

how much, does not bring satisfaction or produce a profit when it is collected with the improper attitude, what does? A friend does. As a matter of fact, wealth is an improper choice to make if it robs you of your friends. There are many choices in life which are based on choosing between two things when it is obvious that one cannot have both simultaneously. He cannot isolate himself with his riches thinking this will bring him enjoyment and at the same time divide his riches with a friend. Life is just that way. In his hour of need, the rich man turns to his fortune for help only to realize what James meant when he wrote: "Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire" (James 5:1-3). But it is different with a friend. While it is true that two would have a greater return for their labor than one, this is obviously not the intent of the statement. One can use only so much wealth and then everything beyond this becomes excessive. The rich man of verse eight was undoubtedly past this point. It moves the idea of profit or "return" into the area of the spiritual or emotional where one shares in the value of a personal friend.

v. 10 Undoubtedly the intention is to refer back to the miser with the statement—"But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up." In what sense does he fall? The most obvious is a physical fall which could occur on the dangerous and narrow roads of Palestine. In such a case, to have a companion to assist would be of great value. The idea may just as well be applied to moral falls and thus one would have a friend indeed if he encouraged and led one back to repentance (James 5:19, 20). The idea, however, which seems to best fit the context would be a "financial collapse." When one sees his fortune slip from his hands quickly, which occurs often without warning, then it is important to have a friend come to the rescue. Many men have experienced the loss of financial security and terminated their own lives because

no friend was standing close by with a helping hand. When a man purposely shuts out close friends because he has no time to cultivate them, or he intentionally remains aloof of meeting needs or ministering to those in lesser circumstances than himself, he has made the choice of a fool. Jesus recognized the wisdom of choosing the better part when he sent his followers out "two by two" instructing them that they should not be concerned for the physical things of life (Luke 10:1, 4).

v. 11 Once again the miser is in the center of the stage. How can "one" be warm alone? It is obvious that he has sufficient resources to purchase warm coverings for his bed, but this doesn't seem to be the implication of the verse. There is an inner warmth that comes because of close friendship. One shares in kindred goals and intents of the heart. It is possible that Solomon could have reference to poor circulation in old age and the warmth of a physical body stimulates circulation and produces some comfort in such circumstances. Solomon knew of his father's experience with Abishag who was selected purposely to attend the king and lie with David to keep him warm (I Kings 1:1-4).

v. 12 The term "alone" appears again to indicate that the rich man who stands by himself is the common denominator for this illustration too. The implication of the "threefold cord" is that if one friend is of greater value than riches, then there is truly great strength in having two genuine, trusted friends. Many things may overpower an individual, but in like manner those who willingly come to our rescue may deliver us from many different kinds of circumstances. Endless examples could be given to illustrate this truth. The tragedy here is that regardless of the opposition or the adversary, the man doesn't have a single friend to assist him in his need. Even when the dust of battle clears and you know you and your friends have lost, there is often warmth and inner peace in realizing that you had those who cared and personally sacrificed of themselves or possessions to defend you. Any such allusion in this verse to the Godhead or the Father, Son and Holy Spirit by the reference to the threefold cord would be out of harmony

with the context and purpose of the book. It cannot be denied that if God is for us, no one can stand against us (Romans 8:31), and we have no greater friend than Jesus (John 15:14, 15), but these are New Testament applications which are only based on principles that are taught in this text. Of course, the Christian rejoices and thanks God for the truth!

It is obvious that each of the verses in this section is related. The miser is the principle character and the vanity of riches is the central theme. Much is said for true friendship. It is a simple matter once again of a proper arrangement of one's priorities in life. Many people are obsessed with money and other forms of riches. Nearly everyone wants more than he presently possesses. It is an important lesson that overrides the examples and observations, and it is a lesson that will appear many times before the Preacher is completed with his message. One should be impressed with the threat a wrong attitude toward wealth is to the soul. A prayer of thanksgiving should be offered to God for constantly placing the signposts before our eyes to keep us from the deceitfulness of riches and forewarning us that they may easily choke out the Word of life.

### FACT QUESTIONS 4:7-12

176. Identify the two themes which are developed concurrently in this passage?
177. In what way are riches deceitful?
178. What is meant by the statement that "there is neither virtue in poverty nor evil in wealth?"
179. What four improper attitudes did the miser possess?
180. What will riches produce when they are improperly collected?
181. What is Solomon illustrating in verse nine?
182. What does the rich man turn to in his hour of need? Will he find comfort?
183. What is most likely meant by "return" in verse nine? Why is money not intended?

184. Identify who is intended by "one who falls"?
185. What three possibilities could be meant by "falls"?
186. Which one do you think best answers the context? Discuss.
187. Name the three ways one may be kept warm.
188. What is the real tragedy of the man who stands alone?
189. Is the "threefold cord" intended to be an allusion to the Godhead? Discuss.
190. Who is the principal character in this section?
191. What is the central theme?
192. For what should a Christian constantly thank God?

4. Keep in mind that prestigious positions will soon be forgotten. 4:13-16

### TEXT 4:13-16

- 13 A poor, yet wise lad is better than an old and foolish king who no longer knows how to receive instruction.
- 14 For he has come out of prison to become king, even though he was born poor in his kingdom.
- 15 I have seen all the living under the sun throng to the side of the second lad who replaces him.
- 16 There is no end to all the people, to all who were before them, and even the ones who will come later will not be happy with him, for this too is vanity and striving after wind.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS 4:13-16

107. What adjectives describe the "lad"? In contrast, how is the king described?
108. What has the king lost the ability to do?
109. Under what circumstances was the lad born?
110. Where did he come from to become king?
111. To whom did the "throng" give allegiance?
112. What will happen to the popularity of the lad who became

king?

113. Such an experience is described in what two ways (v. 16)?

### PARAPHRASE 4:13-16

A young man, poor in earthly treasures but rich in wisdom, is better than a king, if the king is old and foolish and will no longer listen to reason or heed the warning of his counselors. Not only does the young lad rise from poverty to become king in the very land where he was born, but he comes out of prison to assume the highest position in the land. The young man's popularity was great. As successor to the throne, he drew multitudes to his side. He now stands in the former king's stead and his name is praised throughout the land. As great as he was in the eyes of his followers, and as many as sang his praises in his hour of triumph, there is tragedy which befell him too. The next generation will not rejoice in him. They will care nothing about him. I view this as another example of futility and grasping at the wind.

### COMMENT 4:13-16

Although the subject changes from the deceitfulness of riches to the fleeting popularity of even a king, the same general lesson is pursued. Solomon is setting forth argument after argument to substantiate the fact that life lived under the sun is futile. The example is of the poor lad who assumes leadership of the land and is first praised and then forgotten. Solomon explains it once again in detail and then identifies such activity as "vanity and striving after wind." The example not only reveals the lack of personal fulfillment on the part of the former king and the lad who became king, but it also reveals the fickle attitude of citizens of the kingdom. One is immediately reminded of the behaviour of the Jews in the days of Jesus when at one moment they are proclaiming Him as "the Son of David,"

and the one who comes "in the name of the Lord" (Matthew 21:9), and shortly after the same people are crying for his blood (Matthew 26:66).

Many have interpreted this section as prophetic, stating that the fulfillment came upon Solomon's death and the coming of Jeroboam to reign over the ten tribes to the north. (Cf. discussion on 2:18) While the parallel is evident and one would not want to argue strenuously against such an interpretation, the important lesson in this section should not be overlooked. Of course, if Solomon is the king who is old and foolish, and Jeroboam is the one who comes out of prison (figurative for his exile in Egypt), then the futility of the entire experience becomes much more exasperating to Solomon. It would not take much imagination to hear him declare, "Vanity! Vanity! Vanity!"

v. 13 The two extremes are clearly stated. The lad is poor, in prison, yet wise. The king is old, foolish and set in his ways. The country will be better served by the lad than the king. It is possible that the situation could be an historical one unknown to us today but clearly seen by those in the days of Solomon. A neighboring country could have just experienced such a change of rule. But neither is this important to the understanding of the text.

