Solomon, Nehemiah, and I Chronicles complements the information of 2:1-9 and thus confirms our contention; (6) The inequities identified with the close of Solomon's reign along with the social conditions created by his desire for self enjoyment are in harmony with the descriptions of 4:1-6 and 5:8; (7) The allusion in 4:13 to an old and foolish king (Solomon) and one who has come out of prison (Jeroboam's return from his exile in Egypt) to replace the king, fits the closing days of Solomon's reign explicitly; (8) A final reference noted is found in 12:9 where the author of Ecclesiastes has searched out and arranged many proverbs. This is in harmony with I Kings 4:32 where it is recorded that Solomon spoke three thousand proverbs.

Solomon is undoubtedly the one to whom we are indebted for this marvelous book. Read also II Samuel 12:24 and I Kings 1:39 to identify "the Preacher" of 1:1.

"The" words of the Preacher implies that a definite message is in the mind of the author and he intends to proclaim it to all who will hear. We are aware immediately that the Preacher is a proclaimer of truth. From the very first line in the book

we note the purpose of his writing. The definite article "the" suggests a specific message. The content and direction of thought are not revealed at this time. It is the discovery of that message and its practical application to life that shall be the reward for the diligent student of Ecclesiastes.

The goal of the Preacher's words is clearly stated in 12:10: "The Preacher sought to find delightful words and to write words of truth correctly." It is like a breath of fresh air to discover his intention so refreshingly isolated for all to see. There can be little doubt about his purpose. He wants to "find delightful words," and "write words of truth correctly." He clarified his purpose further by stating that a Preacher uses his words as "goads" to prod and drive toward a goal (12:11). He wants the truth of his message to be secured in the minds of his readers as surely as well-driven nails hold fast the carpenter's masterpiece. Although the lessons he teaches us may arise from his own experience, or out of the cultural situation of historic Israel as she struggled under her oft-times foolish king, the Preacher does not want us to miss the fact that it is God who gives us the book! He declares that the words "are given by one Shepherd" (12:11). Once we see that, regardless of the myriad approaches to the interpretation of the book, we must admit that there is a single well-defined purpose for its writing. Solomon eliminates the possibility of debate over this issue when he writes: "The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person" (12:13).

Any pathway taken to unlock the mystery of the book of Ecclesiastes has at least one inescapable criterion: it must lead to Solomon's stated conclusion.

Solomon arrives at an exciting, positive conclusion. His thorough examination of all things, and his extensive experimentations with greatness, work, and pleasure, led him to the frustration of dead-end streets and blind alleys. His conclusion in reality is a fresh, new beginning. The entanglements of the world of vanity are behind him and a clear new horizon looms before him. He draws his reader to the inescapable doorway

to the new life. A burst of heavenly sunlight drives all the meaningless experiments and observations of the past deeper into the ever darkening shadows of the outer periphery of little concern. His grip now is on his new found truth. He clings to it and to it alone. He has finally managed his priority list in such a way that life becomes worth living and filled with purpose and enjoyment. He has managed to bring into focus, in the center of his existence, the central truth alone worth knowing, and most importantly worth believing. He declares this single truth with a note of triumph: "Fear God and keep His commandments" (12:13).

It is a long, difficult journey from Solomon's opening statement that "all is vanity," and his final conclusion to "fear God," but at least the reader knows from the beginning the road Solomon intends to travel.

FACT QUESTIONS 1:1

1. What Bible character best fits the description of 1:1?
2. Until what year did both Jews and Protestants generally ascribe to Solomonic authorship?
3. List evidence within Ecclesiastes that supports Solomon as the author.
4. What is implied by the definite article "the" in reference to the words of the Preacher?
5. What is the Preacher's goal as clearly stated in 12:10-11?
6. The words of the book are given by whom? (12:11)
7. Could this reference be speaking of Divine inspiration? Cf. II Timothy 3:16.
8. What single truth does Solomon arrive at in the final analysis? (12:13).

B. THESIS: THE VANITY OF ALL EARTHLY THINGS 1:2

TEXT 1:2

- 2 "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity."

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 1:2

5. How many times is there a reference to “vanity” in this verse?
6. What does the Preacher include in his category of vain things?
7. List some popular meanings and some dictionary meanings given to the term vanity.

PARAPHRASE 1:2

“Empty and transitory,” sighs the Preacher, “Everything is fleeting as a vapor and unfulfilling!”

COMMENT 1:2

v. 2 The Preacher's first declaration, “All is vanity,” is not one of despair but one which simply states the truth concerning the nature of his world and everything in it. The Lord has cursed the earth (Genesis 5:29) as a result of Adam's sin. Therefore, Paul writes, “For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope.” The fact that the earth and all that it contains has felt the curse of death, is in harmony with the message of the Bible. Study Genesis 3:17-19; Psalms 39:5-6; Genesis 5:29; Hebrews 1:10-12 and James 1:10-11 and 4:13-17.

We often ascribe the idea of vainness of false pride to the term vanity, but this is not the meaning to be given the term as it is interwoven throughout the Preacher's message. It is evident that it conveys the idea of a short life, as the proper noun “Abel” comes from the same Hebrew word that is here translated “vanity.” The Hebrew term “hebel” is used thirty-seven times in Ecclesiastes.¹ Such extensive application of one

¹ Ernest W. Hengstenberg, *A Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (Rochester, Wn.: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1960), p. 46.

idea, discussed in each chapter except the tenth, demands a thorough understanding of its use.

The term is rich in meaning and usage as it appears over and over again in the book. No one term could possibly convey the meaning of each situation. *The New English Bible* has replaced the word "vanity" with "emptiness," while the *Anchor Bible* replaces "vanity" with "vapor." Listed here are terms which serve as synonyms or corresponding ideas. They are: vanity, futile, empty, meaningless, fleeting, pointless, incomprehensible, breath, vapor, unfulfilling, striving after wind, short-lived, Abel, transitory, temporary, sublunary, under the sun, under heaven and upon the earth.

Many lessons in the book are based on the conclusion that "All is vanity." It is vital, therefore, that one see the numerous possibilities contained in the word "vanity." When all of life and its hopes are qualified by sublunary restrictions and limitations, when everything a man has to remember, enjoy today, and look forward to, is limited to and qualified by experience in this life only, then one begins to sense the impact of the term. The term vanity, therefore, is applicable to everything that falls beneath the curse of sin. When man sinned, he began the process of death. As noted in Genesis 3:17-19, the process was passed on to man's world. Therefore, the "All" of Solomon's declaration is comprehensive enough to include both man and his world. There is a genuine pity associated with this truth. As the Apostle Paul has said, "If we have only hoped in Christ in this life, we are of all men most to be pitied" (I Corinthians 15:19). Or again, "If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (I Corinthians 15:32).

At the beginning of the book, we are confronted with the most basic question man can possibly ask: Is this life, in its toil, pleasures, possessions, challenges, and ambitions all there is to living, or is there a Word from God to give hope to man in the midst of his activities? It is in the face of this question that the Preacher embarks on his quest.

It is with deep gratitude to God that we study Ecclesiastes

with the wisdom of His final revelation. On numerous occasions Jesus pointed to the transitory nature of man and his world and always directed his hearers to a higher calling. It was indeed Solomon that Jesus had in mind, clothed in all his glory, when he drove home the lesson that "... not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions" (Luke 12:15). It is in the light of this truth that he challenges us, "But seek for His kingdom, and these things shall be added to you. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves purses which do not wear out, and unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near, nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your hearts be also" (Luke 12:31-34).

Solomon's use of "vanity" does not convey the idea of "fatalism" because God is always present in the sense that He is the acknowledged Creator of this world (12:1), and in His providence He controls the ultimate outcome of all events.

FACT QUESTIONS 1:2

9. What should be included in the term "All" in the statement "All is vanity"?
10. Since the proper noun "Abel" is derived from the Hebrew term for vanity, what meaning should be ascribed to "Abel"?
11. How often does the term "vanity" appear in Ecclesiastes?
12. List some of the possible ways the Hebrew term "hebel" could be translated.
13. According to Paul's reasoning in I Corinthians 15:19, what would cause man most to be pitied?
14. What did Jesus say concerning earthly possessions? Cf. Luke 12:15
15. "Fatalism" is the teaching that the world is controlled by fate. Why can we rule "fatalism" out as a possible interpretation to the book of Ecclesiastes?

C. EXPLANATION: 3-11

1. Man cannot show a profit of all his labor under the sun.
1:3

TEXT 1:3

- 3 What advantage does man have in all his work which he does under the sun?

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 1:3

8. Explain the meaning of "advantage" in the light of 3:9 and 1:22-23.
9. Man labors, but his work is restricted to what place?

PARAPHRASE 1:3

If all of man's efforts are for personal gain and satisfaction, when life is over, what does he possess that he can claim as his reward?

COMMENT 1:3

v. 3 This first question in the book gets to the heart of the Preacher's pursuit. It is not a question directed toward a lazy person. He is a worker! He has dreams and ambitions. He envisions great wealth and power. It is the advantage or profit that he is concerned with. This same proposition is close to Jesus' heart as he, too, raises the question, but is quick to offer an incentive to make our work worthwhile. He says, "For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for

his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds" (Matthew 16:26-27).

The term "advantage" or "profit" is only used in Ecclesiastes. It does not appear in any other Old Testament book. It is used several times by Solomon (1:3; 2:11; 3:9; 5:9, 16; 7:11). It means preeminence or gain. It may also mean "to remain or be left." The meaning here is that of a collected materialistic gain. The Preacher's contention is that man does not have an advantage or profit. He cannot hold on to anything. He toils, labors, plans, but it is like grasping the wind (4:16; 5:15).

This first question of the book offers a key to the reader. It is obvious that man will be engaged in making his living by the sweat of his brow (Genesis 3:19). Man and labor are not equal but they are inseparable. But what will be man's profit? This question must be held against the interpretation of the entire book. Even when there is a temporary profit (5:9; 7:11) it is short lived and unfulfilling.

Modern man, too, grows weary of facing the labor of each day, realizing nothing more than the financial compensation at the end of the week. The monotonous grind of daily routine of the Preacher's day resulted in the declaration, "I completely despaired of all the fruit of my labor" (2:20).

What a vastly different question is "What advantage does the *Christian* man have in all his labor?" Cf. Colossians 1:29; Hebrews 13:21; Revelation 14:13.

Solomon's question and answer are qualified by the phrase "under the sun." This restricts both his question and his answer. Just what restrictions the phrase places upon the inquiry and the place and meaning of the phrase in the book of Ecclesiastes now draws our attention.

The phrase "under the sun" implies a necessary restriction. What is to be included, and what is to be excluded? Since Solomon does not define the meaning for us, we are left to discover the meaning from the use of the idea in the context of the book. One cannot go outside Ecclesiastes for his answer as the phrase is no where else employed in the Bible.

Two other phrases used in the book apparently carry the same meaning. They are "under heaven," and "upon the earth." It is Solomon's purpose, through the use of these restricting phrases, to make his observations and conclusions believable. On occasion he expresses the futility of life "under the sun" with such words as, "who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime, during the few years of his futile life" (6:12)? Yet, he never qualifies his toil "upon the earth" by contrasting it to any after life or hope of eternal blessing. It is as if he is saying, if on this earth we find our complete experience and reason for existing—if this life is all there is, then "a live dog is better than a dead lion . . . for whoever is joined with the living, there is hope" (9:4. Life "under the sun" may not afford man the opportunity for enjoyment, but one must be alive in order to take advantage of such opportunity if it does come.

The restriction "under the sun" appears to be a self-imposed framework of interpreting the meaning of life as it is lived apart from the "verbal revelation" from God. Without the benefit of "words" from God, man is caught in a futile struggle to unravel and interpret the complexities of our transitory world. Thus, the phrase "under the sun" includes that which has to do with purely earthly things. The Preacher purposely closes off the influence of Heaven for the sake of his higher purpose: i.e. the vanity of all earthly things.

In a very real sense the "sun" can move about heaven mocking man, disappearing only to return again tomorrow, smiling upon the futile efforts of those who are so identified with sublunary affairs. Yet, for some, a new day dawns and as Malachi predicted, "For you who fear My name the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings" (Malachi 4:2). The Preacher is not ready to take us to the "new day" but intends to fully demonstrate that upon the earth, under heaven, and beneath the earthly sun, man toils and dreams but for little profit!

"UNDER THE SUN," "UNDER HEAVEN," AND "UPON EARTH"

**A STUDY OF
"UNDER THE SUN," "UNDER HEAVEN,"
AND "UPON EARTH"**

IN ECCLESIASTES

Scripture Reference	That which is viewed by Solomon under the sun	Observations and Conclusions
1:3	All the work one does	What advantage?
1:9	Nothing that is new	Already has been done
1:13	All that has been done	A grievous task to discover
1:14	All the works that have been done	Vanity, Striving after wind
2:3	What good the sons of men might do	Vanity, Striving after wind, No profit
2:11	All of man's labor, activities and exertion	Vanity, Striving after wind, No profit
2:17	Work	Hated life, Grievous, Futile, Striving after wind
2:18	All the fruit of my labor	Hated it Must leave it to another
2:19	All the fruit of my labor	Vanity, Another will have control over it
2:20	All the fruit of my labor	I completely despaired
2:22	All labor and striving	Painful, Grievous, No rest, Vanity
3:1-9	An appointed time for everything	What profit?

ECCLESIASTES

A STUDY OF "UNDER THE SUN" . . . *continued*

Scripture Reference	That which is viewed by Solomon under the sun	Observations and Conclusions
3:16-19	Wickedness in the place of righteousness and justice	Vanity
4:1-2	Acts of oppression	Congratulated the dead
4:3	Evil activities	Greater congratulations to the one who never lived
4:7-8	Labor depriving me of pleasure	No one to whom to leave the wealth
4:15-16	Prominence and success are soon forgotten	Vanity, Striving after wind
5:13-16	Riches hoarded by their owner	Grievous evil, No advantage, Toiling for the wind
6:1-6	A man who has been given everything from the hand of God, but he cannot enjoy them and a foreigner enjoys them	Prevalent evil, Vanity, Sore affliction, Miscarriage is better, Ends in the grave, Never satisfied, No advantage over the poor, Futility, Striving after wind, Cannot argue with God, Increases futility, No advantage
6:12	Spends life like a shadow, Few years	No knowledge of tomorrow
7:20-24	No righteous man	Remote, Exceedingly mysterious

"UNDER THE SUN," "UNDER HEAVEN," AND "UPON EARTH"

A STUDY OF "UNDER THE SUN" . . . *continued*

Scripture Reference	That which is viewed by Solomon under the sun	Observations and Conclusions
8:9-13	Every deed done, Exercised authority to another's hurt, Dead are soon forgotten, Wicked receive burial, Men do evil continually, Sinner lengthens his life,	Futility
8:14	Righteous suffer as though they were the wicked ones, Wicked are blessed as though they were the righteous ones	Futility
8:16-17	Sleepless effort to discover wisdom and the task done, Saw every work of God	Cannot discover the work, Cannot really know
9:3	All that is done	An evil, One fate for all, Insanity in all men's hearts, All men go to the dead
9:6	All that is done: love, hate, and zeal	Have perished, Man no longer has a share
9:11	Race is not to the swift, Battle is not to the warriors, Bread is not to the wise,	Time and chance determine these things

ECCLESIASTES

A STUDY OF "UNDER THE SUN" . . . *continued*

Scripture Reference	That which is viewed by Solomon under the sun	Observations and Conclusions
	Wealth is not to the discerning, Favor is not to men of ability	
10:5	Folly is in the hand of the ruler, Princes sit in humble places	An evil
10:7	Slaves riding on horses, Princes walking like slaves on the land	An evil

The following three references employ the phrase differently. In each instance, the results are positive rather than negative. The Preacher's message to the man who lives "under the sun" is that he should resign himself to the Providence of God, enjoy one day at a time, and make the most of the "now." Salvation or eternal redemption are not the subjects under discussion for the man "under the sun." He is searching for the best way to live out the difficult days of his life.