The present king will no longer accept advice or counsel. Undoubtedly he began his rule humbly which is typical of many in the early days of control. However he has grown self-sufficient and no longer will he entertain ideas or suggestions. The term "kesil" (foolish) actually means he proved himself to be a stupid fool. Although there are three words in the Hebrew translated "fool" in our language, this particular one is used some 24 times in Proverbs alone. It is not a complimentary term as one may conclude by reading the references where it is used in Ecclesiastes: 2:14, 15, 16; 4:5, 13; 6:8; 7:6; 10:12, 15.

It does not necessarily follow that it is because of the wisdom on the part of the young man, through crafty and cunning ways, that he became king. It is just that the land is better

off with such a lad who is wise than a king who has become foolish.

v. 14 It is important to Solomon's conclusion that he demonstrate the extremes. In this verse he pictures the lad as having been shut up in prison. One wonders if the king saw him as a threat to his throne and had him imprisoned. On the other hand, he was born in the most unlikely home to ascend to the throne. He was born a citizen of the land, but in very poor circumstances. To realize that one can rise from unlikely circumstances to become king, to supplant one who already has control, demonstrates the lack of security of life even in the highest office of the land. This is what Solomon intended to communicate to his readers.

v. 15 For a little while the new king will bask in the moment of triumph. He may have dreams of enduring, being remembered and his name proclaimed throughout the land for the remainder of his days, but such a dream will not become a reality under the sun! His success, like the miser's money, glistens only when the sun shines. Once the fleeting moment of success is past and the multitudes realize that what they have is another human being like themselves, his popularity will be a thing of the past.

v. 16 So typical of the word vanity is this verse. In one short breath one reads of the multitude thronging to his side, singing his praises and leading him to believe that he is indeed their redeemer. In the same short verse, however, the scene has changed completely and we picture the very next generation asking, "Who is he?" They do not have the same respect for him and are no longer happy or satisfied with his rule. The final utterance of the Preacher in this section is the oft-repeated conclusion of all matters experienced under the sun. He declares, "This too is vanity!"

### FACT QUESTIONS 4:13-16

193. What general lesson does the example of the "lad" teach us?

## GUIDELINES

5:1a

194. Why did the citizens of the country accept the young lad?  
Why later was he rejected?
195. Why was the first king rejected?
196. How does Solomon identify this whole affair?
197. If the lad who came "out of prison" is to be understood in a prophetic sense, who would he be, and where did he come from? Discuss.
198. How would this same verse be explained if it were interpreted historically?
199. What is the meaning of the Hebrew term "kesil"?
200. In the text, on whom does this term reflect?
201. What demonstrates the insecurity of the king's office?
202. The miser's money and the young lad's success have what in common?
203. What is Solomon's final comment in this section?

## D. GUIDELINES FOR THE WORK OF WORSHIP 5:1-9

1. Watch your step in God's house. 5:1a

### TEXT 5:1a

1a Guard your steps as you go to the house of God,

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS 5:1a

114. Since vanity is still under consideration, where are we now to guard against it?
115. What would the house of God be in Solomon's day?
116. Why should one guard his steps when going to the temple?

## PARAPHRASE 5:1a

Watch your step when you come to the temple. Remember it is God's house.



## COMMENT 5:1a

For the first time the Preacher resorts to admonition. It is direct and extended. He is concerned about the possible corruption of the heart as it reaches toward God in worship. He is observing the citizenry making their way to the temple, turning their feet toward the proper places, and moving through the correct procedures. However, he is also aware that their approach is more formalistic than genuine, more ritualistic than contrite. Since God is the object of worship and therefore has ultimate worth, to worship Him in word only would be ultimate folly. The "house of God" is undoubtedly the temple as the synagogue has not been established, and there was not a plurality of houses where God was worshiped.

"Guard your steps" is to be taken figuratively for examining your heart. Make sure your motives are pure and in line with your external orthodoxy. The Preacher is not implying that one should not approach God in the temple or that external acts are unimportant. He is suggesting that it is possible to give the appearance of worshipping God correctly when actually nothing is happening between you and God. The vanity of hypocritical worship is but another illustration of the vanity of all things. It is likely that his insertion of vain worship at this particular place has a very definite purpose. It is because men are out of step with God that they are out of step with one another. An improper approach to worship leads to the inequitable situation discussed in chapters one through four and also the illustrations which follow. God may be supplanted by numerous other loves. The Preacher is extremely pointed in this application (cf. 5:8-10). We are drawn to the evil activities of men which undoubtedly result from an improper attitude in God's house. Men oppress the poor, deny justice and righteousness, and have an unhealthy love for money and abundance. One way to escape the futility of the things of this world is to be in harmony, in act and spirit, with the will of God.

Much is made of this passage by those who hold to a late

date and non-Solomonic authorship. It is argued that the short-lived joy and dedication of the people to the things of God after the Exile was but a "flush of enthusiastic faith." The people soon developed a hardening of heart. One could see the outward signs of worship were in harmony with the rules, but the spirit of the act was far from what God desired. They cite such passages as Nehemiah 13:10-20 and Malachi 1:8 as evidence. One could not argue successfully against the lack of spiritual sincerity on the part of Israel, for it is manifestly denounced in the Minor Prophets. However, to conclude that such hypocrisy was limited to that particular generation, and that the rebuke and admonition of the Preacher would not be just as applicable in Solomon's day, is also indefensible. As a matter of fact, men in every generation have been guilty of meaningless sacrifices in worship. From the time of Cain and Abel to the present day the history of man has been the same in respect to worship. Every age needs a clear voice calling men back to outward form and inward feeling; to truth and spirit; but not only to sacrifice, but a detailed adherence to the will of the One to whom the sacrifice is offered. Read I Samuel 15:22; Isaiah 1:10-17; Jeremiah 7:33; Proverbs 21:3; Mark 12:40. Surely in the day of Solomon, with the corruption of justice and the erection of altars of false gods on the very soil of Israel, there was a need to admonish men to greater consistency in their performance in the house of God. Similar instruction is found in Proverbs 1:15-16 where Solomon indicates that the direction of one's steps betrays the intent of the heart.

#### FACT QUESTIONS 5:1a

204. What is it that now concerns the preacher as he observes the citizenry?
205. Identify the house of God. Why would it not be the synagogue?
206. How should one understand the admonition to "guard

your steps"? . . .

207. What is likely the reason for the insertion here concerning the need to worship God correctly?
208. List the sins listed or suggested in 5:8-10. What proper attitude would eliminate this evil?
209. How would you meet the argument that this type of hypocrisy had to be during the time of Malachi?
210. Give evidence that men have always had a tendency to go through acts of worship, but in doing so failed to do all that God commanded.
211. What does Solomon suggest may be learned concerning one's intentions by simply watching the direction of the feet?

2. Refrain from making a sacrifice of fools through hasty words.  
5:1b-7

#### TEXT 5:1b-7

- 1b and draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools; for they do not know they are doing evil.
- 2 Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your words be few.
- 3 For the dream comes through much effort, and the voice of a fool through many words.
- 4 When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it, for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow!
- 5 It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay.
- 6 Do not let your speech cause you to sin and do not say in the presence of the messenger of God that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry on account of your voice and destroy the work of your hands?
- 7 For in many dreams and in many words there is emptiness. Rather fear God.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS 5:1b-7

117. Give evidence that the "sacrifice of fools" is evil.
118. How can one commit evil and not know it? Discuss.
119. What reason is given why one should not be hasty or impulsive?
120. What is likened unto a dream?
121. What is likened unto much effort?
122. List numerous vows taken by Christians today. Are some of these the sacrifice of fools? Discuss.
123. What is it that God does not delight in?
124. When is it better not to vow?
125. In what way can your speech cause you to sin?
126. Since the temple is the house of God, who is the "messenger"?
127. What is the opposite of speaking "many words"?

## PARAPHRASE 5:1b-7

Approach the house of God with a spirit that prepares your heart to be slow to speak but swift to hear. A man is a fool who offers God empty words. Such a man offers the sacrifice of fools, and he is not even sensitive concerning his evil deeds. It is improper for you to stand before God and speak without seriously weighing your words. Think! It will benefit your sacrifice if you remember the differences between God and you. He is in heaven, and you are upon the earth! Very likely you will be a man of few words if you keep that truth in mind.

When one engages in many different activities during the day and is occupied with busy work, he will toss and turn upon his bed, and his head will be filled with dreams. Also, a fool is known by his much talk. A fool is also known by making meaningless vows before God. If you do make a vow, don't be late in paying it! God doesn't delight in fools. Pay what you vow to pay. Consider this; it is actually better that you do not vow than vow and do not pay.

It is the problem of your tongue again. Your speech can cause you to sin. Think about that. And consider, too, that it won't help to run to the priest of God and say that it was all a big mistake. The priest will be there to collect what is now rightfully God's, and you will find no escape. Why should God be made angry by your many words and you find the work of your hands destroyed?

Let it be a warning to you—dreams and meaningless promises are feasting on the wind and empty. Simply show respect to God!

### COMMENT 5:1b-7

The purpose of this section is to prevent one from acting the part of a fool in the most important of all activities of men. One is personally responsible for his own behavior when he comes before God. Evidently one can rise above the circumstances around him and behave in such a way that will number him among the wise. It is to the wise, or the potentially wise, that the Preacher addresses himself as he suggests that one should not be "shocked" at what he sees in the perversion of worship or justice (v. 8)—just be certain that you "guard your steps as you go to the house of God."

The activities of the fool as described in this section are not to be emulated. The reader has been introduced to such "fools" before (cf. 4:5, 13). It is a term which suggests stupidity and ignorance rather than evil or brutishness. It does not carry the idea of one who is perverted or wicked, but rather one who is lacking in common sense and the ability to do things correctly. Note the following characteristics of the fool that the wise man will avoid: The fool fails to listen to God; he offers an unacceptable sacrifice; he is ignorant of his own evil activities and is hasty and impulsive in his speech; he fails to remember that he is the created one and God is the Creator; he expends pointless energy in meaningless activities; he is either late in paying or fails to pay the vow he made to God;

more than this, he made the vow even though he realized that he would not be able to pay it; he attempts to go back on his word, making God angry with him and thus having his work destroyed; he discovers that both his dreams and promises are empty; and, in addition to all of this, he fails to fear God which is the ultimate duty of man (12:13).

v. 1 One does not see a picture of a hardened, rebellious, heretic who sets himself against God and is in opposition to all that is holy. The individual observed as a fool attends worship. He is not a fool because he comes to stand before God, but because he does not come to listen, but to talk. And in the talking he yields to the temptation to promise much more than he is capable of delivering. James undoubtedly had these words in mind when he wrote, "But let every one be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God" (James 1:19-20). The leaders of Israel had a solemn responsibility to read the Law to the people. In like manner, the people had a solemn responsibility to listen to the Law. One of the last acts of Moses was to command the people to observe all the words of the Law. The reading, hearing, and observing of the Law, preceded the ability to fear the Lord. Moses said, "Assemble the people, the men and the women, and the children and the alien who is in your town, in order that they may hear and learn and fear the Lord your God, and be careful to observe all the words of this law. And their children, who have not known will hear and learn to fear the Lord your God, as long as you live on the land where you are about to cross over the Jordan to possess it" (Deuteronomy 31:12-13).

To "draw near to listen" would be tantamount to bringing their behavior into harmony with the expressed will of God. This would mean that the many grievous sins being committed throughout the land would cease. To "hear God" has the same force as obeying God. (Cf. I Samuel 15:22; Jeremiah 7:33; Hosea 6:6.) The foolishness depicted is heightened because the one who offers the sacrifice of fools has not stopped long enough to listen to find out what he should be doing,

and he is thus ignorant of the fact that he is doing evil.

The "sacrifice of fools" is not a sacrifice of blood or physical substance. It is rather the words hastily and impulsively offered to God. It would include promises which cannot be kept or meaningless chatter that slips so easily from the lips but never finds its way through the heart. Evidently "words" have always been considered "sacrifices" to God. When one comes to God through Jesus Christ, he should be aware that he "continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to his name" (Hebrews 13:15).

v. 2 The goal here is to keep your words few and mean what you say. The motivation for making your word sacrifice a thoughtful one is the fact that you are standing in the presence of God. It is the Creator that you have come to worship. You have been instructed where to go and what to do when you arrive. Now, don't play the part of a fool and negate your worship act. "To bring up a matter" suggests that what is about to be discussed originates from the imagination of the worshiper rather than from the command of God. Since God has not commanded the vow, perhaps it would be better if you did not make it.

Sacrifices of fools are not limited to hasty promises. Vain repetitions, which of course are repeated without feeling and become just so many empty words, are also considered unacceptable sacrifices before God (Matthew 6:7).

There isn't any doubt in the mind of the Preacher that God and man are not equal. The strong assertion of this verse that "God is in *heaven* and you are on the *earth*," clearly manifests the distinction between God and men. The temple was built for God, not man. The worship is before God, not man. The "fool" is man, not God. The entire context indicates an awareness that the author is cognizant of God's preeminence. The fact that he speaks of man being of the "earth" implies that he was *created* from dust and therefore should not forget his rightful place. It is on the basis of this distinction between God and man that he makes his appeal. When man comes before God his words should be few. This same idea is under

consideration in 6:10. Here Solomon argues that man (Adam) knows that he came from the ground (adamah). He states it clearly when he says "it is known what man is." It is in the light of this argument that his appeal is to the common sense of the one who has been created. Such a one should keep his guard up when he comes before the Creator and protect himself against the temptation to offer the sacrifice of fools.

A classic example in contrast between the fool who cries loud and long for his god to hear and the one who comes before God in correct fashion is given in I Kings 18:25-40. Here the prophets of Baal cried from morning until noon and again they "raved until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice." Yet the account states, "there was no voice, no one answered, and no one paid attention." In what took less than twenty seconds for Elijah to speak before God, he offered a meaningful prayer that resulted in fire falling from the Lord which consumed his sacrifice, along with the wood and the stones and the dust and licked up the water that was in the trench."

v. 3 It is because of the "multitude of business" or the task in which the individual is embroiled that he dreams. The dream, which is an experience that is shared by most, is declared in this instance to be the result of much activity. In like manner, a man is discovered to be a fool because of his many words. Dreams are not necessarily the mark of a fool but stand in this instance only as a comparison to illustrate his point. Once more he is insisting that our words should be few.

vs. 4-6 He now turns from the subject of prayer to that of vows. One is considered a fool if he is either late in paying his vow to God or fails to pay it. In either situation, God does not find pleasure in such activity, or lack of it! As noted above, the vow stems from the mind of the worshiper and not from God. Vows were not a part of God's commands and the laws governing them so indicate. "When you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay to pay it, for it would be sin in you, and the Lord your God shall surely require it of



you. However, if you refrain from vowing, it would not be sin in you. You shall be careful to perform what goes out from your lips, just as you have voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God, what you have promised" (Deuteronomy 23:21-23).

There is a time when it is better not to vow. Such a time obviously, is when you vow but do not fulfill it. A promise is binding among men of integrity. How much more so a promise before God! Yet, if God does not command the promise, how foolish is one who makes promises that he neither intends to keep nor has the ability to keep.

Vows have come into vogue among many churches today. There are faith-promise rallies, faith-care rallies, and numerous methods of either raising financial commitments or time and/or talent commitments through the use of special days and programs. Whereas there is nothing wrong with such activities, and in many churches much good results from them, a proper text in preparing the people to come before God with their "promise" would certainly be the passage under consideration here. Sometimes zeal in promoting for new records and higher goals exceeds wisdom exercised in the practical application of attaining them. The Preacher has a wise word for the church today: "It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay."