5:18-20	God gives you a few years to eat, drink, and enjoy your labor	Good, Fitting, Your reward, Rejoice, Keeps you from remembering the past
8:15	Eat, drink, be merry, Enjoy pleasure and labor	God gives him these days of his life
9:9	Toil and labor with the woman you love	This is your reward Enjoy life

FACT QUESTIONS 1:3

16. What advantage does man have in all his work done under the sun?
17. What is meant by the word "advantage"?
18. What does Revelation 14:13 teach will happen to the Christian's works?
19. What two phrases, also used in the book, are equivalent to the phrase "under the sun"?
20. What limitations are considered by the phrase "under the sun"?
21. Why does Solomon say that a "live dog is better than a dead lion"? Cf. 9:4

2. Compared with the world,
man is transitory and all his efforts are futile. 1:4-8

TEXT 1:4-8

- 4 A generation goes and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever.
- 5 Also, the sun rises and the sun sets; and hastening to its place, it rises there again.
- 6 Blowing toward the south, then turning toward the north, the wind continues swirling along; and on its circular courses the wind returns.
- 7 All the rivers flow into the sea, yet the sea is not full. To the place where the rivers flow, there they flow again.
- 8 All things are wearisome; man is not able to tell it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor is the ear filled with hearing.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 1:4-8

10. When did man become a transitory creature? Cf. Genesis 2:17.

11. How is the term "forever" to be understood in verse 4? Cf. Hebrews 1:10-12 and II Peter 3:10-11.
12. In addition to the generations of men, what three things that God created are used to illustrate the routinism of our world?
13. Everything that man does see and hear, he describes how?

PARAPHRASE 1:4-8

Generations are indeed transitory in their coming and going as compared to the earth, which appears to remain forever. The sun rises and sets, staying within its orbit or tent,² and panting along mocks the futility of man. Likewise, the wind stays within its appointed circular courses and going toward the south and turning back toward the north it continues swirling along. The little wet-weather streams run to the sea, but the sea is never full. In due season they fill their banks and flow to the sea again, but the sea is never full! Man, in his trek about the earth, is never able to see everything or hear everything. All things continue in wearisome toiling; man cannot tell how much.

COMMENT 1:4-8

v. 4 Both man and earth share in the gloomy, monotonous routine of activities. Both man and earth are transitory. The tragedy manifests itself when men, the highest of all God's creatures and made from the earth, continually pass away while the earth remains. Solomon pictures the world as the stage upon which the tragic drama occurs. One generation

² This concept is not foreign to the Bible. In the *New American Standard Bible*, Psalm 19:4 is translated, "He (God) has placed a tent for the sun." Cf. Psalm 104:2. This is a picturesque description of what one should envision when considering man "under the sun." The "tent" closes out the higher values and confines man to knowledge and wisdom discovered only within the tent.

enters as the former generation exits. The events that take place within each generation are described in 3:1-8. They encompass one's life from the time of birth to the time of death. The Preacher does not see beyond the tent which God pitched for the sun and earth. From his observations he concludes that the earth remains forever. When he has reviewed how man spends his short span of life, with its numerous activities involving the "appointed time for everything," he raises the same question with which he opens his book: "What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils?" (3:9). Man doesn't seem to have any advantage, and the only advantage the earth has over man is in its duration. But even here, the word "forever" does not mean eternal. In Exodus 21:6, instruction is given whereby a servant is to serve his master "forever." It simply means "a good long time." Old Testament evidence of the transitory nature of the earth is found in Psalms 102:24-28.

Metaphorically, James implies that it is indeed the sun which destroys us. He says, speaking of man, "because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with the burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and its flower falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth; so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways" (James 1:10-11). It is in this same context that James reminds us that our life is but a vapor, and like the vapor will quickly vanish away.

vs. 5-7 The lesson of man's transitory nature and the futility of earthly endeavor is the purpose of this section. To look for more than this is to cloud the issue and perhaps miss the impact of the book.

The sun, the wind, and the rivers disappear, but unlike man, they are there again tomorrow! In our modern day we see and hear man's protest that the earth outlasts him. Such plaintive cries as "That lazy old sun ain't got nothin' to do, but roll around heaven all day," or, "Old man river, he don't say nothin', he just keeps rolling, he just keeps rolling along," demonstrates man's frustration and resentment in the light

of his own transitory existence. The sun stays within its own appointed limits but as it pants along it appears to actually mock as man works in endless endeavor to discover the profit of his labor. Likewise, the wind is confined to circular courses, and although it appears to pass on never to return, it inevitably finds its way back in its trek about the earth.

The streams, which once flowed freely and often furiously to the sea, may at times beg for water and appear to have lost their intended purpose, but in time they fill their banks and rush toward the sea again. Thus, they demonstrate, that unlike man they continue on forever!

Even though the sun, wind and streams continue on beyond the duration of any generation, they demonstrate the unwearied sameness of the procedure of the repetition of all things. Everything the sun shines upon is transitory by nature, even the sun itself. Man comes and goes, the sun comes and goes, the wind comes and goes, and the streams come and go.

Just as there is a sameness in the backdrop of nature, and a sameness in the "props" which appear upon the stage of life, so there is an identifying characteristic of sameness to be found in man. Since the fall, man and his world have at least one thing in common: "they have been made subject to vanity" (Romans 8:20). Solomon is sharing with us the conclusion of his initial observation. He remarks that man, like his world, is in ceaseless, monotonous, regular motion. Both are on a treadmill, it is just sad that man exits first.

v. 8 Two ideas are possible in translating verse eight. One suggests that all things are more wearisome than words can tell. The other suggests that it is wearisome to try and discover all things. The final thought in the verse is saying that man is unable to discover everything that should be seen or heard and thus the latter idea would be the most tenable. He does not intend to say that man cannot discover some truth or draw reasonable conclusions. Ecclesiastes is filled with numerous discoveries made under the sun. He is stating that when one pursues earthly knowledge, the eye cannot see it all nor the ear hear it all. But, even if he did, he would not discover

the meaning of it all. He knows enough to at least reach this conclusion.

FACT QUESTIONS 1:4-8

22. What is the "tragic drama" taking place?
23. What is the only advantage the earth has over man?
24. Explain the meaning of "forever" as it is used in verse 4.
25. What is the main purpose of this section?
26. What two ideas could come from the translation of verse 8?
27. Is man capable of attaining knowledge apart from the revelation of God's word? Explain your answer.
28. If man could discover everything going on in his world, he would still not have the answer to what important question?

3. History repeats itself and man forgets what has gone before.
1:9-11

TEXT 1:9-11

- 9 That which has been is that which will be, and that which has been done is that which will be done. So there is nothing new under the sun.
- 10 Is there anything of which one might say, "See this, it is new?" Already it has existed for ages which were before us.
- 11 There is no remembrance of earlier things; and also of the later things which will occur, there will be for them no remembrance among those who will come later still.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 1:9-11

14. Is Solomon contending that there is a sameness which marks all parts of man and his world?

15. What is Solomon's answer if man were to say, "See this, it is new?"
16. Does the "for them" of verse eleven refer to things or generations?
17. Since the "them" of verse eleven refers to the "earlier things" and the "later things," and these happen in every generation, why would someone call them new?
18. How is this truth illustrated in 2:16? Cf. 9:5.

PARAPHRASE 1:9-11

The sun shines on all the earth and exposes the routine sameness of all the events which continue on since creation. They shall continue on the same. There is nothing new under the sun! Is something new because you in your generation have not discovered it? Is something new simply because it was forgotten by one generation? No! Sometime in the past it existed as we now discover it. All generations are similar in that they fail to remember the former things and fail to acknowledge that the same events will happen in the future. However, the routine activities of all things continue on regardless of the attitudes men have toward them.

COMMENT 1:9-11

vs. 9-11 These three verses constitute his final arguments in this section. He has declared that everything has fallen beneath the curse of impermanent futility. Rhetorically he has questioned if man has any profit at all in all his work. He has illustrated that not only man, but man's world are caught in a routine sameness that is characteristic of every generation's experience. Man cannot tell everything, he cannot bear everything, and he cannot see everything. What he does perceive he concludes isn't new, but if man thinks it is, it is only because he does not remember what has gone before. History

repeats itself. His further observation is that since human nature and nature itself never change, not only are his peers guilty of forgetting what has gone before, but those who are to come will not remember the things of today.

Solomon is really saying, "He that has seen the present, has seen all things." Things are considered novel or new only because they have been forgotten. So intent is the Preacher on this point that he repeats himself in verses nine and ten.

Much of what Solomon writes throughout the book is based on this premise. For example, he speaks of how easily men are forgotten (9:6-7; 9:15). He instructs us to enjoy today and not to fret over a tomorrow which none is able to see (7:14; 9:7). He suggests that he sought to know wisdom, madness, and folly, and that each of these will be sought by the one who succeeds the king (2:12). There is no lasting memory of either a wise man or a fool (2:16). God knows that human nature is always the same and seeks to deal with man on that basis (3:15; 6:10).

There is dispute as to whether the term "things" in verse eleven refers to "former generations" and "later generations" or "former things" and "later things." The original terms could have either meaning. If one looks at the Preacher's writings in 9:6-7 and 9:15, he will discover that "generations" do fail to remember that which happened long ago. However, the context seems to be weakened by this interpretation. His "all" of verse two and his "earlier things" and "later things" of this verse encompass all the activities of each generation. This appears to be more in harmony with the question he seeks to answer: "What advantage does man have in all his *work* which he does under the sun?" (v. 3).

His message is simple. If one keeps his eyes upon this world alone, then his labor is worth very little. He discovers that all his labor becomes entangled in the gray maze of monotonous, endless activities of not only his own life and generation, but of every generation that "goes" and "comes." It all fades into a similar backdrop of routine acts of nature which he so vividly describes through the activities of the sun, wind and rivers.

His toil and effort on earth profit little. He discovers that he is caught in a purposeless web, a staircase to nowhere, the proverbial treadmill. His observations grow out of a life of one who has lived through the optimum of the excitement of youth as well as the experience of fulfilled dreams which he entertained in young manhood. Now, on the edge of departure from this world, with his eyes focused on earthly values alone, he wants to know what advantage, or profit, he can claim as his own in all his labor.

When man elects to face life and interpret its mystery apart from God's help, he inevitably will come to the same conclusion. Solomon has established an inescapable principle that a wise man works in harmony with the will of God, and God alone. The first half of his book illustrates the premise set forth in chapter one verses one through eleven. Many have asked, "What does the writer know of life?" Almost as if Solomon anticipated the question, he takes up the challenge and turns to the task before him. He is now determined to demonstrate the wisdom of his conclusion.

FACT QUESTIONS 1:9-11

29. What has fallen beneath the curse of futility?
30. In what sense is Solomon teaching that history repeats itself?
31. What is there in verse 11 that corresponds to the "all" in verse 2?
32. What conclusion will man reach in reference to the question of the purpose of life, if he lives all of it purely "under the sun"?
33. The first half of Ecclesiastes illustrates what premise?

**I. A MAN OF WISDOM WORKS IN HARMONY WITH
GOD'S PROVIDENTIAL BLESSINGS, OTHERWISE HE
DISCOVERS ALL HIS WORK IS VANITY. 1:12—6:12**

A. Experiments and Conclusions 1:12—2:26

1. Experiments 1:12—2:11

a. Unlimited resources for research 1:12

TEXT 1:12

12 I, the Preacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 1:12

16. How is "the Preacher" identified in this verse?
17. The Preacher should be identified, therefore, as what person?
18. Write down your own ideas as to what might be involved in the use of the past tense ("have been king") since Solomon is still king as he writes the book.

PARAPHRASE 1:12

I, the one who gathers together God's people in order to preach to them, became king over God's people, Israel.

COMMENT 1:12

v. 12 This verse is in harmony with 1:1 and restates the Preacher's position as king over Israel in Jerusalem. The experiments which immediately follow this verse, required great

wealth and resources. A close study of I Kings 1-11 is sufficient to establish the credibility of Solomon's claim to wealth and capabilities. He was in a position to propose and follow through on the ambitious goals of 1:13 and 2:1.

One major problem of this verse centers on the use of the past tense in reference to his reign over Israel.

The verb rendered "have been" could as easily mean "become," and thus the sentence would carry the idea that Solomon "became king" in Israel³ (note the Paraphrase). However, the purport of the verse does not hinge on the tense of the verb, but rather on the question as to whether the one who is to make the experiments has sufficient wealth and resources to carry them through. He may be saying, "I have been king, and still am!" At any rate, as king he has the authority and financial affluence to pursue his objectives.

Those who would argue for a non-Solomonic authorship interpret the past tense in this verse as implying that the author personified Solomon, as Solomon would not have used the past tense at a time when he was still the king.

The Berleburger Bible conveys the meaning of the verb as a description of the past that stretches into the future, "I the preacher have been king thus far, and am one still."⁴ There is a sense in which the past tense could be used in the latter part of Solomon's reign. The Lord took the kingdom from Saul while he still "looked" like a king. Samuel declared unto Saul, "I will not return with thee; for thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord hath rejected thee from being king over Israel." (Read I Samuel 15:24-35.) Even in Solomon's day the kingdom shook beneath him with unrest and discontent. Sacrifice to foreign deities took place on the sacred ground of Israel. Jeroboam and Rehoboam stood waiting to claim their respective sections of the kingdom when it divided. Indeed, the "handwriting was on the wall." It is reasonable,

³ H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Ecclesiastes* (Columbus, Ohio: The Wartburg Press, 1952), p. 52.

⁴ Hengstenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

therefore, that Solomon could think of himself and the glory of the past as something that would never be reclaimed and thus in the last days of his reign to realize his control over Israel was indeed a thing of the past.

Another view concerning the tense of the verb is called the "citizen-king" concept. It maintains that Solomon speaks through two voices in the book. One voice is as king over Israel, and the other voice is that of a citizen who views "from afar" the happenings in Israel. It is believed that such a view explains the use of past tense in the verse.

Perhaps there is some basis for each of the views under consideration. At any rate, history records that Solomon reigned over Israel until his death. Perhaps the simplest explanation is to accept the possibility that Solomon is saying "I, the Preacher *became* king over Israel in Jerusalem."

FACT QUESTIONS 1:12

34. What major problem is suggested in this verse?
35. Give evidence that Solomon could easily have been the one who carried out the experiments proposed in 1:13 and 2:1.
36. Explain from the example of King Saul how Solomon could be spoken of as a king in the past tense while he is still reigning.
37. Explain the "citizen-king" explanation as it pertains to the tense of the verb in this verse.

- b. Wisdom is used exploring all that is done under heaven.
1:13-18

TEXT 1:13-18

- 13 And I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom concerning all that has been done under heaven. It is a grievous

task which God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with.

- 14 I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind.
- 15 What is crooked cannot be straightened, and what is lacking cannot be counted.
- 16 I said to myself, "Behold, I have magnified and increased wisdom more than all who were over Jerusalem before me; and my mind has observed a wealth of wisdom and knowledge."
- 17 And I set my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly; I realized that this also is striving after wind.
- 18 Because in much wisdom there is much grief, and increasing knowledge results in increasing pain.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 1:13-18

19. What is Solomon now determined to do?
21. What tool will he use with which to explore?
23. What is it that he wishes to explore?
24. What does he call the task?
25. Who gives such a task to men?
26. Once he had explored all the works, what conclusion did he reach?
27. Mention some things in life which are "crooked."
28. What are some things which are "lacking"?
29. Who could be compared to Solomon in regards to his increased wisdom?
30. In addition to observing wisdom, what other two things did he study?
31. Upon examining these things, what conclusion did he reach?
32. When one increases wisdom and knowledge "under the sun" what will he receive in return?

PARAPHRASE 1:13-18

I was determined, assessing all my resources, employing all my energies, and guided by my mind, to ferret out and examine the roots, turning everything from side to side, until through wisdom I had explored all that has been done within the limits of the world. To examine and explore all things is a longing placed in man's heart by God Himself. However, it is a grievous, unrewarding task because what is discovered does not bring satisfaction or reward to man's mind. Everything the sun shines upon, I have seen. The conclusion I have reached is the same: nothing discovered upon the earth will fully satisfy man's longings; everything is as filling as feasting on the wind! Let me illustrate what I have just said: man tries to bring harmony to the overwhelming chaos of past and present events, but he despairs because it is a futile effort. Also, there are so many things lacking among the pieces of life that one cannot even count them, let alone find them! Speaking to myself I said, "Your effort was successful in that you expanded your wisdom far beyond that possessed by any who have ever ruled in Jerusalem. Your unlimited resources made it possible that you could examine heretofore unexplored areas of wisdom and knowledge." Certainly it is no secret to myself that I explored every facet of life. I was determined to learn about the disorder of proper thoughts and subsequent consequences. I was determined to learn about evil and wickedness as they are entreated by others. Once again, I concluded that such knowledge is as satisfying as feasting on the wind! As I expanded my understanding of the various aspects of wisdom and knowledge, I discovered that my capacity to suffer grief and pain had also been increased. Not only is this true, but the increased information actually increased my sorrow.