The idea of your "speech" in verse six could just as easily be "mouth," or "tongue." Yet, Jesus taught that it is indeed the "heart" that causes one to sin (Mark 7:21). The heart in this instance finds expression through the mouth and more specifically in the form of a hasty vow. Now, new words must be formed as you come before the "messenger of God" (the priest) and confess that it was indeed a mistake! However, both the irresponsible vow and the appeal to the priest are to be avoided. The priest acts only as a representative between you and God. This is why God is angry at your appeal and not the priest. Your vow was made to God and now the covenant has been established. God expects payment. To utter such a vow or make such an appeal places one in the position that his words cause God to become angry with him. God's anger is

now directed toward the individual (fool), and nothing he does will succeed. God destroys the work of his hand. The one in Solomon's day could expect some act of judgment from the Lord. Not all evil was immediately recompensed, however, and thus the ones who were guilty of offering the sacrifices of fools continued in such activity for a time (8:11).

Verse seven is a summary. It captures both the idea of empty prayers and empty vows and admonishes toward a more positive, fruitful activity: fear God. It is not to be assumed that the Preacher considers everyone who reads his message as guilty before God. He is suggesting that there are those who will follow the foolish ways and that one should avoid that pathway. In Wisdom Literature, the concept of "fearing God" has a marked prominence in the priorities of men and also a distinct meaning. It is both the doing of good and the departing from evil. David wrote, "Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. Who is the man who desires life, and loves length of days that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it" (Psalms 34:11-14).

Solomon has now completed his discourse on formalistic worship and the futility of such. He ends the discussion with a positive emphasis. He declares that the better way is to fear God. He has given sufficient cause why one is indeed a fool should he follow the way of thoughtless, insincere prayers or vows. Strong religious terminology such as God, temple, priest, sin, vows, and sacrifice, offer a marked and inescapable relationship to religious behavior. Perhaps his appeal is more direct and carries the feeling of admonition because of the seriousness of the matter. Nothing is of graver consequence than man's relationship to God. Perhaps he could not refrain from "preaching" in the light of this truth.

## FACT QUESTIONS 5:1b-7

212. What is the most important of all activities of men?
213. One should not be "shocked" at perversion in what two areas?
214. What does the term "fool" imply in this context?
215. List the ten characteristics of fools as described in this section.
216. What temptation does the fool yield to as he stands before God?
217. According to James 1:19-20, the fool should have followed what advice?
218. What objective did Moses have in mind when he commanded the people to always have God's law read publicly?
219. To "hear God" is equal to what?
220. What is the "sacrifice of fools"?
221. How could one negate his worship act?
222. Give evidence that Solomon does not think of man as equal with God.
223. How long did Elijah speak before God?
224. How long did the prophets of Baal cry to their god?
225. Are dreams the mark of a fool? Discuss.
226. In the making of vows, when would one be considered a fool?
227. Does the vow originate in the mind of the worshiper, or is it a command of God? Discuss in the light of Deuteronomy 23:21-23.
228. When is it better not to vow?
229. Jesus taught that evil issues from what area?
230. Why, then, does Solomon say that your "speech" causes you to sin?
231. Who is the "messenger of God"?
232. Define the "fear of the Lord." (Cf. Psalms 34:11-14.)
233. Why does Solomon turn to "preaching" in this section?

## 3. Recognize God as the Ruler over all. 5:8-9

## TEXT 5:8-9

- 8 If you see oppression of the poor and denial of justice and righteousness in the province, do not be shocked at the sight, for one official watches over another official, and there are higher officials over them.
- 9 After all, a king who cultivates the field is an advantage to the land.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS 5:8-9

128. One should not be shocked at what two areas of inequity?
129. Is there a "line" of authority in the land? Explain.
130. What kind of a king is an advantage to the land?

## PARAPHRASE 5:8-9

Do you not see the way the poor are being oppressed, and the denial of righteousness and justice that is found throughout the land? This should not shock you. At least don't allow it to have this effect. It will help to remember that every official in the land has a higher official watching over him—even the king. There is an advantage in having a king over the whole cultivated land, for by his authority he approves the endeavors of men and defends his subjects against wrong, unnecessary burdens, and violence,—poor government is better than no government at all!

## COMMENT 5:8-9

Disharmony among men is the inevitable result of hypocritical worship. One should not be shocked at whatever he

sees throughout the land when men fail so miserably in their response to God. Once Judas had betrayed Jesus, it was a short step to press into the forbidden inner section of the temple to desecrate it by casting the price of blood upon the floor. In like manner, when men make a mockery of public worship, going through the outward forms but denying the true spirit of worship, corruption runs rampant throughout the land. It is *only* when men are right before God that they are capable of living together in peace and harmony.

Oppression, corruption, unrighteousness and denial of justice are common sights in any land where God is truly shut out of the heart. The poor are especially susceptible to oppression for they have neither the means nor the authority to champion their own cause (note the comments on 4:1). The rich men, wielding some authority, failed to justly deal with the decisions which involved the poor. If the authorities were in a proper relationship with God, none of the evils mentioned would be tolerated in the land. Note the words of Micah 6:8: "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

Why should one not be shocked at such behaviour? These two verses have been variously interpreted. It is clear that certain evils are common throughout the land. It is not clear, however, what is meant by "one official watches over another" or what is meant by "a king who cultivates the field." Whatever the interpretation, it must be the reason why one should not be shocked at the prevalent evil in the land.

There is an implied line of authority in control. Perhaps Solomon is suggesting that each person who is above another is taking advantage of him and practicing similar graft and corruption. Since this practice is so open and permeates the entire society from the lowest to the highest level, then one should not marvel at the matter. The purpose, however, is to comfort the poor who seem to be at the very bottom, and are not, themselves, taking advantage of another. He speaks to them in verse nine with the comforting thought that the king

(and in this instance many believe it to be a reference to God) is over the entire cultivated land—that is, the land where all the activities are taking place. This truth, that God will bring about ultimate justice and that all evil deeds are recorded and will one day be destroyed, is in harmony with the major theme of the book. It is not comforting to one who is imprisoned or denied daily bread, to realize that some day even the “officials” will come into judgment before the true “King,” but it is all the comfort they have. There is an advantage to having such a King.

Solomon is not building a case for the farmer by suggesting that a land who has a king who is interested in and participates in agriculture is a blessing to the land. Although some translations lend themselves to this interpretation, it should be noted that the purpose of the Preacher in this section is to bring comfort to the poor and explain why they should not be shocked at the prevalent evil in the land. If the king is a man and not God, as seems most reasonable, then in the whole land there is an advantage to realize that a final authority exists and that although he will, on occasion, close his eyes to improprieties and even be guilty himself of similar charges, he will be called into judgment before God.

On this verse, Martin Luther has written the following observations which prove to be good advice for Christians today:

The book consequently teaches thee to let thine heart have rest and peace, and not to trouble and worry thyself over much when things go wrongly, but to accustom thyself to be able to say, when the devil brings malice, injustice, violence, and burdens on the poor, ‘Such is the way of the world, but God will judge and avenge it.’ And again, when thou seest things going well, learn to say, ‘God be praised, who, after all, so rules, that we do not merely suffer evil and injustice, but receive also much good.’ Moreover, let every man, according to his rank, and God’s command, do his work with the best industry: other things let him commend to God; let him be patient and wait for Him who

is able to find out and judge the ungodly and unjust. He that cannot lift a great stone, let him leave it lying and lift what he can. Wherefore, when thou seest that kings, princes and lords misuse their power, that judges and advocates take bribes and allow causes to sink or swim as they can, being wise and sensible thou wilt think within thyself,—‘God will sometime bring about a better state.’

Futility is still the theme. How fleeting is life, and all too often how very fleeting the pleasures of life. One great lesson gained from reading Ecclesiastes is the awareness that men have *always* been troubled with the fact that any truly enjoyable experience on earth is very transitory, and in some cases never experienced by those who sojourn here. The Preacher’s message brings us to a deeper appreciation of Jesus and the revelation He brings us. Those who have experienced the grace offered through Christ have found the secret of finding joy in the midst of the temporary. He also has discovered an explanation of the corruption, denial of justice, and oppression of the poor. It does not mean that the Christian either approves or tolerates such when it is within his power to rectify wrong, but it does mean that such evil does not destroy him and he is able to triumph in victory even when he is the recipient of the injustice.

#### FACT QUESTIONS 5:8-9

234. What is the inevitable result of hypocritical worship?
235. Why are the poor usually the ones who suffer the most?
236. What is meant by “one official watches over another”?
237. Do the officials practice evil? Explain.
238. In what way is discovering the purpose of Solomon a key in interpreting the verses?
239. Is Solomon praising the farmer? Discuss.
240. What possible meanings are given to verse nine?
241. What theme is Solomon still illustrating?
242. What advantage does the Christian have over the person

in Solomon's day? (Discuss in the light that he lives in a similar world where corruption is so prevalent?)

# E. ADMONITIONS CONCERNING THE FUTILITY OF RICHES 5:10—6:12

## 1. Riches by themselves are vain. 5:10-20

### a. They do not satisfy. 5:10-12

#### TEXT 5:10-12

- 10 He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income. This too is vanity.
- 11 When good things increase, those who consume them increase. So what is the advantage to their owners except to look on?
- 12 The sleep of the working man is pleasant, whether he eats little or much. But the full stomach of the rich man does not allow him to sleep.

#### THOUGHT QUESTIONS 5:10-12

131. What attitude toward money will keep one from being satisfied with it?
132. What is identified as vanity?
133. What else must be increased when one increases his possessions?
134. What advantage does the poor man have over the rich man?



## PARAPHRASE 5:10-12

If the love for money becomes one's objective in life, money will never satisfy. He will never have enough to cause him to say, "I am content." His profits will always be looked upon as insufficient regardless of how great they are. This is but another illustration of vanity. What profit is there in accumulating riches? The more you collect and gather, the more people are required to care for them. You then have the added responsibility of providing for all these people. Your necessities of life are provided by only a fraction of what you possess, and all you can do with the excess is look upon it with your eyes. Observe a single example: One who labors and eats little or much finds that he is not incumbered with worry. His rest is profitable and his sleep is sweet. But the price one pays for being satiated is sleepless, restless nights.

## COMMENT 5:10-12

Note the absence of such statements as "I turned to consider," and "I looked again." The reason is that Solomon is not turning to a new subject or even a different illustration of the same subject. He is returning to the vanity of all things as it is demonstrated through love for money and possessions. He has discussed this before in 2:10-11 and 4:7-8.

This discourse on the futility of riches runs through 6:12. It is lengthy because it is common to all men and it is highly deceptive and dangerous. It also has many sides which need exposed so the reader will not fall prey to any of its insidious nuances. Similarly much is said in the New Testament concerning the principle of Christian stewardship. Jesus offered numerous discourses on the danger of loving the world. His disciples kept the theme alive in their Epistles and instruction to the church. One need not apologize for extended discussion on such an important theme. Jesus said to his disciples on one occasion, "How hard it will be for those who are wealthy

to enter the kingdom of God!" (Mark 10:24) It was a "certain rich man" in contrast with a beggar who found himself upon his death to be "in torment." (Read Luke 16:14-31.) Jesus told the story of the rich man and Lazarus after it is recorded that the Pharisees who had encountered Him "were lovers of money" (v. 14).

v. 10 It is the love for money and not money itself that Solomon is careful to note. He is talking about the man who "loves" money and the man who "loves" abundance. He shall discover that satisfaction escapes him in reference to both. Even when one continually receives a profit or income from the fortune he has amassed, it will not satisfy him. Many rich people touched the life of Jesus and were members of the church and were both successful and content. Such men as Joseph of Arimathea, Barnabas, and Zacchaeus are usually considered wealthy men. Yet, their love was not for their wealth but rather the good their wealth could accomplish. This is the difference.

Solomon identifies this *love* for money and possessions as "vanity." It is not the money itself. To this very point Jesus spoke when he illustrated this type of empty, transitory greed in Luke 12:20-21. He said concerning the certain rich man who had such an insatiable desire for riches, "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' So the man who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

v. 11-12 The reader is here confronted with two disadvantages of riches which are kept to the owners hurt. One is the fact that the more you gather, the more people you must have to look after your possessions, and thus you simply become a provider of the necessities of life for others who have not so labored to enjoy your wealth. The other is the fact that restful sleep, which is so vital to the renewal of strength and a proper spirit to both enjoy and care for what one possesses, is taken from you.

A single insight to one facet of Solomon's many endeavors is given for us in I Kings 5:13-16. Solomon became responsible

to care for 30,000 forced laborers, 70,000 transporters or burden bearers, 80,000 hewers of stone in the mountains, and 3,300 chief deputies to rule over the people who were doing the work. Although this cooperative work with Hiram and the Gebalites was in reference to the work on the temple, it nevertheless indicates the principle he is now setting forth. His own personal endeavors, which exceeded the work on the temple in both time and riches, necessitated similar involvement of those who must be cared for from his abundance.

What is meant by "to look on"? Perhaps it is the riches which are left over after the expenses of caring for all that it takes to support his wealth that he finally fixes his eyes upon and asks, "What profit is this?" Some believe "to look on" means that he gazes upon all the activity that is the direct result of his own wealth and speaks more to the workers and the fruit of their labor than the actual wealth itself.

It is a sad commentary on Solomon's activities and life-long endeavors to come to the conclusion that the humblest man in his employ enjoys a night's rest more than he. The king is envious of him. The "full stomach" means that the rich man has eaten all that he can possibly hold. Perhaps it was the most delicate and palatable of the finest or rarest prepared foods. Yet, he is unable to sleep. The point is that one man discovered that he is able to find satisfaction in the most meager circumstances while the other discovers that contentment is not the result of excessive riches. It is not so much the full stomach that causes the restless, sleepless nights, but the avaricious spirit of the rich man that causes him to toss and turn throughout the night as he thinks back over the activities of the day and schemes and plans for a more profitable tomorrow. His many activities and responsibilities invade his mind and rob him of sweet peace.

FACT QUESTIONS 5:10-12

243. What subject is again under consideration?
244. Give three reasons why the discussion on the "futility of riches" is particularly long.
245. What did Jesus say concerning the "wealthy" entering the kingdom?
246. Why were some rich men in the New Testament both successful and contented?
247. What is it that Solomon calls vanity?
248. Name the two disadvantages of riches. (Cf. vs. 11-12)
249. What was the total number of men under Solomon's control in quarrying stone for the temple?
250. Give two interpretations of what could be meant by "to look on."
251. What is the point of verse twelve?
252. What really robs the rich man of a restful night?

b. They may be harmful. 5:13-17

TEXT 5:13-17

- 13 There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun: riches being hoarded by their owner to their hurt.
- 14 When those riches were lost through a bad investment and he had fathered a son, then there was nothing to support him.
- 15 As he had come naked from his mother's womb, so will he return as he came. He will take nothing from the fruit of his labor that he can carry in his hand.
- 16 And this also is a grievous evil—exactly as a man is born, thus will he die. So, what is the advantage to him who toils for the wind?
- 17 Throughout his life he also eats in darkness with great vexation, sickness and anger.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS 5:13-17

135. Identify the two activities of life Solomon considers as "a grievous evil."
136. How were the riches lost? (Cf. v. 14)
137. Why was it important that the man not lose his wealth?
138. What fruit of his labor will the rich man take with him when he dies?
139. List the four things which are descriptive of the rich man's life. (Cf. v. 17)

## PARAPHRASE 5:13-17

I looked closely upon another situation under the sun, and I saw what was a painful misfortune for the rich man. He accumulated his riches and hoarded them, but this resulted in great damage to himself. In his attempt to increase his profits and accumulate more money, he made an unwise investment. Rather than compounding his money as he predicted, he lost his entire fortune! In the meantime he had fathered a son, and now nothing was left to be given the son for an inheritance.

This is life's lesson: one is born naked and empty handed, and when one dies he returns to the dust naked and empty handed. Men cannot carry any of the fruit of their labor in their hands when they return to the earth. And this also is a painful misfortune—since man goes exactly as he comes, what profit is there in gathering and collecting? Such a one actually labors for the wind!