COMMENT 1:13-18

vs. 13-18 Solomon's purpose is clearly defined. He wants

to explore all that is done under heaven. He will do it with his mind guided by wisdom. He sees it as a grievous task, vain and futile.

The term "mind" in verse 3 is a much better translation than "heart" which appears in the King James Version. Almost without exception the use of "heart" in the Old Testament should be thought of as the mental faculties. The idea here is to convey the fact that it is to be a mental procedure. He restates his determination to study and to know in 1:17 when he says, "I set my mind." He does not bring a bias to his work. Neither is he interested in simply accumulating facts. He desires to see the nature of "why" and "how" things work.

"Seek" and "explore" are not synonymous. "Seek" carries the idea of studying that which is near at hand while "explore" suggests taking a comprehensive overview of something at a greater distance. Or, as Barton has stated it: "'Search' means to investigate the roots of a matter; 'explore' to explore the subject on all sides."⁵ He does not leave a stone unturned in his quest to discover all that has been done under heaven. He is dealing, however, with that which has felt the blow of Adam's fall. He explores everything that comes within his power to see or hear. He is faced with endless observations but his conclusion is that all of it is afflicted with the mark of the vanity of this world. He calls it a "grievous" task and "striving after wind."

Since the task is grievous and drives one to despair, why say that God has given this task to man?

That is just the point! God has not given it to other than man. Nothing in all of God's creation, except man, concerns itself with the "why" of the activities of our world. Man, however, is restless until he discovers the why. Augustine's admission to God was that men are restless until they find their rest in Him. This quest for God in all the things around us is a futile pursuit. The reason it is unfulfilling is that it is directed

⁵ Leupold, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

toward God's creation, and not toward the mind of God which interprets God's creation. In Jesus' day the mind of God was revealed to man in the fullest sense. It was under these circumstances that Jesus said, privately to his disciples, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see, for I say to you, that many prophets and kings wished to see the things which you see, and did not see them, and to hear the things which you hear, and did not hear them" (Luke 10:23-24).

False gods are worshipped throughout the world. False idols are established in every land. Why? Because these are expressions of man's frustrations and despair. He is searching in harmony with the grievous task in his mind, yet his results are inconsistent and unrewarding. His ultimate frustration is depicted by the Athenians in their erecting an altar to an unknown god! We hear Solomon say that God "has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end" (3:11). It is an "affliction" because man is honest enough to admit that God is only longed for, not discovered. He must also admit, as Solomon does, that the mark of sin is so heavy upon both man and his world that nothing can really be changed, and that which is lacking in man and nature is still lacking. Man is not capable of remaking his world or himself. Cracks can be plastered, and cosmetically treated, but not healed. On our own, we can be pretenders and mask wearers, but we really can't make the crooked straight or add to man's account in order to make him acceptable before God.

Man is crooked and lacking, but God is not responsible for this. It was man who violated God's order, and thus suffers the consequences of sin. He and his world stand out of joint and in debt before God. God placed the curse upon both man and the world because of sin. In a sense it can be said that God bends things and people out of shape. But it is only in the sense that God made the righteous rules which were violated by men, and God placed the subsequent punishments upon that which violates the rules. It is in the light of this truth that

Solomon admonishes us, "consider the work of God. Who is able to straighten what he has bent?" (7:13). Man is in debt to God. Solomon in all his wisdom cannot help. Paul goes a step further and declares that even the world cannot help. "Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through wisdom did not come to know God, God was well pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe . . . we preach Christ crucified . . . because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (I Corinthians 1:20-25).

Another reason why the task is grievous has to do with the accomplishment of the very thing he started out to do. He wanted to explore all that had been done on the earth. He wanted to increase his wisdom and knowledge. He states that he accomplished this task to the degree that he (1) magnified and increased his wisdom more than any who had ruled over Jerusalem before him, and (2) his mind had observed a wealth of wisdom and knowledge. It is grievous because he admits that the more he learns, the greater his pain and grief. The deeper one penetrates the true nature of man, and the more knowledge one has concerning the inequities of life's struggle, the more disappointed he is with what he learns. His grief is actually compounded when he discovers that although he is a wise man, in this case greater than any who have lived before him, that he is still helpless and unable to bring justice to his own affairs. In addition, he is unable to correct the anomalies in the affairs of those about him.

In verse 17, he decides that he will also observe all he can concerning "madness" and "folly." These words are usually associated with wickedness and improprieties. He contrasts these with "wisdom" which he actually employs in his pursuit. One example of Solomon's observation of madness and folly is found in 10:12-13 where it is stated, "the lips of the fool consume him; the beginning of his talking is folly, and the end of it is wicked madness." He associates folly and madness

with the fool not the wise man. It is one thing to share in something, and something else to know of it through observation. It appears that Solomon is observing it rather than experiencing it. We read 7:25, "I directed my mind to know . . . the evil of folly and the foolishness of madness." Cf. 2:12.

Solomon's experiment was a success. That is, if he wanted merely to seek and explore by wisdom all that has been done under heaven. It was not successful if its objective was to bring him peace and satisfaction. His observations concerning it are (1) it is grievous, (2) it is an affliction, (3) it is vanity and striving after wind, (4) it increased my grief and my pain.

FACT QUESTIONS 1:13-18

38. What is the goal of Solomon's first experiment?
39. Why is mind a better translation than heart (v. 13)?
40. What evidence is there that Solomon was determined?
41. What is the difference between "seek" and "explore"?
42. What happened in the world that makes the study of it a grievous task?
43. Why say that God gave this grievous task to man?
44. Idols and gods are evidence of what within man?
45. Give evidence from Ecclesiastes that God does not intend for man to find out His work from observations under the sun.
46. What does "crooked" and "lacking" mean?
47. In what sense is God responsible for it?
48. Why was Solomon's increased wisdom also a matter of grief?
49. Why was his grief "compounded"?
50. What words are associated with madness and folly?
51. In what way was Solomon's first experiment a success?
52. In what way was it a failure?

A STUDY OF SOLOMON'S USE OF THE TERM GOD IN ECCLESIASTES

In 1:13, the reader is introduced for the first time to Solomon's own selection from the Hebrew language for God. It is of particular interest because there are numerous alternatives. That is, Solomon could have used other Hebrew terms than the one selected. The term for God appears forty-one times in the book. He also speaks of God as Creator and the Shepherd. He uses the pronouns "He," "His," and "Him" ten times. Thus, there are fifty-three direct references to God in the book.

Solomon selected the term Elohim for God. Never once did he employ the term Jehovah. There is a distinction that is often made between the two names. Jehovah is the name for God which communicates the idea that God covenants with His people, entering in a more personal relationship than what may be indicated in the use of Elohim. Elohim is the term used to speak of God as He is discovered, not in a covenant pact, but through the evidence of nature.

Perhaps one should exercise caution by reading more into the limited use of Elohim in the book than the author intended. There are two lines of reasoning, however, that are offered for his choice of the term Elohim to the exclusion of the term Jehovah. We shall discuss them separately.

The first one suggests that Solomon was growing old and lost the joy and closeness he once knew with God. It is argued that it would be inappropriate for him to choose the name for God that implies warmth and friendship. Solomon, it is thought, had forfeited this right.

The other argument appears to be more plausible. It speaks more to the intent and purpose of the book. It is reasoned that the name Jehovah speaks of the God of divine revelation and covenant relationships, and is, therefore, excluded from Solomon's writings because it is his purpose to discover truths on his own through his own wisdom and experimentation. It is not Solomon's intention to pretend that God does not exist,

A STUDY OF WISDOM

or that God is not interested in His world and that which is contained in it. Quite the contrary, God's concern for man and man's need to be concerned about God is the conclusion of the whole book. It is Solomon's intention to demonstrate that man is hopelessly frustrated if all he has as his guide is the evidence of nature. Elohim is the God of providence and creation. He may be discovered in that sense by all men. God's glory is manifested through the work of His hands in both the heavens and the earth. Cf. Psalms 19:1.

The purpose of the book is best served by thinking of God as Creator rather than the revealer of propositional truth. If the choice of the word Elohim best does this, then perhaps this is the purpose behind the exclusive use of the name in Ecclesiastes.

A STUDY OF WISDOM AS IT IS USED IN THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

The Bible gives various meanings to our English word wisdom. The diagram on page 40 illustrates at least three different kinds. One can see that the wisdom "from above" involves revelation and speaks to the higher level of behavior that is characteristic of those who walk with God. The wisdom "from below" is just the opposite. It involves the individual in those activities associated with the one who carries out the will of the Devil. James speaks of this wisdom as "earthly, natural, demonic" (James 3:15). The wisdom discussed in Ecclesiastes is neither that which is from above, nor that which is from below. The wisdom pursued and employed by the Preacher (Solomon) is best described as that which is discovered "under the sun." This wisdom is discussed in the following passages: 1:13, 16, 17, 18; 2:3, 9, 12, 13, 21, 26; 7:11, 12, 19, 23, 25; 8:1, 16; 9:10, 13, 15, 16, 18; 10:1, 10.

According to the preacher, this wisdom is available to every man who is willing to pursue it. It is not evil of itself. It should

be learned and followed. Both the godly and the ungodly employ it (Cf. Diagram, page 40, I, III). However, it will not bring lasting satisfaction although it has certain advantages over other things which can be possessed. It is despised by some and sought after by others. It may be used to discover knowledge and can be magnified and increased. It strengthens, excels foolishness, protects its owner, causes the face to shine, and brings success. It is better than weapons of war and may deliver one from the hands of his enemy. It will increase the ability to use an inheritance for good. It is limited in its usefulness to this world and cannot be found in the grave. Because it is so identified with the futility of this world, of which it, too, is a part, there is the logical conclusion that in much wisdom is much grief.

Solomon's experiments explained in the first two chapters were not independent of his life-long work. What we see in these two sections are the detailed procedures and the motivating forces behind his work. He is speaking of his pursuit under heaven and under the sun of all that has been done. It was written of him that "he spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon even to the hyssop that grows on the wall; he spoke also of animals and birds and creeping things and fish" (I Kings 4:33).

In what sense does Solomon stand in first place in respect to the possession of wisdom? There can be little doubt that he does! (I Kings 3:12) His wisdom is a testimony to his amount of knowledge, not that he was the most righteous or morally sound man who ever lived. The poor of necessity looked up to him. They had neither the resources nor opportunities for such pursuit. However, kings and queens also looked up to him and marveled over his wisdom and knowledge.

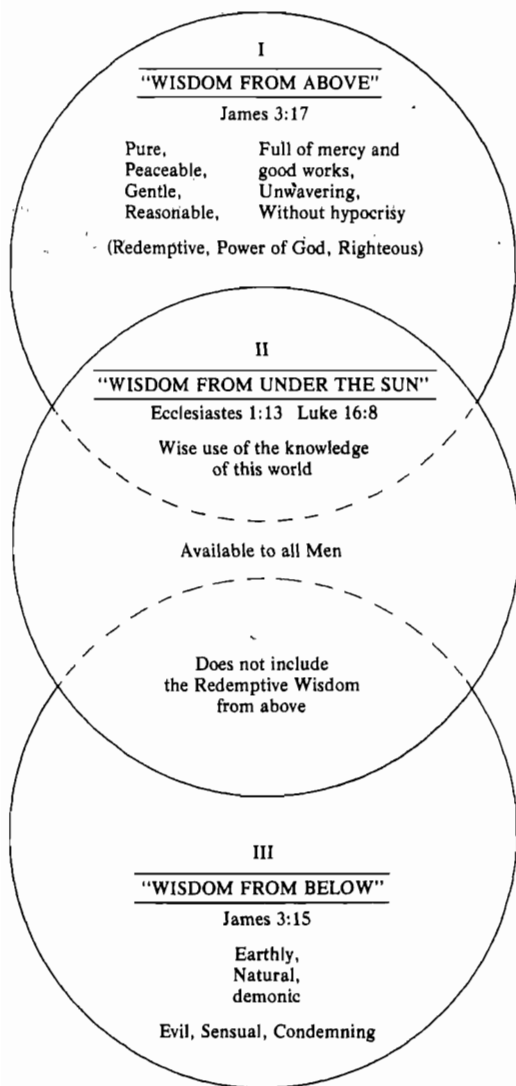
Solomon's reputation as a wise man became the talk of the East country and Egypt. It is written that his "fame was known in all the surrounding nations" (I Kings 4:31). So extensive was his fame that "all the earth was seeking the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom which God had put in his heart" (I Kings 10:24).

A STUDY OF WISDOM

The wisdom discovered "under the sun" is available to both the Christian as well as the non-Christian. At times the unbeliever demonstrates better use of such wisdom, often referred to as common sense, than does the believer. It is in this context that Jesus said, ". . . the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light" (Luke 16:8). The ideal Christian would avoid the wisdom from below, he would accept and follow the wisdom from above, and he would skilfully employ the wisdom found "under the sun" to the best of his advantage and to the glory of God.

ECCLESIASTES

DIAGRAM "A" THREE KINDS OF WISDOM AVAILABLE TO MAN



- c. Wisdom is used in the exploration of sensuous pleasure.

2:1-11

TEXT 2:1-11

- 1 I said to myself, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself." And behold, it too was futility.
- 2 I said of laughter, "It is madness," and of pleasure, "What does it accomplish?"
- 3 I explored with my mind how to stimulate my body with wine while my mind was guiding me wisely, and how to take hold of folly, until I could see what good there is for the sons of men to do under heaven the few years of their lives.
- 4 I enlarged my works: I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself;
- 5 I made gardens and parks for myself, and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees;
- 6 I made ponds of water for myself from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees.
- 7 I bought male and female slaves, and I had homeborn slaves. Also I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem.
- 8 Also, I collected for myself silver and gold, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men—many concubines.
- 9 Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me.
- 10 And all that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor.
- 11 Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 2:1-11

33. How many times do the words "I," "my," and "myself" appear in this passage (vs. 1-11)?
34. What obvious conclusion is drawn from this observation?
35. How many times in this same passage does Solomon indicate that his plans and great works were for the enjoyment of others?
36. Solomon now turns to what specific area of activity (v. 1)?
37. After experiencing laughter and pleasure, what is Solomon's conclusion?
38. He is still searching for the answer to what question (v. 3)?
39. Give proof from two different verses in this section that all of his activities were guided by wisdom.
40. List five of the works which he built and/or enlarged.
41. What two distinctive categories of slaves did he possess?
42. What did he say concerning the proportion of his livestock in comparison to others who owned flocks and herds?
43. Name the items of personal pleasure mentioned in verse eight.
44. What did Solomon claim as his reward for all his labor?
45. Upon reviewing all of his activities (v. 11), list the three attitudes he has toward them.

PARAPHRASE 2:1-11

Addressing myself, I said, "Look, let me experiment with all the pleasures which appeal to my senses, and see the good that can bring me enjoyment." What enjoyment did it bring me? That which came of it was as satisfying as feasting on the wind. I had something to say concerning the laughter and merrymaking which came of my experiment with pleasure: "It is madness." And of pleasure itself I said, "It does not accomplish a thing." I extended my experiment to the pleasures of the table. I stimulated my body with wine and yet my mind always remained in control of every situation. I thought

fulfillment could be found in silliness, the opposite of wisdom, so I put my hand to folly and asked, "What good is there for the sons of men to do during the few days of their short lives as they lived them under heaven?" I planned and carried out great undertakings. I planned them for myself. I was not satisfied with building just one house for myself, so I built houses. I planted vineyards for my own personal gratification and enjoyment. I designed and constructed a paradise of shade trees and winding paths where I could enjoy their beauty and the relaxing benefits of my parks. Throughout my gardens and parks, I planted all kinds of fruit trees. I needed to irrigate a forest of growing trees, so I constructed pools for myself. I owned many servants. Some I purchased for myself, both male and female. Others I had born in my own house and considered them in a special way as sons of the house. I collected large amounts of silver and gold. I gathered it together for myself. I also amassed treasures typical of kings and rulers of provinces. I provided male and female singers for my own enjoyment and satisfaction. I indulged myself with the pleasure of men—concubine after concubine. None could boast of the possessions and luxuries at my command. I was greater than any who had been before me in Jerusalem. I surveyed the purpose of it all through the eyes of the wisdom which is under the sun. This kind of wisdom I retained as a constant companion. I did not deny my eyes anything they wished to see. If my thoughts ran to embrace any pleasure, and I desired it, I provided it for myself. Did I receive a reward from all that I had done? Yes. My heart was delighted that I had accomplished for myself everything that I proposed—this was my reward. Now I must return to my original question: What good is there for the sons of men to do the few days of their short lives that they live under heaven? I kept that question in mind and considered all the things that I had done and the energy I expended, and my conclusion is that all of it is unfulfilling, futile, and striving for the wind. None of it is profitable for the man who lives under the sun.