I have clearly seen these things in my own mind. What does such a rich man gain? He eats his food in the midst of gloom, and lives out his life with frustration, sickness and anger.

## COMMENT 5:13-17

In this section there are two additional descriptions of the futility of riches which lead the Preacher to the same conclusion. He states that both are "a grievous evil." The reader should keep in mind that it is not riches that are evil but the improper attitude toward riches. In this instance, the man "hoarded" them to his own hurt. This simply means that rather than using them for good, he accumulated riches for the sake of riches.

v. 13 He once more qualifies the activity by the phrase "under the sun." This time, however, he discovers that not only do the riches fail to satisfy and keep one from sweet sleep, they actually harm the owner. The owner once believed the added wealth was good and would be the answer to everything. He is to discover that they not only fail to produce peace of mind; they become the very source of sorrow and pain.

v. 14 It was suggested in 5:10 that money is generally invested for greater gain. But now some bad business investment has resulted in not only a failure to gain a profit, but the loss of the fortune as well. This of itself would be of grave consequence to one who had such a love for money. It is of a more serious nature, however, because the man who has lost the fortune has gained a son. He would naturally wish to instill in his son's mind the same desire and love for what is so important to him. He would demonstrate first-hand to the young man how to care for and increase the fortune and together they would share in promoting for even more gain. But it is not to be. Money is transitory just like other things that are attached to this world. The father has lost all he possessed and stands empty handed. He is unable to give his son a penny. The text offers that "he" had nothing in his hand. Is it the father or the son? It could be taken either way, and would be true in either instance.

v. 15 This verse speaks of death and contrasts it with birth. He is born with nothing and shall leave this life with nothing. The elusive riches one toils for in this life are actually called

"wind" by Solomon. From the beginning of his message, he has underscored the truth that one may labor through knowledge, wisdom, and skill only to leave what he has to another. The tragedy of this situation is that the one to whom he wanted to give his fortune did not receive it; neither does the man who accumulated it take it with him. It is a universal truth to which Paul speaks when he says, "For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either" (I Timothy 6:7).

Death terminates all wealth. This lesson is difficult for many to learn. Yet, it is close to the heart of Christianity. James admonishes when speaking of our new relationship in Christ: "But let the brother of humble circumstances glory in his high position; and let the rich man glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away" (James 1:10-11). The Preacher stands as it were, on the edge of the grave of the rich man looking at the freshly shaped mound of earth and asks, "So, what is the advantage of him who toils for the wind?"

v. 17 "Darkness" is a metaphor for gloominess and suggests that he lives his life in sorrow, dejection and heaviness of heart. Perhaps this is why James had written "let the rich man glory." In other words, what riches cannot do, Christ can. But the man who eats in darkness, in this case at least, has had the privilege of riches. He is sorrowful the more because he has the memory of the temporary satisfaction they brought. He thinks back over his poor investment or the ones now who are enjoying what he had labored so hard to accumulate, and this adds to his darkness. His mind turns to view the son who should have inherited the fortune, but now has nothing in his hand. Such thoughts result in vexation, sickness and anger. These are mental maladies which could easily produce physical illness too. However, it is a troubled spirit that broods over what could have been. He placed his trust in material gain and when he lost it, he lost his joy and his life.

FACT QUESTIONS 5:13-17

253. In what way do "hoarded" riches harm the one who hoards them?
254. What adds to the rich man's sorrows since he lost his riches?
255. Who stands empty handed? Discuss.
256. Solomon equates "wind" with what?
257. "Darkness" is a metaphor which stands for what?
258. Name the past experiences of the rich man, which when remembered by him, adds to his sorrow.

c. Exhortation to enjoy the riches God permits 5:18-20

TEXT 5:18-20

- 18 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.
- 19 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.
- 20 For he will not often consider the years of his life, because God keeps him occupied with the gladness of his heart.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 5:18-20

140. List the four things which God does for, or gives to, men.
141. What is it that Solomon here calls "good"?
142. What is man's reward?
143. Who gives every man riches and wealth?
144. Can every man rejoice in his labor and his riches? Discuss.



145. What does man forget when God keeps him occupied with the gladness of his heart?

### PARAPHRASE 5:18-20

“What does any man gain?” I have asked myself this question before. Now, I arrive at a similar conclusion. That which is satisfying and appropriate is to eat, and to drink, and to enjoy oneself in all the events of life under the sun. Let the labor of your hands bring you pleasure. That is really all one gets out of life. In addition, if your excessive wealth is indeed a gift from God—that is, you can actually enjoy it and it makes you happy because God permits it, consider yourself fortunate. You have just received a bonus from God. Another blessing which will come to you is the fact that you will not be vexed over the past experiences of your life. You will have your mind occupied with happy thoughts and thus you will not sit and ponder the transitory nature of life.

### COMMENT 5:18-20

Solomon is still pursuing the “profit” that is available to one who labors “under the sun” and “during the few years of his life.” He speaks of such profit in these three verses as a “reward” or “gift” from the hand of God. He also instructs his reader to “rejoice” and discover the “gladness” of the heart that comes from his labor. This theme is an oft-repeated one that culminates in 9:7 with the imperative form which states: “Go then, eat your bread in happiness, and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works.” Note also 2:24; 3:12, 13, 22; 8:15. There is a sense in which man can find pleasure and some advantage in his labor. The qualifying mark appears to be that God must approve.

v. 18 To find personal satisfaction in one's labor and the

joys of living is the reward available to men. Yet, on the one hand there are very few who seem to find it. Much of what the Preacher has observed and experienced, has been the opposite of this. There has been the inescapable futility that has marked all his labors. Now, however, there is a shaft of light that reveals some cause for rejoicing and joy that can be shared. He calls it "good and fitting." Actually the rendering is "good and *beautiful*" which implies personal satisfaction. What does one have to do to receive such a reward? Evidently avoid the attitudes which have been illustrated with such detail by Solomon in the preceding materials. (1) Eliminate the *love* for money and abundance. Use your wealth as a means to an end, and not an end in itself. (2) Do not offer hasty words before God. "When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it." (3) Do not put your trust in the acclaims of men. Realize that men are fickle and drawn by success rather than integrity. (4) Avoid selfishness which results in loneliness. Choose friends over insatiable desires for wealth. (5) Admit to the anomalies of life. Sorrow over the oppression of the poor, but do not despair. (6) Do not fail to see the hand of God in control of His world. The prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous are not indicators of God's justice, but rather His patience. God "has made everything appropriate in its time." Thus, from Solomon's own observations we draw the conclusion that there is a way to find a reward in the short years one has upon the earth.

v. 19 As noted, "riches" and "wealth" are not evil of themselves. God gives them. When they are looked upon with a proper attitude and used in harmony with God's ordained will, they bring joy. This is what is meant by the fact that God has "empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward." Such behavior is also called a "gift of God." It is surely available to every man, but some men choose the unrestrained, selfish pathway of avarice and greed. They miss the gift, the reward and the joy. The Preacher's admonition is to the better way of life. Do not be carried away with excess. Rather, accept your life each day and live it to the fullest.

v. 20 There is a "bonus" for those who seek such a life before God. Not only do they discover that they have a reward in finding joy in their labor and living, but they soon forget the undesirable experiences of the past which causes greater joy for the present. Since it is God who now controls his daily attitudes, it is also God who causes him to forget the sorrows of his past years. This verse does not speak to "eternal" life or the anticipated joys of some future state. This would be out of character for Ecclesiastes. However, it does suggest that one's present life can be rewarding and filled with joy. One way to accomplish this is to be busy doing what God desires. The memory that haunts the rich, lonely miser and brings him to a prison house of gloom and vexation has no part with the one who discovers God's gift for living.

All men have past experiences that are better buried and forgotten. Some come as a result of external circumstances and pressures that are beyond the control of the individual but nevertheless erode his peace of mind when recalled. Other experiences are direct results of volitional folly or sin. These have a more damaging influence on the joy of the present. It is a much-desired blessing to be able to close the door to the past and find joy in the present. This is the promise the Preacher now offers to those who make an effort to be wise.