COMMENT 2:1-11

What good is there for the sons of men to do under heaven? This is the question that troubles Solomon (1:13; 2:3). His desire to know the answer is insatiable. In his first experiment he set his mind, guided by wisdom and knowledge, to discover the causes and results of all that had been done under heaven. His experiment was successful, it just did not yield satisfaction. He discovered that his reward was mental pain and sorrow rather than the desired mental health and peace. He now considers the possibility of the answer coming from another area of research "under the sun." It is "pleasure" that now intrigues him. He is not unlike the rest of us in his desire to experience the pleasures of life. The motivation behind Solomon is one of personal gratification. Nothing of the loving, philanthropic nature of concern colors his activities. It is indeed misanthropy. His self-centered desire is a matter of record. He states, "I said to myself, 'Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself.'" The grammatical construction "dative of interest" (for myself) appears eight times in these eleven verses. In addition, there are thirty references to the pronouns "I" and "my" in this limited summary of his pursuit of pleasure. It is manifestly evident that if the answer to his question is to be found in this area of life, he intends to discover it.

One should not be unduly critical of Solomon. His experiments are not hedonistic. He is not sensually lusting after base and inordinate things. He wishes only to come alive to the pleasures to be received through the senses. He wants his answers to come to him within the framework of the demonstrable. He is interested in seeing, feeling, smelling, tasting, and hearing. He declares that he did not withhold any pleasure from his heart.

Although Solomon does not mention it in the text, it is a matter of record that his resources to carry out such an experiment were unlimited. It was written that ". . . silver and gold were as stones in Jerusalem" (I Kings 10:27). He had successfully

increased his kingdom ten times beyond what he had inherited from his father. By his own declaration he proclaimed that he had increased in wealth more than all who had preceded him in Jerusalem.

vs. 1 The "Come now" of this verse indicates a new direction. We have explained it as the exploration of sensuous pleasure. As in the other experiment, he states his conclusion at the beginning. Futility marks his pursuit. He should not have been surprised, for from his own pen had previously come the words, "Even in laughter the heart may be in pain, and the end of joy may be grief" (Proverbs 14:13). He declares the reality of this.

That which is being tested is the question concerning what is good for man in the few years he has on this earth. This appears to be the key question in the book. It was asked in 1:3 and also in 1:13. The question is clearly stated here in 2:3. Although he does not arrive at the answer in this section, he does state conclusively that he had discovered what is good for the sons of men to do during their lives as they live them under heaven. Note his conclusions:

- (1) "There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen, that it is from the hand of God" (2:24).
- (2) "I know there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one's lifetime, moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor—it is the gift of God" (3:12-13).
- (3) "Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat to drink and enjoy oneself in all one's labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward. Furthermore, as for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, He has also empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor; this

is the gift of God" (5:18-19).

- (4) "For who knows what is good for a man during his life-time, during the few years of his futile life? He will spend them like a shadow. For who can tell a man what will be after him under the sun" (6:12)?
- (5) "So I commended pleasure, for there is nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat and to drink and to be merry, and this will stand by him in his toils throughout the days of his life which God has given him under the sun" (8:15).
- (6) "Go then, eat your bread in happiness, and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works" (9:7).
- (7) "Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life, and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun" (9:9).

As important as the theme is, it is to be understood as a minor chord which he sounds, a half step less than the major theme. The theme is recurring, appearing no less than seven times as noted above, yet it only leads man to the logical conclusion as he views life under the sun. It is in this light alone he turns to examine the evidence of his quest. The major theme speaks to the emptiness of what is thought of as a full and fruitful and enjoyable life when it is lived without the redeeming nature of grace and apart from the direction of God's revelation. We have purposely jumped ahead of Solomon. We have read the conclusions, which at this time in his experience, he is eager to discover himself. It is important, therefore, that we realize that at this point in his experiment, he is steeped in the details of one of his most elaborate undertakings.

v. 2 Laughter is associated with pleasure. He has learned

to laugh much because he has had great pleasure; but once again he admits to the superficial nature of this unrewarding experience. He labels his laughter as "madness," and asks of pleasure, "What does it accomplish?" Laughter, madness, and pleasure should be thought of as harmless delights in this context. Neither does madness convey the idea of mental insanity, but rather boasting and foolishness. His conclusion is that there isn't any true, lasting value in the exercising of sensuous pleasure. Note this additional commentary on this subject in 7:3, 6 and 10:19. In like manner, Jesus taught that the presence of laughter is not necessarily a sign of genuine joy (Luke 6:25).

vs. 3-8 In this section, Solomon turns to three additional categories of pleasure which he pursues. The first involves him with food and folly; secondly, he is engaged in aesthetic improvements; and finally he seeks cultural improvements and the pleasures of possessions. One is reminded of the admonition of John, "Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If any one loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh (food and folly) and the lust of the eyes (aesthetic improvements) and the boastful pride of life (cultural improvements and pleasures), is not from the Father, but is from the world" (I John 2:15, 16). Solomon does each of us a favor in that he comes to the same conclusion (v. 11), and thus saves us the necessity of learning this lesson the difficult way.

(1) Section one: food and folly. (v. 3)

"Wine" could represent all the pleasures of the table as well as just the enjoyment of wine. It would be understood as the part used for the whole. So elaborate were King Solomon's tables that the Queen of Sheba was totally exhausted in her praise (I Kings 10:5). One should not understand his statement as an abandonment to strong drink. He assures us that his mind continued to guide him wisely.

"Folly" implies the harmless nonsense that so often accompanies the pleasure of dining with friends. We should understand this to be the lowest level of his pleasurable pursuits.

The following descriptions represent those experiments which he carried out on the middle level. Solomon identifies them as the enlargements of his works.

(2) Section two: aesthetic improvements. (vs. 4-6)

Although the Temple was the most important and most elaborate of Solomon's contributions, no mention is made of it in this section. The reason is obvious. Solomon is discussing only those items which he planned and designed for personal satisfaction, the Temple belonged in a special way to the people as well as to the king. In reality it was God's Temple and thus it would be out of place to mention it along with those things programmed for sensuous delights.

(a) *Houses*. For a detailed explanation of Solomon's houses, read I Kings 7:1-12 and 9:19. His endeavors were almost unbelievable in scope. He built numerous buildings and public works in Jerusalem. He spent thirteen years building his own palace. It included the armory and the Hall of Judgment. He built a "house of Pharaoh's daughter" (I Kings 7:2-8). He built a citadel (I Kings 9:24; 11:27) or huge fortress to protect the temple. He founded cities in distant lands (I Kings 9:18), built store-cities and chariot towns, national works of great importance, and rebuilt and fortified cities throughout his kingdom.

(b) *Vineyards*. David possessed vineyards that Solomon undoubtedly inherited (I Chronicles 27:27, 28). It is also recorded in Song of Solomon 8:10, 11 that he possessed his own vineyard.

(c) *Gardens*. The term is synonymous with the Greek term for paradise and suggests pleasantries and beauty. There is a reference to "a king's garden" in II Kings 25:4. Note also Song of Solomon 4:16. A detailed description of gardens in Palestine cannot be found in the Bible although they are often mentioned. They were generally believed to be walled inclosures with winding paths and canals of running water to provide for the many shade and fruit trees. This is in harmony with the information in this section. One can almost see the

sweet-smelling, aromatic blossoms inviting travelers to the cooling arbors and refreshing streams.

(d) *Parks*. The terms "parks," "gardens," and "forests" are used interchangeably. From the context in Nehemiah 2:8 and corresponding references, the emphasis is on trees and forestry. Such parks also contained fruit trees and herds of animals.

(e) *Ponds*. Besides the aesthetic value of pools or reservoirs, they served a practical purpose. Pools supplied the water for the irrigation of the growing trees. Because of the long extended periods without rain, sometimes lasting three to four months, the ponds provided an essential and vital supply of water. Evidence of the water supply at Etham is the most celebrated of the pools ascribed to Solomon. There were three large pools ranging in length from 380 feet to 582 feet and in width from 207 feet to 250 feet. They varied in depth from 25 to 50 feet. The pools were located a distance of ten miles from Jerusalem but because of the natural contour of the Judaeian hills, the water traveled nearly 15 miles to the enormous reservoir beneath the city. The origin of the aqueduct is uncertain. The history of Jerusalem has always included a struggle on the part of the people to discover and supply water for their needs. However, in Solomon's description, no mention is made of the utilitarian purposes of the pools, either for Temple needs or the needs of the people. He is searching for the answer to the question: Is there any good in the beautiful?

(3) Section three: cultural improvements and pleasures of possessions. (vs. 7, 8)

This third and highest level upon which he experiments involves the pleasures derived from developing cultural projects and accumulating earthly wealth.

(a) *Slaves*. Solomon purchased some slaves, captured others and had some born in his own house" (I Kings 9:20-22; 10:4-8). Those who were born in his house were called "sons of the house (Genesis 15:3)" and were often more desired than other slaves. Solomon's interest in horses alone required literally

thousands of slaves to care for his extensive holdings. It was stated that he had 40,000 stalls of horses, a similar number of chariots and 12,000 horsemen (I Kings 4:26). It was said of the Queen of Sheba, as she observed the elaborate attention given to the king by his servants, that "there was no more spirit in her" (I Kings 10:5). She had not believed the colorful reports; however, upon personal observation she confessed that she had not been told half of what was true!

(b) *Flocks and herds.* Solomon's provision for one day included, among other things, ". . . ten fat oxen, twenty pasture-fed oxen, a hundred sheep besides deer, gazelles, roebucks, and fattened fowl." Read I Kings 4:22, 23 and 8:62, 63. The large number of dedicatory sacrifices offered to God at the consecration of the Temple, suggests the magnitude of his flocks and herds. He offered the Lord 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep on that one occasion. Cf. I Chronicles 27:29-31.

(c) *Silver and gold.* The statement, "I collected for myself silver and gold" is more flagrant than it appears on the surface. God specifically commanded the king not to multiply gold for "himself." The detailed accounts found in the Bible depicting Solomon's inordinate desire for gold and silver supports his contention. In the face of the prohibition (Deuteronomy 17:17), Solomon made silver and gold as common in Jerusalem as stones (II Chronicles 1:15). The following record of Solomon's extensive use of gold is included here to impress the reader with the magnitude of his personal quest. It is found in II Chronicles 9:13-21 and is followed immediately with the declaration, "So King Solomon became greater than all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom." It reads:

"Now the weight of *gold* which came to Solomon in one year was 666 talents of *gold*, besides that which the traders and merchants brought; and all the kings of Arabia and the governors of the country brought *gold* and silver to Solomon. And King Solomon made 200 large shields of beaten *gold*, using 600 shekels of beaten *gold* on each large shield. And he made 300 shields of beaten *gold*, using

three hundred shekels of *gold* on each shield, and the king put them in the house of the forest of Lebanon. Moreover, the king made a great throne of ivory and overlaid it with pure *gold*. And there were six steps to the throne and a footstool in *gold* attached to the throne, and arms on each side of the seat, and two lions standing beside the arms. And twelve lions were standing there on the six steps on the one side and on the other; nothing like it was made for any other kingdom. And all King Solomon's drinking vessels were of *gold*, and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon were of pure *gold*; silver was not considered valuable in the days of Solomon. For the king had ships which went to Tarshish with the servants of Hurum; once every three years the ships of Tarshish came bringing *gold* and silver, ivory and apes and peacocks."

(d) *The treasure of kings and provinces.* If the treasure is that of great wealth, Solomon qualified (I Kings 4:21, 24; 10:14, 15). If it means he possessed such treasure unique to kings and not the common man, he also qualified. He controlled provinces and exacted tribute from them; these provinces boarded or neighbored his own country of Palestine and were in addition to the districts of his own country. There were twelve districts in Israel and each district provided Solomon's needs for one month of the year (I Kings 4:7). Solomon reigned over all the tribes and nations between the Mediterranean and the Euphrates. The promise God gave in Genesis 15:18 was thus fulfilled. Solomon was a dictator. Everything depended upon his will. Although he was not a man of war as his father David had been known, he still subjected the people of his land to his every desire. In addition to Israel, he ruled the Philistines, the Moabites, the Edomites, the Amonites, the Canaanites, the Hittites and the Syrians. So vast was his wealth that he was greater than all other kings of earth. It was estimated that he provided for 10,000 people in his service.

(e) *Male and female singers.* From the reference out of David's life (II Samuel 19:35), singers were employed to entertain

and lighten the spirit. These singers were for Solomon's personal enjoyment and should not be confused with the male singers of the choir within the Temple. They were chosen solely because of the satisfaction they brought to the king.

(f) *The pleasures of men.* This euphemistic phrase suggests the sexual enjoyment of men. The translators of the New American Standard Version suggest that "concubines" represent what is meant by the pleasures of men. This is in harmony with Solomon's experience as he had 700 wives and 300 concubines (I Kings 11:3).

This text, however, has been widely disputed. The Septuagint translates it "a male cupbearer and a female cupbearer." Both the Syriac and Vulgate agree with this. The King James Translation renders it "Musical instruments, and that of all sorts." Other translations supply a variation of ideas. Some of these are: "plenty of all sorts," "combination of tones," "captives," "litters," "coaches," "baths," "treasures," "chests," and even "demons." The original Hebrew expression appears but this one time in the whole of the Bible, and thus the difficulty of determining the proper translation.

v. 9 In this verse he sets forth two ideas which qualify his experiment. The first suggests the extensive nature of his experience. He said that he excelled all who preceded him in Jerusalem. This would include David and Saul and very likely implies any of the Jebusite kings of various chieftains who ruled prior to that time. The second suggests that he was always mentally in control of his activities as elaborate as they may have been. He states, "My wisdom also stood by me." He never lost sight of his objective that he stated in verse three. The type of wisdom that remained with him is not to be confused with the "heavenly" wisdom from above. It is the exercising of common sense and earthly propriety . . . it is the wisdom known to those who live "under the sun." The words "stood by me" carry the idea of "served me" and bring into sharper focus the purpose and value of this kind of wisdom. Solomon was committed to every pleasure conceivable to the mind of man. The only criterion was that his pleasurable experience

would not violate his "under the sun" wisdom. As we have noted, this opened the door to endless opportunities for one who had at his command the wealth and resources as the world's richest king.

v. 10 In this verse he speaks of his reward. One would expect glowing and colorful descriptions of an exuberant heart declaring, "I have found it!" A lifetime of searching and millions of dollars expended would surely bring one to the end of the rainbow where the treasure would be discovered and the fortunate man who pursued it could, with the deepest satisfaction, share such fulfillment with his friends. However, no such manifestation of joy is forthcoming. There is a deficiency that manifests itself in his answer. There is a positive note, but it is the rather subdued admission that his reward was simply the fact that he did everything his heart desired. This, however, isn't what he was searching to discover. He wanted to do everything in order to find out what profit there is for the sons of men in all the activities of their days upon the earth. His heart was pleased. In other words, the earthly desires were fulfilled and thus the earthly needs were met. He had at least accomplished this.

v. 11 Solomon is after a profit. He intends to review all his labors, satisfied that he had exhausted every opportunity for some new thrill of experience. One panoramic flashback over his life brought into focus all the fruit of all his labors. He searches in his mind's eye to discover something of lasting value, something that abides. He isn't interested in speaking to the empty feeling within the one who has so indulged himself, but rather to the "profit" that comes to one who has thus so lavishly lived. He doesn't deny the emptiness, such grief, he admits, is very much the fiber of one who lives "under the sun." His conclusion is pointedly harsh: "there was no profit under the sun." Men today should learn this lesson from Solomon. Who can find the time or the resources to run the course as skillfully as Solomon? Even if he does, the signpost at the end of the road points to "no profit." How unlike the Christian who discovers that in Christ are "hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 3:2).

FACT QUESTIONS 2:1-11

53. What is the question Solomon now seeks to answer?
54. Explain why Solomon's first experiment (1:13-18) did not bring satisfaction.
55. What general area now intrigues him in this second experiment?
56. What motivation is behind his activity?
57. How often does he refer to himself in these eleven verses?
58. What is the kind of pleasure that he seeks?
59. How common were silver and gold in Jerusalem?
60. Solomon asks, "What is good for man?" Find the verse in chapter two where he states this question.
61. What two verses in chapter one alluded to this same question?
62. From your study of the list of answers to this question, give five things Solomon indicates as good for man to do.
63. Name the three categories of pleasure to be pursued by Solomon.
64. Explain how they correspond to a degree with the teaching in I John 2:15, 16.
65. In what two ways could the term "wine" be understood?
66. Why isn't the Temple mentioned in Solomon's list of great works?
67. How many years did it take for Solomon to build his own house?
68. The term "garden" corresponds with what other English term that comes to us from the Greek?
69. What two purposes did the ponds serve?
70. What is the difference between slaves and home-born slaves?
71. What was the total number of oxen and sheep sacrificed at the dedication of the Temple?
72. Why is Solomon's statement that he collected silver and gold for himself more flagrant than it appears?
73. From the description found in II Chronicles 9:13-21, list the various items which were covered with gold.

74. What is the distinction between "districts" and "provinces?"
75. How were Solomon's needs met each month?
76. Solomon fed from his table approximately how many people?
77. What purpose did the male and female singers serve?
78. What is meant by the term "euphemistic?"
79. Why is there such difficulty in translating the latter part of verse eight?
80. What translation seems the most appropriate from the context?
81. In what ways does he qualify his experiment? (Cf. v. 9)
82. Define the kind of wisdom Solomon used.
83. What satisfaction came from his experiment? (Cf. v. 10)
84. What "profit" did he discover?
85. What was his final conclusion? (Cf. v. 11)

2. Conclusions 2:12-26

- a. Value of this wisdom and pleasure stop at the grave. 2:12-17

TEXT 2:12-17

- 12 So I turned to consider wisdom, madness and folly, for what will the man do who will come after the king except what has already been done?
- 13 And I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness.
- 14 The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I know that one fate befalls them both.
- 15 Then I said to myself, "As is the fate of the fool, it will also befall me. Why then have I been extremely wise?" So I said to myself, "This too is vanity."
- 16 For there is no lasting remembrance of the wise man as with the fool, inasmuch as in the coming days all will be forgotten. And how the wise man and the fool alike die!
- 17 So I hated life, for the work which had been done under the sun was grievous to me; because everything is futility and striving after the wind.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 2:12-17

46. List the six reasons stated in this passage (vs. 12-26) that led to the conclusion that all is vanity and futility.
47. What could be expected of the man who succeeds the king? v. 12
48. Although wisdom excels folly, and it is better to be wise, what fate comes to both the wise and the foolish?
49. Give proof that Solomon numbered himself among the wise. v. 15
50. What will happen to the memory of both wise men and fools?
51. Why did Solomon hate life and consider his work grievous?

PARAPHRASE 2:12-17

I turned my attention to another matter. I was interested in making a comparison of wisdom with foolishness and stupidity to determine the value of wisdom. My intention as king was to thoroughly examine this proposal. I did examine it with greater detail than any man who preceded me or any man who would follow me. I reached the conclusion that wisdom is an advantage over folly just as light is an advantage over darkness. The wise man walks in the light as he is guided by the eyes in his head. The fool, the one who practices folly, goes forward blindly, stumbling along the path. Yet they are both influenced by chance and fate. Then I said to myself, "I am a wise man, but one day I shall lie in the grave along side the fool. What advantage has my wisdom been to me?" Looking at it from that angle, I concluded that this too was futility. Death brings both the wise man and the foolish man to common ground. Not only do both die, but before many days pass, the memories of both have been forgotten. There is no lasting memory of either the wise man or the fool! All of my labor under the sun has thus been interpreted as clutching for wind, unrewarding, and only a vapor. I concluded that since this is true, I hated life.

COMMENT 2:12-17

"I turned" does not indicate a new experiment, but additional conclusions to be drawn from testing the meaning of life with pleasure. He has already indicated that he is aware that history repeats itself. He stated that God seeks what has passed by (3:15); that what happens in the future has already happened in the past (1:9). He is manifesting this same truth when he draws our attention to the question, "What will the man do who will come after the king except what has already been done?" In this question, Solomon indicates that one will come after the king. Is Solomon speaking only of one who might experiment in the same manner, if such were possible, or is he speaking historically of one who is already standing in the wings waiting his turn to rule over the kingdom? It is difficult to determine. However, the import of his question appears to be that whoever follows, whether in his authority or by his example, will certainly reach similar conclusions. Human nature is the same generation after generation.

One should not conclude that Solomon's experiment was a failure. He did what he proposed to do as stated in verse twelve. He said that "his heart was pleased because of all his labor" (v. 10). The experiment, however, did not yield the satisfaction that he sought. His dilemma is found in the fact that he did not discover "what good there is for the sons of men," and he now admits that the one who follows him will not discover the answer either!

"I set my mind" (1:17), and "I turned to consider" (2:12), should be understood as similar statements. In each instance, the objective is to know wisdom, madness and folly (cf. 7:25). Wisdom here is the "earthly" wisdom previously discussed. Although it is not of the high level where "wisdom from above" is discovered, it still excels madness and folly as light excels darkness. Madness and folly have been identified as foolishness and silliness which is so often associated with those who are caught up in the sheer enjoyment of earthly things.

The metaphor is wisely chosen in verse thirteen. Wisdom

is likened to light while folly is likened to darkness. The contrast is sharpened in Ephesians 5:8 and I Thessalonians 5:5, because light is the symbol of truth from God, and darkness is the symbol of sin. It should be noted that Solomon makes a similar distinction in 2:26 when he identifies the wise man as the "good" man, and the foolish man as the "sinner." Solomon admits to the availability of a particular earthly wisdom that gives an advantage to men. In 7:11, 12 and 19, he states that wisdom is (1) good and an advantage to men on this earth, (2) a protector to those who possess it, and (3) gives strength to a wise man. In 9:18, he writes that (4) wisdom is better than weapons of war, and in 10:10, he speaks of wisdom (5) as bringing success. It is this kind of wisdom that excels foolishness as light excels darkness. Note the following comparisons and conclusions made in the remaining section of chapter two.

THE WISE MAN

THE FOOLISH MAN

COMPARISONS

Light	Darkness
Eyes are in his head	Walks in darkness
Same fate (death)	Same fate (death)
No lasting remembrance	No lasting remembrance
Will be forgotten	Will be forgotten
In the coming days he will die	In the coming days he will die

CONCLUSIONS

1. If one labors with wisdom, knowledge and skill only to accumulate a great legacy, he will discover this is futile and striving for the wind (vs. 19-21).
2. If collecting and gathering a great fortune is your primary goal in life, your days will be filled with pain and grief and your nights will be restless (vs. 22, 23).
3. One should resolve to eat, drink and enjoy labor one day at a time as this is the gift of God (v. 24).
4. There is joy that comes to the good man who understands

that he should enjoy life day by day. However, to the sinner who collects and gathers for his own satisfaction, there will be no joy but a realization that all that he has gathered will be given to the good man (v. 26).

There is a difference that is discernable between one who practices common sense and keeps his eyes within his head, and one who seeks folly and thus walks in darkness. Solomon had written, "Wisdom is in the presence of the one who has understanding, but the eyes of the fool are on the ends of the earth" (Proverbs 17:24). However, there is the recognition that even to the wise man death is an inevitable companion who never discerns between the wise man or the fool. It is in the light of this conclusion that Solomon states that he hates life. In addition he confesses that his work, even the fruit of his labor, is grievous, futile, and striving after wind. Vanity has once again robbed even the wise man of any possible profit of his labor under the sun.

The fact that both the wise man and the fool share equally in many ways is a recurring theme throughout the book. It is discussed in 6:6, 7:2 and 9:2, 3. One of the real tragedies of living is the fact that one must die. The tragedy is compounded because through man's natural eye, he cannot see beyond the grave. If indeed the premise is correct, that is that all activities qualified by the phrase "under the sun" do not have the redemptive nature of the higher values, then it is possible to interpret Solomon's despair. David wrote of this when he said, "even wise men die; the stupid and the senseless alike perish, and leave their wealth to others" (Psalms 49:10).

It is in view of the fact that both the wise man and the fool die and go to the grave that Solomon despairs of being "extremely" wise. His extreme wisdom is the fruit of his life-long labor, and yet what does it profit him? He is certain that the wise man has no advantage over the fool in this respect (6:8, 11). Of course one dare not assume these conclusions in the light of Christian hope. However, to the man who is restricted to only that which can be interpreted "under the sun," death

terminates everything! This is why Solomon amplifies this conclusion with the observation in 9:3, 4: "This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men . . . they go to the dead. For whoever is joined with the living, there is hope; surely a live dog is better than a dead lion."

The concept of "the coming days" is also important to the Preacher (v. 16). In the days to come, *how* will a man be remembered? More to the point, however, is the question of *will* he be remembered? There is surely some profit in the awareness that one's reputation continues on in the minds of one's countrymen. Especially would this be true if one were a wise man. However, this is not to be under the sun! His original premise in 1:11 underscored how quickly things are to be forgotten. Later in his book he offers two illustrations of this same tragic truth. He speaks of a young man who rises from adverse circumstances to become king. The multitudes, tired of the former king, throng to his side and offer their allegiance. However, he declares that in time even the new king will not be remembered (4:13-16). He speaks further of the dead who no longer have a reward. Their reward would have been for them to have been remembered. However, they no longer have a share in all that is done "under the sun." No one remembers them.

There is a relentless correlation between the results of participating in fleeting things and the nature of the things themselves. His conclusions are consistent with the means employed in reaching them. It is not surprising, therefore, to hear him say that he "hated life," that he questioned his endless endeavors to become wise, that he looked upon all his work as a grievous, empty, futile task. His thoughts were simply corresponding with the kind of wisdom, madness and folly which he sought. There is a sense in which the very wisdom which he found became the greatest kind of folly.

FACT QUESTIONS 2:12-17

86. Give three references from Ecclesiastes that Solomon understood that history repeats itself.
 87. What is meant by "the man who will come after the king?" Give two possible interpretations.
 88. Who ever follows the king will reach what conclusion concerning Solomon's primary question concerning profit?
 89. In what sense was Solomon's experiment found in the first eleven verses unsatisfactory? In what sense was it successful?
 90. Identify and define the three objectives which Solomon "turned to consider."
 91. List the five good qualities that "earthly" wisdom affords.
 92. Who is the one who walks in darkness?
 93. "The wise man's eyes are in his head" means that he has what? (Cf. Proverbs 17:24)
 94. Why does Solomon say he hates life?
 95. Why did he despair of being extremely wise?
 96. Will either the wise man or the fool be remembered after they die?
 97. Give an illustration found in Ecclesiastes chapter four that confirms your answer.
- b. The legacy of one's labor is often lost to fools when one dies.
2:18-23

TEXT 2:18-23

- 18 Thus I hated all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun, for I must leave it to the man who will come after me.
- 19 And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the fruit of my labor for which I have labored by acting wisely under the sun. This too is vanity.
- 20 Therefore I completely despaired of all the fruit of my

labor for which I had labored under the sun.

- 21 When there is a man who has labored with wisdom, knowledge and skill, then he gives his legacy to one who has not labored with them. This too is vanity and a great evil.
- 22 For what does a man get in all his labor and in his striving with which he labors under the sun?
- 23 Because all his days his task is painful and grievous; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is vanity.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 2:18-23

52. Why did Solomon hate the fruit of his labor (vs. 18-20)?
53. What three tools did Solomon use to accumulate his legacy?
54. State the qualifying phrase found in verse twenty and twenty-two that proves Solomon's labor had no eternal value.
55. Find the verse in this passage that corresponds with the basic question asked in 1:3.
56. What keeps men from restful sleep (v. 23)?

PARAPHRASE 2:18-23

I labored and achieved more than any man who had been before me. Yet, I hated my achievements because now I must leave them to some man who will follow me. The basic tragedy is that I have no knowledge of the one who shall follow me. He could be a wise man, or he could be a fool. I have collected everything through wisdom, and now who ever follows me will have complete control over my fortune. What fleeting satisfaction! What vanity! Therefore, I turned my heart aside to despair as I thought of all the works I had accomplished, and the great fortune I had accumulated upon the earth. Why do I despair? I labored with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and now I must give this legacy to one who had not labored in this manner. This is not only futility, it is a great evil. I ask

again, "What profit does man have in all his toil and stress as he struggles upon the earth in the few days of his short life?" For all his days he labors at his task accompanied by pain and grief. Even at night he remembers the vexation of his work and his mind has no rest. This too is vanity.

COMMENT 2:18-23

The Preacher turned toward the past and surveyed the fruit of his life-long endeavor. He had amassed a fortune and collected riches beyond his highest expectations. However, as he contemplated the future and the one who would inherit all that he had gathered together, he grew bitter and cynical. He could designate the next king, but the people would not likely listen to the advice of an old and foolish king. He might dream of the kingdom remaining united but in his heart he realized it was but a dream. He would have little control over these matters. What if the one who follows him is a fool? He had acquired the greatness of his kingdom through wisdom, knowledge and skill. He now senses that it could slip into the hands of one who exercises little of these attributes and thus he will inherit wealth and power which he neither deserves nor can properly handle. His conclusion is that he thus "hated life." There are no forthcoming answers which satisfy him. He carries his burden into his bedchamber and is thus robbed of sleep (v. 23).

Did Solomon have cause to worry? One has sufficient evidence to recite the history of Israel following Solomon's death, and he discovers not one but two men who ascended to his throne. The kingdom did divide. In Solomon's closing years, his foreign wives turned away his heart from the Lord (I Kings 11:1-8). The author of Chronicles is silent on his closing years, but in I Kings we read that he loved "many foreign women" (I Kings 11:1). Solomon also had many adversaries. Among them were Hadad the Edomite and Rezon of Damascus (I Kings 11:9-25). However, the most dangerous of his foes had

to be Jeroboam. Jeroboam had been appointed to a prominent position in Solomon's kingdom. In addition to his own personal designs on the throne, he had the encouragement of the prophet Ahijah. The aggression and zeal of Jeroboam were manifested throughout the kingdom, and when Solomon suspected him he fled to Egypt for his life (I Kings 11:26-40). It is thought by some that the "lad" who comes out of prison to take the place of the king (4:14) is a direct reference to Jeroboam. It is true that upon Solomon's death, Jeroboam did return from Egypt to assume the leadership of the ten tribes. Rehoboam, Solomon's son, was proclaimed king in Jerusalem.

Perhaps there is a prophetic sense in which the words of Solomon predict the historical situation of his day. However, this interpretation is not vital to understanding the message of the book. One may readily see that Solomon's despair is based on two entirely different premises: (1) he will *not* be remembered for all his great works, and (2) he is uncertain who will inherit his fortune. It could easily be a person who has little regard for wisdom and much regard for silliness and jest.

Either way, Solomon will lose control over all the "fruit" of his labor. This is the inevitable result of laboring "under the sun." How different is the picture for the Christian who one day shall rest from his labor with the sweet peace that his works will follow after him (Revelation 14:13)!

The "legacy" is of major consequences to the one who has acquired it because he applied wisdom, knowledge, and skill in the task of gathering and collecting. The term "skill" may also be translated "efficiency" which suggests hours of toiling and perfecting of trades. He is not like the one who came upon his fortune through happenstance or chance. Solomon has designed and labored toward such an end. He has placed his whole heart in his work. His fortune represents an entire lifetime of tireless effort and toil. Some of the magnitude of his despair is sharpened by his question concerning profit. He asks, "For what does a man get in all his labor and in his

striving with which he labors under the sun" (v. 22)? His answer: He gets nothing! Thus he declares, "I hated all the fruit of my labor." In addition he says, "I completely despaired of all the fruit of my labor." He places a label on the fruit of his labor. It reads: "This too is vanity and a great evil."