Since such a positive note is sounded regarding the possible rewards that one may find even under the sun, it might be expected that Solomon will turn to a new theme. This is not true, however. This rather refreshing observation that speaks of rewards and joy is to be looked upon as a temporary terminal in his reasoning. He dedicates the entire next section (Chapter Six) to the theme of the futility of riches. Let us close out this section with two observations. One comes from Jesus who speaks to this point with the words, "Therefore do not be anxious for tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matthew 6:34). Also, the following quote from the Bereleburger Bible is very much to the point: "To the pure all things are pure" (Titus 1:15), "and so a pure man may undoubtedly use riches with purity;

and it will, therefore, chiefly depend on each one's own heart, on how it stands before God. But if any person is unable to remain just as contented and calm, when house and home are burnt down, or when some other damage is done to his property, he proves himself to be not yet truly composed and satisfied: *that is the test thereof.*"

### FACT QUESTIONS 5:18-20

259. When and where does Solomon seek for a profit?
260. What does he call this profit?
261. What is the qualifying mark that makes man's labor profitable?
262. To labor according to God's will is said to be "good and fitting." What is an alternative rendering for "fitting"?
263. List the six reasons given why men can discover a profit from their labors.
264. How can "riches" and "wealth" bring joy? (Cf. v. 19)
265. Why do some men miss the gift, reward and joy of life?
266. Explain the "bonus" mentioned in verse twenty.
267. Past, undesirable experiences come from what two sources?
268. What general theme is discussed in chapter six?
269. What did Jesus teach about anxiety over tomorrow?
270. What does the Bereleburger Bible say is the true test of riches?

2. It is possible to possess riches which cannot be enjoyed.

6:1-6

### TEXT 6:1-6

- 1 There is an evil which I have seen under the sun and it is prevalent among men—

- 2 a man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor so that his soul lacks nothing of all that he desires, but God has not empowered him to eat from them; for a foreigner enjoys them. This is vanity and a sore affliction.
- 3 If a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years, however they may be, but his soul is not satisfied with good things, and he does not even have a proper burial, then I say, "Better the miscarriage than he,"
- 4 for it comes in futility and goes into obscurity; and its name is covered in obscurity.
- 5 "It never sees the sun and it never knows anything; it is better off than he.
- 6 "Even if the other man lives a thousand years twice and does not enjoy good things—do not all go to one place?"

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS 6:1-6

146. What is "better" than the rich man of this passage?
147. Give the five reasons listed in the passage why the miscarriage is better than the rich man.
148. Who gives men riches even when they are not enjoyed?
149. What is the prevalent evil among men?
150. What does the rich man lack of that which he desires?
151. Who enjoys the fruit of the rich man's labor?
152. The rich man's labor is considered vain because he is not satisfied with what? (Cf. v. 3)
153. Would begetting of children be considered a great blessing?
154. The rich man would not enjoy his riches even if he lived how many years? (Cf. v. 6)
155. What is the "one place" where all men go?

## PARAPHRASE 6:1-6

I observed one other misfortune that lies heavily upon men who live and labor under the sun, and I concluded that not

only is the burden heavy, but it is also prevalent among men. That burden is this: A man has everything his heart desires and yet he does not enjoy it. God grants him riches, possessions and honor in his community. As a matter of fact, he has every materialistic benefit needed to satisfy his soul. Although God permits him to possess all and experience social prominence, God does not allow him to enjoy it. One who is a stranger receives it and enjoys it instead. This is indeed a heavy burden to bear. More than this, it is a misfortune marked with hollowness!

What can you say concerning a man who has everything except happiness? Even if he lives a good long time, is honored in his community, and is the father of a hundred children, and, yet, doesn't enjoy what he has, or doesn't even receive a proper burial when he dies, he would be better off not to have been born. It is my conclusion that a stillborn child is better off than he! I know that sounds extreme, but here are my reasons for such a conclusion: The stillborn has no name; it is marked with total futility; it leaves in darkness just as it arrived in darkness; and although it never saw the sun and never knew anything, it rests in greater peace than he.

The important thing is to discover joy and find contentment. What good is there if one lives for two thousand years if he cannot share in either of these? Do we not all finally come to the grave anyway?

#### COMMENT 6:1-6

This entire chapter continues the theme of the futility of riches. The poor would discover some comfort in the fact that since he is poor he is not sharing in the evil which lies heavy on so many others. However, the message is directed toward the one who is able to gather and collect and yet fail to enjoy. The Preacher now turns to another side of the deceitfulness of riches and would have his reader note carefully that it is not possible to find satisfaction through possessions, where God

does not permit, even when those possessions include everything the heart could desire!

v. 1 Wealth is relative. To the poor, a rich man is one who possesses more than he does. Thus, it is possible that a lesson is held in these verses for every man. Solomon does say that the incident which he has in mind is common or prevalent among men. In other words, one can see it everywhere. He also identifies it as an evil and influenced by vanity as it takes place once again under the sun. It is not to be thought of, therefore, as an incidental ill or burden but one that is "heavy" upon many men. When one looks to possessions for comfort and security and thus places his confidence in that which he owns, he is a prime candidate for the message the Preacher now proclaims.

v. 2 God is involved in this example in two ways: first, He permits the man to acquire all that his heart desires; secondly, He does not permit the man to enjoy what he has acquired. The first part of this verse is more easily understood. One can readily see that it is because of God's providential activities working through His laws of nature that we have material success upon this earth. Jesus spoke to this point when he said that God "causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45). It is evident that although men do not acknowledge that their success in gathering and collecting materialistic things comes as a direct result of God's blessing, it nevertheless does. The mercy of God is demonstrated in the apparent success of the wicked. Such success should be a means of bringing the wicked to the acknowledgment that his wealth is a result of God's goodness and thus come to repentance and humility before Him. However, men often gather and collect and fail to acknowledge God in their endeavors. It is this kind of man who also fails to enjoy what he possesses. The Preacher states that "God does not empower him to eat from them." The phrase "to eat from them" is a metaphor for "to enjoy them." Just what does "enjoy" mean in this instance? Or more to the point, how can one fail to enjoy such possessions

when he has *everything* his heart desires? This part is not so easily explained.

What the one who accumulated the riches failed to do, the stranger who inherits them does. It is said of the stranger or foreigner, and this should be understood as one who is not of the same family or rightful live to inherit the wealth, that he does "enjoy" them. That is, he eats from them with great satisfaction. To say that God does not empower the rich man to enjoy what he has accumulated is stating that the rich man cannot divorce himself from the power of his wealth. He is still greedy of gain; he is hoarding his riches to his own hurt; he is not content and perhaps he fails in health as a result of his avaricious spirit and thus cannot use what he has gathered together. Whatever the cause of such failure to enjoy, it is spoken of that God does not permit it simply because God's laws will not permit such to find joy. God has ordained that personal fulfillment and joy are to be found only within the confines which he has established. One who chooses to live outside such an area may be able, because of God's mercy, to gather and collect great amounts of wealth, but he will not genuinely enjoy it!

When riches capture the heart and control the will of an individual, it is indeed an evil. Such evil is common among men. In addition, Solomon speaks of it as vanity and a sore affliction. That which one believed would fulfill his life and bring lasting satisfaction has created an emptiness instead and is making a hollow mockery of life itself. Not only is this true of possessions, it is also true of prominent positions (Cf. 4:13). "Honor" suggests that the man has a place of respect in his community. The idea that he "lacks nothing" speaks entirely to the elements of this world which are marked with futility. In contrast James speaks of one who is "perfect and complete, *lacking in nothing*" (James 1:4). There is a marked difference. The man in Ecclesiastes has every possible physical need met and all that his heart desires; yet he is not enjoying life. The man in James may not have any physical blessings and yet lacks nothing. The difference? The Christian man of whom James



speaks is content because he possesses wisdom from above and potentially all the blessings in Christ are his (Colossians 2:3). Contentment in Christ is not a result of riches, prestige, health or long life. Rather, it is a result of spiritual maturity. Therefore, the poor man is to glory in his high position (in Christ) and the rich man rejoice in that he has been brought to see that his riches will not bring him enjoyment and he has been humbled and divorced from the control his possessions held over his life. Study James 1:1-11.

v. 3 Our attention has been drawn to riches, possessions and prominence in the community. Perhaps, one may reason, a large family and long life will surely bring personal joy. But, no, the Preacher reasons that though one fathers a hundred children and lives for two thousand years (v. 6) this will not change the picture. It would certainly add to his list of blessings which God permits him to have, but the additional blessings are not of such a nature that they in themselves will produce the joy.