- c. Labor is good only when it is acknowledged as from the hand of God. 2:24-26

TEXT 2:24-26

- 24 There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen, that it is from the hand of God.
25 For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him?
26 For to a person who is good in His sight He has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, while to the sinner He has given the task of gathering and collecting so that He may give to one who is good in God's sight. This too is vanity and striving after wind.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 2:24-26

57. List the three simple things in life that one is instructed to recognize as coming from the hand of God.
58. Who gives man enjoyment?
59. What is the condition that one must meet to receive God's blessings of wisdom, knowledge and joy (v. 26)?
60. What happens to the "sinner's" legacy?

PARAPHRASE 2:24-26

Man is not able of himself to find satisfaction in his work or in his pleasure such as eating and drinking. However, if a

man finds a temporary satisfaction in his labor or his pleasure, he must recognize that it is entirely from the hand of God. For who can eat and who can find enjoyment apart from God? Let us consider what happens to the one whom God favors and also to the one who offends God. To the person who is good in God's sight, God gives wisdom, knowledge and joy. To the sinner, however, God gives the vexing task of collecting and heaping up a fortune under the sun. Then the one who offends God must give it to the one who is good in God's sight. My conclusion is that this too is as unfulfilling as feasting on the wind.

COMMENT 2:24-26

This is the first time in Solomon's book that he reaches above the "sun" and speaks of God. As previously noted, however, it is not in the sense of a warm, covenant relationship. Rather, he speaks of God as the *Creator* who is in complete control of His universe. God's laws govern our world. There is enjoyment to be found in one's labor, but it is only when God blesses or permits. There are two classes of people who are identified. One is the "good" man who receives approval from God, and thus enjoys his labor. The other is the "sinner" who does not find this approval from God. Perhaps the intention here is to explain that a wise man, in this instance the good man, works in harmony with God's laws as he interprets them through the revelation of God through nature. As a result he pleases God and finds favor. On the other hand, the sinner is literally one who offends God. He sets aside the rules he discovers in this world. As a result he runs contrary to what he knows to be the better way to live. When one does this, he does not discover wisdom, knowledge or joy.

Solomon employs the term "joy" in much the same way that it is understood today. It carries the idea of cheerfulness and satisfaction with life. It is used three other times in Ecclesiastes and in each case the NASV renders it differently.

They are: "pleasure," (2:10); "joy," (2:26); "gladness," (5:20); "cheerful," (9:7). In each reference it speaks to the excitement of discovery and living life to its fullest each day. This kind of "joy" does not come to the man who is motivated by greed, or gathering wealth and possessions for his own use. The sinner has a grievous task because he gathers and collects with selfish intent. The good man is quite different. His wisdom does not bring grief. His knowledge does not bring sorrow. His joy comes to him because he finds satisfaction in the labor within a single day. This conclusion is clearly stated: "Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one's labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward" (5:18).

The sinner does not enjoy what he has gathered. This has been the basic premise of the book thus far. Not only has Solomon demonstrated this to be true, but what the sinner has gathered and collected for his own use will be inherited by one who is "good" in God's sight. This principle of retribution is taught in Proverbs 28:8 which reads: "He who increases his wealth by interest and usury, gathers it for him who is gracious to the poor." Again he writes: "The wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous" (Proverbs 13:22).

The vanity of "striving after wind" of verse twenty-six, does not refer to the activities of the good man. It has reference to the sinner who is collecting and gathering fruit of his labor, but will not enjoy it because it will soon belong to another. (Read carefully 2:11, 17, 18.)

The fact that the good man recognizes that his enjoyment is from "the hand of God," should not be interpreted in the context that God has given him a detailed rule book by which he works and lives to increase his joy. Rather, it is simply that the good man realizes that food and drink are gifts, which he acknowledges to be from God, and he finds genuine joy in the use of them. There is a definite moral involved. If avarice is the foe which keeps one from enjoying life, then setting oneself free from such a vain sin would result in the daily

satisfaction with life that Solomon is discussing.

To try and discover happiness where God has not ordained that happiness can be found, has always been man's failing. Jesus redirects men's minds to those higher and nobler efforts which result in genuine happiness. Never has it been that joy results from the pursuit of joy. Our Lord's beatitudes underscore the truth that when one seeks higher values such as purity, peace, and righteousness, that "blessedness," in this case "joy," overtakes him, and he discovers that he is experiencing real joy where God has ordained that it is to be found.

The division of chapter three at this particular verse is unfortunate. The same theme is under consideration in all twenty-two verses. In 3:9 the basic question is asked once again: "What *profit* is there to the worker from that in which he toils?" The entire chapter is an amplification of chapter two. How can man discover a profit from his labor? First, by submitting to the fact that God does things appropriately in His own time. Second, eat, drink, work, and do good in one's lifetime. Third, do not be discouraged by the similar fate (death) of both man and beast as man does not have the knowledge to see his future, and thus he should be happy in his activities day-by-day. The profit is limited but it is there. Joy is his reward. Solomon states it clearly: "Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one's labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; *for this is his reward*" (5:18).

FACT QUESTIONS 2:24-26

108. What attitude does the "good man" have toward God's control of the world?
109. What attitude does the "sinner" have?
110. Give the three synonyms used for "joy" in Ecclesiastes.
111. Who cannot experience this joy?

112. There is a limited profit (reward) that is available to one who labors under the sun. What is it? Cf. 5:18
113. What will happen to that which the sinner collects and gathers?
114. Does joy result from pursuing joy?
115. Jesus taught us that we will find joy if we pursue what?
116. What subject comes under discussion in chapter three?
117. What basic question is once again raised?
118. Give three ways one can find a share of profit even under the sun.

B. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS THAT WE WORK UNDER THE RULE OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE 3:1-22

1. Man should adjust to live his life within the framework of God's providence. 3:1-8

TEXT 3:1-8

- 1 There is an appointed time for everything, And there is a time for every event under heaven—
- 2 A time to give birth, and a time to die;
A time to plant, and a time to uproot what is planted.
- 3 A time to kill, and a time to heal;
A time to tear down, and a time to build up.
- 4 A time to weep, and a time to laugh;
A time to mourn, and a time to dance.
- 5 A time to throw stones, and a time to gather stones;
A time to embrace, and a time to shun embracing.
- 6 A time to search, and a time to give up as lost;
A time to keep, and a time to throw away.
- 7 A time to tear apart, and a time to sew together;
A time to be silent, and a time to speak.
- 8 A time to love, and a time to hate;
A time for war and a time for peace.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 3:1-8

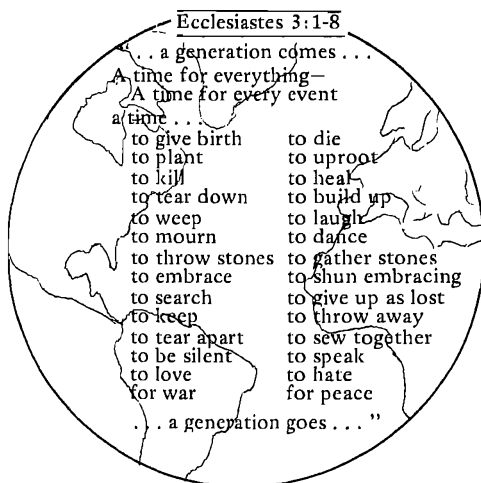
61. Give evidence that God's creation is orderly. (v. 1)
62. Compare translations of the first line of verse two. What variations do you find?
63. What might have to die in order for a particular generation to be healed? (v. 3)
64. What experience usually occasions mourning?
65. Look up the term "dance" in a Bible concordance. After reading several of the references, how would you describe dancing as it is pictured in the Bible? Would you equate it with the modern dance?
66. If the first part of verse five is figurative, and the second line is speaking to the same subject, what single idea is under consideration?
67. List some dreams from your own life that you have searched for and found. List others you have given up as lost. (v. 6)
68. When is silence "golden?" When is it "yellow?"
69. List some things the Christian "hates" and therefore should wage war against.
70. List the objects of each of the twenty-six infinitives.
71. List the objects of the four prepositions "for." (vs. 1, 8)

PARAPHRASE 3:1-8

To everything there is a season, and a time to every delight under heaven. There is a time for all things to be born, and everything in due season will die; man can take advantage of the seasons and plant when he should, but the time will come when that which has been planted will have to be uprooted. Self-discipline and social justice require the destruction of evil, but a time will come when both the people and their land will be healed; so there is also a time to wreck, and tear down that which is beyond repair, and there is a time to build anew. Many events of life will sadden the heart and cause one to weep, just as other events make the heart merry and result in

laughter; since death comes to all, there will be seasons of mourning. On occasion, joy shall also overwhelm one and find expression through dancing. There is an appropriate time for making love, and just as appropriately there is a time to refrain; there is a time when an embrace is proper, and also a time when wisdom leads one to refrain from embracing. Fortunes are sometimes gained because one knows the times for searching, but it is also true that they are often kept because good judgment is exercised in refraining from excess; even our present possessions are retained with discretion, and we find wisdom in discarding or sharing with others that which is no longer of value to oneself. There is a time when clothing should be discarded, and a time when it should be mended and used again; the same kind of judgment is in order with the control of the tongue: silence is often golden. On the other hand, words fitly spoken have great power and should be said. Love encompasses all that is holy and good, and there is a time when it should be demonstrated to your fellow man; hate is reserved for that which is evil, and yet there is a time when it should also be exercised—there is a time for war, and a time for peace.

DIAGRAM "B"
THE EVENTS OF ONE GENERATION
UNDER HEAVEN



COMMENT 3:1-8

In this section the reader is confronted with seven parallel passages demonstrating the theme that God, the Creator, is in control of His world. More than this, it illustrates the various activities which take place in the lifetime of one generation. The Preacher has observed that one generation passes away while another generation moves in to take its place (1:4). Here he gives a detailed account of the activities of each generation from birth to death.

Parallelisms were popular with the writers of the Old Testament. One is tempted to be carried away with the poetic beauty of the passage and possibly miss the message which it contains. This popular passage from Ecclesiastes has made its way into the forms of art, poetry and song in our present generation. It should be emphasized once again, however, that the theme discussed in chapter two is still under consideration. Some have written that this is an unrelated insertion of material without appropriate relationship to the context of the discussion, but a cursory reading of the two chapters together would dispense with such an argument. The lesson is that God controls through orderly laws and principles. Man may run contrary to God's appointed times and seasons, but if he does, he will experience frustration and failure. The "good man" of the preceding chapter attempts to live in harmony with God's order, while the "sinner" has little regard for it.

Certain qualities mark the comparisons. (1) The list is rather extended. This may serve the purpose of demonstrating that the many sides of life are under God's control, or it may have been Solomon's intention to show the various activities of man from the time of his birth until the time of his death. (2) Nothing evil is included in the list. Some of the activities are difficult to interpret as to exact meanings, but nothing needs to be placed in the category of immoral behaviour. This is very clear. The contrary is actually true. Since the second line of the couplet partially explains the first line, the meaning of each line interprets the meaning of the other. The meaning of the

event must be in harmony with the parts of the comparison. Nothing in any of the descriptions suggests evil activities. Hate, kill, rend and war are all extreme in nature, but are approved by God under qualifying circumstances. (3) Some events are inevitable. It is obvious that no one has control over the time of his death (8:8). We are also subjected to a "time" to give birth, to weep and to heal. These circumstances of life are beyond our control. God controls them in the sense that His laws are active in His world. It is improper to read predestination into the passage. (4) Some events can be experienced at one's own discretion. Man controls such activities as loving and refraining from love, deciding what to keep and what to cast away. Even in these areas, however, there are times and seasons within God's order when good judgment dictates policy. (5) Sometimes one works contrary to the seasons. One may keep silent when he should be speaking. He may laugh when he should be mourning. The wise man interprets the times and adjusts his activities accordingly.

Jeremiah stated this truth when he said, "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" (Jeremiah 10:23). Solomon himself had written, "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord" (Proverbs 16:33). He has also written that he sees the activities of life as coming from the hand of the Lord (2:24).

v. 1 The arrangement of man's activities as he lives out his life is now under consideration (cf. introductory remarks for this section). This verse is not intended to suggest that all things are predetermined or that man has no choice in arranging certain times or events. If this were true, the distinction between the "good man" and the "sinner" would be inappropriate. In addition, there would be little meaning given to admonition and rebuke found throughout the book. (5:1ff; 11:1ff; 12:1ff are but examples.) This verse acknowledges what has previously been taught: there is nothing new under the sun, and God seeks that which is past (1:9; 3:15). The events peculiar to every generation are set forth. No intention

is made for chronological order or arrangement. Each generation may experience different events at varying times, but generally speaking each generation will experience all the events.

v. 2 The Hebrew word rendered "be born" is passive and would best be translated "give birth." This idea is more in harmony with the parallel "time to plant" and therefore comes close to the original idea. The purpose is to illustrate the beginning and end of a thing. Everything else happens between these two events. While "birth" represents the animal kingdom and "plant" represents the vegetable kingdom, the intention is not to be comprehensive of all things, but rather representative of *beginnings* and *ends*.

v. 3 Both Deuteronomy 32:39 and Hosea 6:1 suggest that it is God's prerogative to tear, wound, smite and kill, even as it is His prerogative to heal, to bind up, and to make alive. Man is also involved in these activities as he exacts judgment and pursues justice. The term "kill" here will not allow cutting but does allow capital punishment. Both the execution of criminals, and killing necessitated by the need to protect the innocent, would be allowed. Killing which results from war would probably be excluded as it is specifically mentioned in verse eight. The verse suggests the necessity of judgment and appropriate punishment if there is to be a time of healing and building up.

In the spiritual relationship the principle is also valid. Paul's rather lengthy discourse on this subject in I Corinthians chapter five clearly illustrates the necessity of tearing down before there can be a season of restoration.

v. 4 One doesn't live long before he experiences both laughter and weeping. These human emotions are common to all men in every age. Mourning suggests a deeper sorrow than weeping, while dancing may be thought of as the sheer physical display of inner joy. Jesus spoke to both of these activities when he said, "But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market places, who call out to the other children, and say, 'We played the flute for you,

and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn' " (Matthew 11:16, 17). Dancing in the Bible times should not be confused with the modern-day dance. Biblical dancing was the unrehearsed, spontaneous exuberance resulting from a great physical victory, or some festive occasion.

v. 5 An attempt to escape or skirt the obvious has led to far-fetched and varied conclusions concerning the first part of this verse. Since the verses are couplets, and each line parallels the other, then the clear statements of "a time to embrace," and "a time to refrain from embracing," would suggest that "a time to cast away stones," and "a time to gather stones together," is a euphemistic description of sexual love. The fidelity of a monogamous union finds proper expression and fulfillment in such acts of love. God has placed natural desires within both men and women which result not only in the propagation of the race, but also in the holy mystery of oneness that exists between husband and wife. Such an interpretation as this does not appear to meet with any difficulty. This makes the first part of the couplet harmonious with the second part. It speaks to a vital and major part of life's experience which is not discussed elsewhere in this section. Finally, the absurdity of most interpretations necessitates a clearly defined and logical explanation of the verse.

Some of the more popular but unacceptable interpretations of gathering and casting stones are listed: (1) building or demolishing houses, walls, cisterns and similar works made from stones; (2) marring an enemy's field by casting stones upon it (II Kings 3:19, 25); (3) stoning as a form of capital punishment; (4) clearing land or vineyards of stones (Isaiah 5:2).

v. 6 Easy come, easy go," is an idiom which may speak to part of the lesson of this verse. The first section appears to refer to that which man acquires either through his own ingenuity or by his good fortune. In like manner he may find his possessions slipping away from him in a manner beyond his control. The latter part of the couplet suggests that man sometimes decides what he keeps and what he chooses to discard. Earthly wisdom enables one to take advantage of both

situations. He will take advantage of the opportunities offered through God's providence, and he will also exercise discretion in the wise use of that which he has gathered or collected.

Benevolent acts could be under consideration. They are part of the Preacher's message (11:1-6), and Solomon had written, "There is one who scatters, yet increases all the more, and there is one who withholds what is justly due, but it results only in want. The generous man will be prosperous, and he who waters will himself be watered" (Proverbs 11:24, 25). This principle is also taught in many of the New Testament books. An example is found in II Corinthians 9:6-15.

v. 7 Since the tearing of garments was commonly associated with mourning among the Jews, it is easy to see such an application of this verse. Also, the tear was to be mended after an appropriate period of mourning depending upon the nearness of the relationship of the deceased person. However, mourning and weeping have previously been included in the listing of events, and it isn't likely that such would be the intention in this verse. What then is the category of activities to which he speaks? Once again the second comparison offers a clue. Wisdom dictates the practical value, or lack of it, of many things possessed in life. We finally give up on certain garments while others are mended or patched. Clothing was of great value (II Kings 5:5; II Chronicles 9:24). In like manner, wisdom is manifested in the ability to know when to keep silent and when to speak. There were occasions when Jesus chose to remain silent (Mark 14:60, 61; 15:4, 5). There were other times when His words were like "apples of gold in settings of silver" (Proverbs 25:11). How penetrating is James' sermon on the control of the tongue (James 3). (Cf. Proverbs 17:28; 15:23) Solomon is speaking to a vast area of life in which the daily events are of major significance.

v. 8 Unlike verse five, "love" here has as the opposite "hate," and the comparison is "peace." It is unlike the conjugal love of the former verse and should be understood as more comprehensive of the affairs of men. In times of peace, all of man's activities should be expressions of love, as he moves about

in his relationship with his family and his fellow man. However, when war is necessary, there should be foundational issues which require the hatred of just men. The seriousness of war speaks to the issue of life and man's ability to distinguish between that which is to be loved and thus defended, and that which should be destroyed because it is the recipient of man's justifiable hatred.

The infinitives represent a more personal, individual activity, while the preposition "for" speaks in each instance to general categories which involved multitudes at the same time.

We have refrained from giving the couplets an unwarranted spiritual or Christian interpretation, as this would be out of character with the purpose of the book. We have also withstood the temptation, to which many others have yielded, to see God's activities with Israel or the church in each of the events. The greater context of the passage assures that God's laws are in effect in God's world. He is very much in control. However, the emphasis is undoubtedly on the activities of men. Solomon is giving us an overview of the total life of one generation. He stated it clearly in the beginning that there is a time for everything and every event under heaven (v. 1). His objective, at this point in his book, is to bring man to see that there is nothing better than to resign himself to the work and pleasures of the day, recognizing that this is a gift to man from the hand of God. It is not the activity of God but of man that is foremost in his mind. His very next question substantiates this contention: "What profit is there *to the worker* from that in which he toils?"

FACT QUESTIONS 3:1-8

119. What kind of an "account" is Solomon picturing?
120. What themes are under consideration?
121. Explain what will happen to man if he elects to live contrary to God's appointed times and seasons.
122. Define the "good man."

123. Define the "sinner."
124. Give two reasons why this list of the activities of each generation is rather long.
125. Name four "extreme" activities of men that are listed.
126. Give at least one example of an inevitable event that man experiences.
127. Explain why verse one should not be interpreted as teaching predestined times and events.
128. State the purpose of verse two.
129. What kind of killing would be included by the context of verse three.
130. Distinguish between weeping and mourning.
131. Explain what is meant by "an euphemistic description."
132. Give an example of such a description and explain its meaning.
133. What will earthly wisdom enable a man to do? (v. 6)
134. In what way is the term "love" in verse eight to be thought as different from the same term in verse five?
135. What is Solomon's overall "objective" at this point? How does verse nine substantiate your answer?

2. Working outside the framework of God's providence results in frustration and defeat. 3:9-22

TEXT 3:9-22

- 9 What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils?
- 10 I have seen the task which God has given the sons of men with which to occupy themselves.
- 11 He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end.
- 12 I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one's lifetime,

- 13 moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor—it is the gift of God.
- 14 I know that everything God does will remain forever, there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take away from it, for God has so worked that men should fear Him.
- 15 That which has been already, and that which shall be has already been, for God seeks what has passed by.
- 16 Furthermore, I have seen under the sun that in the place of justice there is wickedness, and in the place of righteousness there is wickedness.
- 17 I said to myself, “God will judge both the righteous man and the wicked man,” for a time for every matter and for every deed is there.
- 18 I said to myself concerning the sons of men, “God has surely tested them in order for them to see that they are but beasts.”
- 19 For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same. As one dies, so dies the other; indeed, they all have the same breath and there is no advantage for man over beast, for all is vanity.
- 20 All go to the same place. All come from dust and all return to dust.
- 21 Who knows that the breath of man ascends upward and the breath of the beast descends downward to the earth?
- 22 And I have seen that nothing is better than that man should be happy in his activities, for that is his lot. For who will bring him to see what will occur after him?

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 3:9-22

72. Explain why 2:24, 3:1-8 and 3:12 could be an answer to the question raised in verse nine.
73. What has God given the sons of men? (Cf. v. 10)
74. Even though God has placed the desire in men to know the ways of God, will they discover it? (Cf. v. 11)
75. What is the “gift” from God? (Cf. vs. 12, 13)

76. Explain what is meant by "God seeks what has passed by. (Cf. v. 15).
77. What stands in the place of justice and righteousness?
78. Both the righteous and the wicked will come before God for what reason?
79. What similarities exist between men and beasts? (Cf. vs. 19, 20)
80. What difference between men and beasts is suggested? (Cf. v. 21)
81. Does Solomon know that man's spirit will go upward when he dies? (Cf. 12:7)
82. What is man's lot? (Cf. v. 22)
83. Can man see into the future? Give evidence for your answer from the text.

PARAPHRASE 3:9-22

When man shares in all the events of life, and toils throughout the short time he has to live here under the sun, what profit does he have to hold in his hand? I have been around. I have seen the work that God has assigned to the sons of men to occupy them as they toil and labor during their lifetimes. Also, I clearly understand that God makes every thing right for an appropriate time. There is indeed a specific time and season for every affair under heaven. God has placed in the minds of men the desire to know and the ability to wonder concerning all the events, but men are unable to discover or find out the work of God from the beginning even to the end. I know that among men there is nothing better than to find pleasure and joy in one's lifetime. However, God does have a gift for men. It is not to understand the mysterious ways of God, but it is to be happy and find pleasure in living and see good in all of one's labor. One other thing I willingly admit: whatever God does will endure, nothing can be added and nothing can be subtracted. God works in this consistent way because of His very nature, and in order that men may stand

in awe of Him. In addition, consider this! God will see to it that history repeats itself. That which was, now is; and that which is to be, has already been. (Is there anything of which one might say, "See this, it is new?")

Let us look more closely under the sun. We shall discover disturbing things. I saw in the place where justice should be found that wickedness was there. I saw in the place where there should have been a just man, that there was an evildoer. I said to myself, "Beware, evildoer! God will judge between you and the righteous man." And I also understand that there is a time when God will judge every delight of man and every deed. I said to myself, "God lets things happen so he can purify the sons of men. In God's time, the true issues will be clearly seen, and men's real attitudes will be revealed. God permits men to see, that in themselves, they are only animals." Man really has no advantage over the animals. They both are subject to chance. They both suffer the same event: death comes to both. Both have the same breath. They are both subject to futility. Both go to the same place. Both come from the ground, and both are returning to the ground. Who among you can say that you know the spirit of man which ascends on high, or the spirit of the beast, which goes downward to the earth?

I am now more convinced than ever that man can do nothing better than rejoice in his works, do good in his lifetime, and make the most of each day. This is man's lot. No man can see what will occur in the future. Who can enable man to see what even tomorrow will bring?

COMMENT 3:9-22

v. 9 In this verse, we see a return to the original question of the book (1:3). It is not necessarily introducing the material which is to follow, although this basic proposition is still under consideration, but it reflects on everything that has been stated previously. For the use of "profit" or "advantage," see the comments on 1:3. That in "which he toils" refers to all of

man's activities which are mentioned in 3:1-8.

v. 10 Solomon's personal experience was very comprehensive. One need only review the details of his life, as referred to in chapters one and two, to be convinced that he is correct in saying that he has viewed the activities of men. He has called attention to the major areas of men's interests, and demonstrated how each generation finds itself engaged in the same activities. He calls it an evil (grievous, sorry) task (1:13; 2:26), that has occupied men in each generation. He declares that God has given the task to the sons of men, and in the next verse he explains what he means by saying that God gave it.

v. 11 The song writer picked up the theme of this verse with the words, "Everything is beautiful in its own way." Solomon declares that God made everything beautiful (appropriate) in its time. To say God set "eternity" in the heart, is another way of saying that God gave men the "task" of occupying themselves. The meaning of the Hebrew word is widely debated. The context leads one to believe that it is speaking to a desire that God has placed in the heart to search out and to know. Hengstenberg writes that the word is never used except for "unmeasured time." Some translate the word "world" while others prefer the idea of a "sense of the infinite." One translation (The Anchor Bible) uses the term "enigma" to convey the idea intended. Every man does have the desire to explore the meaning of all the events of life, but it is not within him to discover the answers. A sense of awe does come to the mind when one thinks of the Creator (the Infinite One), but this only compounds his frustrations. An awareness of the differences that exist between men and the rest of God's created beings only intensifies the desire to probe and discover more and more. Yet, it is clearly stated that man will not find out the work which God has done. For additional study on man's desire to know and discover, study the following passages from Ecclesiastes: 7:23, 24, 29; 8:7, 17; 9:1; 11:5.

The "beginning and end" of God's work probably refers to the work which God does in relation to one's lifetime. This would be in harmony with the next verse as well as with 3:1-9.

Some do explain it as the work of God that extends from eternity to eternity, but this appears to be out of harmony with the obvious purpose of the Preacher in this section. Because the task is grievous, one should not attribute the task itself to God. It is not God's fault that man does not have success in his investigation.

v. 12, 13 The five-point exercise suggested here is at least a key to deriving some profit from life even if it is very meager. Man is instructed to (1) rejoice, (2) do good, (3) eat, (4) drink, and (5) see good in his labor. This same message is emphasized in 2:3, 24; 3:12, 13, 22; 5:18; 6:12; 8:15; 9:7. This reward is called a "gift" from God. Sometimes it is spoken of as coming from the "hand" of God (2:24; 5:19). God is recognized as the One who provides. Whatever one includes in his enjoyment of life, it should be with the approval of God. Two clear statements undergird this truth. They are: "Go then, eat your bread in happiness, and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works" (9:7). And, "Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood. And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes. Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things" (11:9).

v. 14, 15 Not only is everything God has made beautiful, good and appropriate, but all that He does is perfect. God is a complete Being, and therefore has complete order in all His creation. When one realizes this, and looks beyond it to see the nature of God, he stands in awe of Him. Each of the admonitions and challenges the Preacher sets forth in the book is based on the true nature of God. For example, he admonishes his audience when they go to the temple to worship God, that they should remember God is in heaven and they are upon the earth (5:1, 2). In other words, they are the "created" beings while God is the "Creator." Men should recognize that God is the perfect, complete and authoritative Governor of His world. Men should learn to "fear" God (12:13).

Because of this, the Christian appreciates the completeness

of God. He says with the author of Hebrews that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever" (13:8). We place our trust in the complete work of Christ (Hebrews 9:28) which was offered but once for our sins. We trust the complete sovereignty of God (Acts 17:24). We abide in His complete wisdom set forth in the act of saving grace. But to the reader of Ecclesiastes in Solomon's day, nothing of the blessings we have in Christ were realized. The context of this passage must be explained in the light of the frustration expressed in verses ten and eleven. As man routinely experiences the events of life, he sees that God's laws are in complete control of the times and the seasons. He learns to respect God because of His consistency and power, but he does not share in the knowledge that belongs only to God.

Some events appear to contradict God's sovereign control and completeness of order in His world. However, the statement, "God seeks what has passed by" assures the reader that any violation of the rules is only temporary, and in due season everything will return to proper order as it has always been.

It is precisely to this problem that the Preacher now speaks. He is primarily concerned through the remaining section of this chapter with one very apparent inequity: wickedness in the place of righteousness and justice. He then draws numerous observations concerning this. In the first section of chapter four, he is concerned about another problem. This time it is the oppression of innocent people with the authority on the side of evil men. He illustrates the violation of God's rules through two more examples. One has to do with an inordinate desire for earthly riches, while the other speaks to the fickleness of the citizens of the land. In each situation, he admits to the futility of the whole affair, and in view of the fact that God works out the times and seasons of justice, he resigns himself to the fact that "nothing is better than that man should be happy in his activities, for that is his lot" (3:22).

The obvious corruption in both places high and low throughout the world does not disturb the inner peace of the Christian.

He has the advantage over the Preacher in Ecclesiastes for he knows Him who brings peace (John 14:27). He is not limited in his understanding to the message preached through nature, but has the "final word" from God in the person of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1).

v. 16 There is little doubt in the Preacher's mind that God's control of His world will eventually set all things right—but this justice must have its appropriate time. In the meantime, life must be faced for what it is. It must be endured as it comes. This leads to some sobering observations. He discusses one such observation here: God's order is being prostituted by the corruption of evil men, and evildoers have control of the authoritative positions. Thus, justice is sacrificed for the sake of wickedness.

v. 17 Since he knows that God's laws will ultimately bear their own fruit, he muses to himself concerning the future state of the evildoers and also the righteous men. The translation in the NASV appears to be saying that both the wicked man and the righteous man will fall into God's judgment. While this is undoubtedly true, the better rendering is that God will judge "between" the wicked man and the righteous man. It is the wicked man who is in hard straights with God. The latter part of the verse speaks to the total concept that God makes everything appropriate in its time. It is in this context that the Preacher says, "for a time for every matter and for every deed is there."

v. 18-20 So intense is the corruption of justice that he is led to conclude that man is no different from animals in many respects. God "has surely tested them" is to be understood that God has given them sufficient opportunity and time to declare their true character. The pressures of both authority and responsibility test a man. Some translate "test" as "purify" which implies that God waits patiently through the various experiences of life until He separates, winnows and proves men. The strength of the original text suffers some loss with the insertion of "but beasts," or especially "but as beasts," as the idea is that "they are beasts." Numerous illustrations

from history could be cited to verify this contention. When man is left to himself, without the benefit of the heavenly wisdom, he proves his beastly nature. When God elects to withhold punishment of sin for a season, the heart of man is set to do evil continually (8:11).

Note the similarities between men and beasts that are given:

- (1) Both have the same fate: death;
- (2) Both have the same breath;
- (3) Both are subjected to a short life (corruption);
- (4) Both go to the same place (grave);
- (5) Both come from dust;
- (6) Both return to dust;
- (7) One does not have an advantage over the other.

One can clearly see the differences between men and beasts; this is not the issue. It is the Preacher's purpose to convince his audience that once men begin moving in the direction of wickedness and forsake justice and righteousness that they become as beasts.

v. 21 This is a difficult verse to translate because the Hebrew has three possibilities. (1) It may be a question (2:19); (2) It may suggest "maybe"; or (3) It actually affirms through a question (8:1). The correct understanding, therefore, will come through a study of the context, and in this case, a study of the greater context.

There is little doubt that Solomon is writing through inspiration. In addition to such statements as II Timothy 3:16, there is the internal claim of Ecclesiastes 12:11. The difference in the destiny of the "breath" or "spirit" of the beast and the man is clearly taught in 12:7: "then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it." But, it is not the differences but the similarities that are under consideration. Therefore, it is not a question of debate as to the differences between men and beasts, or of the obvious destinies of each, but what Solomon is saying is this, "Who can understand their spirits?" Or to put it differently, he is saying, "It is difficult to believe that man can behave with

such beast-like characteristics! Who can understand the spirit of either?"

v. 22 This would make the final thought of the chapter a very natural conclusion. The Preacher knows that the spirit of man will return to God who created it. This is not his concern at this point. His question concerns the profit to be gained by the one who has to live out his life in the short span of time and in the difficult days ahead (3:9). He recognizes that life under the sun is a grievous task. He now admits that it is filled with social injustices. He knows that in God's due season he will see how God works to bring about justice and order, but it is far from him to explain the ways of God. He is assured only of God's consistency, and thus on the basis of God's past performance, he concludes that man should not fret over either what he does not know or what he cannot change. In the light of this reasoning he says, "And I have seen that nothing is better than that man should be happy in his activities, for that is his lot. For who will bring him to see what will occur after him?"

Some see in the twenty-first verse a simple acknowledgment on Solomon's part that some do not take to heart the differences that exist between men and beasts. While this does not satisfy the context, it does offer an idea that is needful. There are many ways in which men and beasts are similar, but there is also a vast way in which they differ. One cannot read the book without recognizing the challenge on every page to rise above the eroding pressures of life and get the most from living. One is challenged to exercise wisdom, worship God correctly, demonstrate benevolence, and remember God. The differences between men and beasts are obvious. Further, sinners would not liken themselves to beasts. It would take a preacher to do that! The man who is under consideration in the closing verse of this section is not the evildoer. He is the "good man." He cannot see the future or the events which shall befall him, but he is convinced that he will trust God and be happy in the activities of the day. This does not mean that the Preacher will not soon be in the valley of despair, looking again at the

activities under the sun, and pointing out the discouraging events of life. However, for the moment, he has his readers on a high plateau, receiving a fresh breath of air before descending once again to the reality of life "under the sun."

FACT QUESTIONS 3:9-22

136. Solomon makes it clear that in this section he is seeking to do what? (Cf. v. 9)
137. What does "which he toils" have reference to? (Cf. v. 9)
138. In what sense can it be said that God gives this "task" to men?
139. What does the term "eternity" mean as it is used here? What do you think the meaning of the word in the context is?
140. What is meant by "the beginning and end?"
141. What five things is man instructed to do if he wants to show a profit? (Cf. vs. 12, 13)
142. Give evidence from Ecclesiastes what enjoyment from the hand of God means with God's approval.
143. What brings man to stand in awe of God?
144. Has God lost control of His world because some events are out of harmony with His expressed will? Discuss.
145. What is the first evil that is apparent to the Preacher? (Cf. v. 16)
146. Will both the wicked man and the righteous man be judged? Discuss.
147. Explain the purpose of the testing of men. (Cf. v. 18)
148. What does "purify" imply?
149. Why does he go to such lengths to show the similarities between men and beasts?
150. Read verse twenty-one from different translations. Give three reasons why the verse is difficult to translate.
151. Is the debate here over the eternal nature of man's spirit? Discuss.
152. Write out your own paraphrase of verse twenty-two.
153. List the reasons Solomon came to this conclusion.

C. GUIDELINES FOR WORKING WITH GOD UNDER ALL CIRCUMSTANCES 4:1-16

1. How to work under oppression 4:1-3

TEXT 4:1-3

- 1 Then I looked again at all the acts of oppression which were being done under the sun. And behold I saw the tears of the oppressed and that they had no one to comfort them; and on the side of their oppressors was power, but they had no one to comfort them.
- 2 So I congratulated the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still living.
- 3 But better off than both of them is the one who has never existed, who has never seen the evil activity that is done under the sun.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 4:1-3

84. What new inequity does Solomon now observe?
85. What qualifying phrase (v. 1) places the restrictions on this activity?
86. Give evidence that the oppression was severe.
87. What increased the tragedy of the oppression?
88. Did anyone comfort the oppressed?
89. Who received congratulations? Why?
90. Who is better off than either the dead or the living?
91. What qualifying phrase appears again in verse three?

PARAPHRASE 4:1-3

Then I turned to look closely at all the acts of oppression under the sun. Just as I had previously been confronted with the problem of corruption of justice, so now I see the oppression

of the helpless. I witnessed the tears of the oppressed. What compounds their tragedy is that they have no one to comfort them, and the authority is on the side of the oppressor. They themselves have no avenger. Both of these inequities were foremost in my mind, so I sang the praises of the ones already dead. I said, "Congratulations to the dead who died long ago for they are more fortunate than the living who are still alive." Then it occurred to me that the one who is truly the fortunate one is neither the dead nor the living, but the one who has never existed. He is better off than both of them because his mind has not been filled with the knowledge of the evil activities done under the sun.

COMMENT 4:1-3

v. 1 "I looked again" indicates that he is considering the same theme in this section that he was discussing in chapter three. The "again" implies that a new illustration of injustice or the inequities of life is under consideration. On two occasions the qualifying phrase "under the sun" appears in these three verses which indicates that what one observes is apart from heavenly values. The act of social injustice that now arrests Solomon's attention illustrates the vanity of all earthly things and endeavors.

One is confronted with a very basic problem that is common to all men of every age: Why is it that wicked men prosper and often have the authority on their side, while the righteous are often poor and suffer oppression? Since this is often the situation, and it appears to be so in Israel at this time, one is lead to the erroneous conclusion that wickedness pays profitable dividends while godliness results in poverty and affliction. If one interprets the meaning apart from the "heavenly values," the conclusions could indeed be very dismal. The extreme statements of the Preacher in these three verses must be understood in this light. If one fails to interpret his observations in the light of the "under the sun" restrictions, he finds the

Preacher contradicting himself later on in his message. However, Solomon knew what we know about the justice of God. He knew that God is patient, long-suffering and correct in all of His dealing with men. It is from this vantage point that he writes, "Although a sinner does evil a hundred times and may lengthen his life, still I know that it will be well for those who fear God, who fear Him openly. But it will not be well for the evil man and he will not lengthen his days like a shadow, because he does not fear God" (8:12, 13).

Because of similar circumstances today, one of the most difficult things is for the Christian to keep his priorities in order. There are certain values which belong within the inner circle, next to the heart, in one's life. At the same time, there are "things" which must be kept on the periphery, and constantly challenged to keep them from eroding the truer values or invading the inner circle where "things" have no claim. Yet, how many people do you know who are living purposeless lives simply because they have allowed themselves to be deceived by the riches of this world, or the pleasures derived from participation in such evil deeds of injustice that meet the Preacher's searching eyes in our text? The extreme observations of verses two and three would be the most plausible in the world if this life were all there is to living. The young man struck down in the prime of his life; the young mother left without guardian, provider or companion; the poor, neglected and often persecuted by wicked men who grow fat from withholding what should be shared with the less-fortunate, or even at times what is rightfully theirs; they all cry out to the emptiness of living and the futility of the life that thousands must endure on the face of the earth. However, such was the situation described in detail by James (5:1-6), and in view of all that Jesus Christ means to the Christian he was able to admonish them to steadfastness and joy with the words, "You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door" (James 5:8, 9).

What is the oppression? In 5:8 we are instructed again not to be "shocked" by such oppression as it may very well be commonplace among us. In any system where men govern men, authority is often corrupted. It may be that in carrying out the necessary instructions of the king in accomplishing his great works (cf. 2:1-11), that the result was that which the Preacher now observes. There were many areas where authority could be violated and the process of graft take place. With a king so obsessed with the desire for personal pleasure, many such violations of justice could go unnoticed throughout the land.

The intensity, and perhaps widespread influence, of the oppression was evident in the actual tears of the poor. If they only had a just man who was in an authoritative position to plead their cause. But no! The authority is on the side of those who are persecuting them. They might turn to one another for some word of encouragement, but this would be hurt turning to hurt. They needed healing. Yet, there was no one to heal them.

It is not a picture of a merciless tyrant holding all the people under the authority of his rule. It is rather the picture of a thoughtless king who has only his own interest at heart and closes his eyes to the cries of the innocent who are trampled in his pursuit of pleasure and personal satisfaction. Perhaps enough people in the land were enjoying the superfluity, or overflow, of the king's wealth. In this case those who suffered were not numerous enough to mount any meaningful rebellion against the wickedness of those in high places.

v. 2 When the Preacher contemplated such a sight, he quickly decided that the fortunate ones were those who have already died and do not have to share in this travesty of justice. Congratulating the dead is a rather dramatic, picturesque description demonstrating that such behaviour would actually be humorous if it were not so serious.

v. 3 Upon more serious contemplation, he decided that there is one who is better off than either the living or the dead, and that is the individual who has never been born! He is not

speaking of abortion in order to shut out the life of one before he sees the light of day, but rather the one never conceived or possibly miscarried (6:3). Such a one will never have to feast his eyes upon the evil activities taking place in the midst of what has once been a nation noted for her justice and righteousness.

FACT QUESTIONS 4:1-3

154. What does "I looked again" indicate?
155. Does he consider his observations in the light of heavenly values? Discuss.
156. What "basic problem" is under consideration here?
157. What truth, shared by the Christian, does Solomon explain in 8:12, 13?
158. Write out a priority list for yourself as you are living life today? Would it be arranged differently if all "things" were removed from the top?
159. What does James teach us that motivates toward steadfastness?
160. What is the oppression spoken of in verse one?
161. How could such oppression be explained in the time of Solomon?
162. Why could not the oppressed people organize their forces to protest the evil?
163. Did the oppressed have even one just man to plead their cause?
164. Who had the authority?
165. Who were the truly fortunate ones? (Cf. v. 2)
166. Is abortion recommended by Solomon in verse three?
167. What evil thing will never be witnessed by the unborn?

2. Keep your motive for work pure. 4:4-6

TEXT 4:4-6

- 4 And I have seen that every labor and every skill which is done is the result of rivalry between a man and his neighbor. This too is vanity and striving after wind.
5 The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh.
6 One hand full of rest is better than two fists full of labor and striving after wind.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 4:4-6

92. What motivates the labor and the development of skill?
93. When one labors and develops skills for this reason, it is all what?
94. The fool in this case is a fool because he is what?
95. He actually tries to live off of what?
96. If verse six is the statement of the lazy fool, what is he actually saying?
97. If verse six is the observation and conclusion of Solomon, what is he saying?

PARAPHRASE 4:4-6

I noticed something else that is empty and just like striving after the wind. There is a man jealous over the success in this world of his fellow man. He will practically kill himself to keep up with his neighbor. He works and develops his skills, and is motivated solely by the desire to keep up or surpass his neighbor's success. This type of rivalry is futile. On the other hand, there is the foolish, lazy man who lies down, folds his hands and lives off his own flesh. I said, "It is better to have a quiet moment and one handful of rest than to have two handfuls if it is acquired by such futile rivalry as I have seen."

COMMENT 4:4-6

Another example of the futility of life now comes into the Preacher's view. Is the goal of life to become the most successful person in your community? Many today would say yes. At least their activities betray that desire. Human nature hasn't changed. The clear-cut picture of rivalry serving as the motivating factor for work evidently possessed the hearts of men in Solomon's day as it does today.

v. 4 It has been asked, "If the motive is tainted, how can the fruit actually satisfy?" This is the case here. Since it stems from a jealous spirit, and a desire to excel one's neighbor that the individual labors, he discovers that his accomplishment is unrewarding. Once he can honestly say, "I have accomplished more, and gathered and collected more than those around me," what does it really mean? The satisfaction is very fleeting. The term "skill" suggests that one spends hours in developing the ability to produce something that will bring an earthly profit. He is willing to labor tirelessly and become expert in his affairs, but since it was motivated by an unworthy desire, it accomplishes nothing.

v. 5 By "fool" we are to understand a sluggard or stupid person. He is in contrast to the individual who works skillfully as the fool does not have the wisdom to develop expertise in any area. His slothfulness, that leads him to the comfort of the couch, and causes him to fold his hands and sleep during the day-light hours, is despicable, but he concludes that he isn't any worse off than the wise man who is improperly motivated to such extreme industry. "Consumes his own flesh" is not a reference to cannibalistic practices, but the excess energy of his body is consumed through indolence rather than productive work.

v. 6 The problem confronted in this verse is not one of translation, but rather to whom should the statement be attributed? Is it spoken by the fool or the one writing the book? If it is the testimony of the fool, he is actually saying that he will not become conspirator in such folly as driving himself

to working day and night just to keep pace with his neighbor! On the other hand, if the Preacher is making the remark (cf. the Paraphrase, v. 6), then the statement is to be interpreted as somewhat of a compromise between the two extremes and is more in harmony with the stated conclusions of the book (cf. 3:12, 22). The fool has not chosen the wiser way as both men under consideration reach the same conclusion. Slothfulness and improperly motivated industry are both unrewarding and vain. "One hand full of rest" could easily be understood as saying, "Don't get on the treadmill. Just take life day-by-day and rejoice and do good in your lifetime."

FACT QUESTIONS 4:4-6

168. What motivated the man to labor and develop his skills?
169. Is the fruit of one's life satisfying if the motivation is tainted? Discuss.
170. What does "skill" suggest that is not suggested by labor?
171. Why could not the fool be skillful?
172. How should one explain the statement, "consumes his own flesh?"
173. What is the problem in understanding verse six?
174. If it is the fool who is speaking in this verse, what is he saying?
175. If the verse is to be understood as another conclusion of Solomon, which is in harmony with his former conclusions, what is Solomon saying? Discuss.

3. Attain your riches for practical good. 4:7-12

TEXT 4:7-12

7 Then I looked again at vanity under the sun.

8 There was a certain man without a dependent, having neither a son nor a brother, yet there was no end to all his

labor. Indeed his eyes were not satisfied with riches and he never asked, "And for whom am I laboring and depriving myself of pleasure?" This too is vanity and it is a grievous task.

- 9 Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor.
- 10 For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up.
- 11 Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone?
- 12 And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 4:7-12

98. Solomon calls the man's labor what?
99. What motivated the man to labor so tirelessly?
100. What did he fail to ask?
101. Were his eyes ever satisfied with his riches?
102. In what kind of a task was he involved?
103. What important thing did he deprive himself of because of his labor?
104. List the four advantages given in this section of companionship.
105. What is the lesson taught by the "cord of three strands?"
106. Do you think loneliness is an appropriate theme for this section? Discuss.

PARAPHRASE 4:7-12

I saw still another example of futility and unrewarding labor under the sun. I saw a man who lived a solitary life as he did not have a family. He had neither son nor brother. Yet, he labored endlessly and was never satisfied with the wealth he

accumulated. He never stopped and asked of himself, "For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of contentment?" His life was lonely, empty and miserable. He experienced the affliction of the grievous task which God allows to come to men who so labor under the sun.

Two are better than one because they prove in many different ways to be an advantage to each other. One reward for laboring together is obvious: if either one falls, his companion will help him up. But consider the tragedy of the one who falls and has no one to help him up. Will his riches come to his rescue? Consider another example. If two sleep together, they keep warm; but what of the lonely man who has no wife? Can one be warm alone? In many situations where one may be overpowered by adversaries, it would be possible for two to resist such and escape unharmed. Common sense teaches that a cord of three strands is not broken quickly.

COMMENT 4:7-12

Although we suggest here that the theme is that riches should be used for practical good, there is also the theme that friends or companions may be of much greater value than wealth. These two ideas run concurrently through these verses. It is obvious that money will not bring comfort, warmth, protection, companionship, or personal satisfaction. Yet, men have always faced the temptation to accumulate wealth for wealth's sake. This illustration is justifiable in the Preacher's mind as it represents a major area of concern in every age. It was typical of those who lived when Jesus was on the earth in the flesh. Indeed it was Jesus who taught us that riches are deceitful (Matthew 13:22; Mark 4:19). They will lead one to believe that they bring lasting fulfillment and satisfaction, while in reality no amount of riches will do that. In addition, Jesus taught that they may have an adverse effect and not only fail to satisfy but shut out or "choke" the very means by which one can find personal enjoyment. As the reader shall

see, much of what Solomon says in the following two chapters simply amplifies this same theme.

v. 7 It is noteworthy that he labels such concern for wealth "vanity." He knows. He was not one to take opinion polls or inquire of rich friends what such a desire for money and possessions did to their lives. He wanted first-hand information. He wanted to speak authoritatively on the subject so he became the richest man of his day. Yet, he calls it unfulfilling and empty. Of course, there is the ever-present safeguard for his observation. He is talking from the "under the sun" viewpoint. There is neither virtue in poverty nor evil in wealth. It is the attitude one has toward riches that becomes the issue.

v. 8 Note the improper attitudes of the one he describes. (1) He was not gathering a fortune with a view to the security of an heir or companion. (2) There was no end to his labor. His sole purpose in life was to collect more and more riches. (3) He became exceedingly wealthy, and yet he was never satisfied with the amount he had collected. (4) He deprived himself of what might have been meaningful pleasures to him. Money appears to satisfy because it seems to be saying that it is the answer to every problem, but perhaps this is the very deceitfulness that Jesus was talking about. Rather than finding that it resolves one's problems, it becomes the very entanglement that produces loneliness, jealousy, frustration, worry and distrust. Numerous present-day examples of extremely wealthy men could easily be given as vivid illustrations of this very truth. The man never stopped and asked himself, "And for whom am I laboring and depriving myself of pleasure?" His attitude was not one of compassionate, benevolent concern. It rather spoke to selfishness and greed. Thus, it is truly empty and a grievous task.

v. 9 It appears that Solomon has now turned to the value of companionship rather than riches. However, he is only illustrating that riches are of value if they are properly acquired and subsequently shared with a friend. In verse nine the idea of "a good return" suggests a profit. This is the basic question before him. Since the accumulation of wealth, regardless of