The failure to have a proper burial was a disgrace (Isa. 14:19-20). The tragedy of the rich man is compounded as he has everything his heart desires except the means of enjoyment, and now at the end of his useless and hollow life he has no burial. To leave a body upon the ground to be devoured by animals or fowls of the air was reserved for the enemies of Israel or the despicable members of their society. (Cf. I Samuel 17:46; Jeremiah 22:18-19) It is not noted as to the reason why the rich man does not have a burial, but circumstances of life led to this unfortunate conclusion. To face such a reality is indeed a heavy burden especially in light of the unlimited wealth the rich man possessed, to say nothing of the fact that he was honored in his community.

Once again the qualifying mark of such a man is the fact that "his soul was not satisfied with good things." He has placed his values on things of this earth rather than being content with each day's activities. The sorrow and bitterness of such a wasted life is intensified in the following analogy. He compares such a wasted life with a stillborn baby and

concludes that miscarriage is better!

vs. 4-5 The baby born prematurely or born dead is said to be better off than the rich man. This is a strange conclusion because the child has no name, is not honored in the community, knows nothing, and never experiences one day of life. It is nameless, unrecorded, unburied and unremembered! Yet, such an untimely birth is more to be desired than the long life of the rich man under consideration. The key appears in the marginal reading of verse five in the NASV. Here it reads, "more rest has this one than that." The idea of rest is the reason why the one is desired above the other. It has previously been noted that when a rich man places his ultimate values on riches that he is restless at night and is unduly concerned for his riches during his waking hours. In other words, he has been robbed of rest. The stillborn does not experience the perpetual restlessness of the rich. Certainly one must agree that the description of the stillborn is depressing and undesirable. Yet, whatever the plight of the untimely birth, it is *better* than the misery of a covetous man! "Rest" may suggest "freedom from suffering." The entire picture leads one to the conclusion that such rich men in any society are to be objects of pity rather than envy.

v. 6 There are three significant points in this verse: (1) Regardless of how long one may live, even if it is twice as long as the longest life recorded, it would not change the circumstances nor would one come to different conclusions, (2) the reason being that the man who is under consideration did not "enjoy good things." This is the equivalent of verses two and three which teach that God did not permit him to enjoy life. (3) Both the stillborn and the rich man will return to dust and, in the grave as it were, there will be no remembrance of previous things. It is on the basis of these arguments that the conclusion is drawn that an untimely birth is better than living in the midst of plenty and yet failing to divorce oneself from an avaricious spirit.

## FACT QUESTIONS 6:1-6

271. What theme is continued here?
272. How could the poor find some comfort in this passage?
273. Why does one fail to enjoy riches even when he has all his heart desires? Discuss.
274. Explain what is meant by the statement, "wealth is relative."
275. Who is a "prime candidate" for the Preacher's message?
276. In what two ways is God involved in this example? (Cf. v. 2)
277. How does God permit evil men to acquire wealth?
278. What should such blessings from God lead even evil men to do?
279. What is meant by the metaphor "to eat from them"?
280. Who is a foreigner?
281. What does the foreigner do?
282. List the possible causes why the rich man fails to enjoy his riches.
283. What is suggested by "honor"?
284. In what sense can one "lack nothing" and still be miserable?
285. What does James mean when he speaks of one who "lacks nothing"?
286. What two additional blessings come from God? (Cf. v. 3)
287. Who usually failed to receive burial?
288. List the characteristics of the stillborn.
289. What is the "key" that makes the untimely birth better than the long life of the rich man?
290. List the three significant points in verse six which serve as his final arguments for his conclusion.

3. Reasons why riches cannot satisfy 6:7-9

TEXT 6:7-9

- 7 All a man's labor is for his mouth and yet his appetite is not satisfied.
- 8 For what advantage does the wise man have over the fool? What advantage does the poor man have, knowing how to walk before the living?
- 9 What the eyes see is better than what the soul desires. This too is futility and striving after wind.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 6:7-9

- 156. Man labors for what primary cause?
- 157. Is man's appetite for either food or pleasure ever completely satisfied?
- 158. Does the wise man have an advantage over the fool in respect to being satisfied with pleasure or food?
- 159. Does the poor man have an advantage over the rich man?
- 160. Explain verse nine in the light of 5:18-19.
- 161. What parallel is found between verses seven and nine?
- 162. After reading over these verses, what does the Preacher identify as futility and striving after wind?

PARAPHRASE 6:7-9

A man labors all the days of his life for food and pleasure, and regardless of how much he gathers and collects he will never say, "It is enough!" If one's appetite is never satisfied, how is the wise man better off than the fool? Or, what advantage does the poor man have who at least knows enough to enable him to get along in life—even as he walks over against the rich and the wise? It is better that one enjoy daily what he has than fret over what he might be able to acquire.

To always anticipate more possessions and additional pleasures and think for a moment that when they are realized you will be satisfied is an empty dream which never will be fulfilled.

### COMMENT 6:7-9

In searching for one idea in these three verses which would give clear insight to the unlocking of the mystery of how one with such great wealth could go through life unfulfilled, one discovers the thought that "the appetite is not satisfied." This explains the first seven verses in this chapter as well as giving direction to the remaining verses. The man under consideration has an insatiable appetite. He will never have enough regardless of how much he accumulates. Such a man is given over to the "cares of this world" and has lost control of his own spirit. In these three verses, therefore, we are discussing the same individual who has been under consideration from the beginning of this chapter. It is not to be concluded that the Preacher has one particular person in mind, but rather this evil which is common to men is simply being illustrated through a hypothetical situation. This activity is so designated as "futile" and "striving after wind."

v. 7 Some render this verse as "All of man's toil is for his mouth and yet his *soul* is not appeased." In doing so, it is argued that mouth represents the lower areas of desire and soul represents the higher, spiritual areas. This, however, is not the intention of the verse. It is not a comparison; it is an additional argument to demonstrate that certain men labor endlessly for the products of food and pleasure, and yet their desire is never satisfied. Certainly it is the soul that desires such things and it is the soul that is in difficulty. What Solomon is saying is simply that some men are so attached to earthly things that like fire, the barren womb, and the grave itself they never cry, "Enough!" (Cf. Proverbs 30:15-16) Once again the lesson which teaches the power riches have over the minds of men is vividly demonstrated. Indeed the man's soul is in

trouble. He has perverted his true purpose of living to God's glory and has become slave to things futile and transitory.

v. 8 One would think that the wise man would have great advantage over the fool. The wise man in this situation is the one who is skillful and has the ability to increase his possessions and receive healthy profits from his investments. In addition he has merited the esteem of his peers and managed his physical affairs in such a way that his life has been extended. He is also surrounded with his children. Yet, he does not hold an edge on the fool. The fool, of course, is the one who lacks the wisdom to make such a mark in his community as that which distinguishes the wise man. When a wise man fails to enjoy what he possesses, he is no better off than a fool. There is a sense in which he is indeed a fool (Luke 12:20).

The second part of this verse is difficult to understand. The tenor of this section would lead one to see here the simple statement that the poor man does not have an advantage over the wise man simply because, like the stillborn, all finally go to the grave and there are no distinctions there. The Paraphrase attempted to speak to this truth. However, there is much disagreement as to how the verse should actually be translated. Leupold translates it: "or what advantage has the poor man that knows how to walk over against the living?" He would argue that the poor Israelite, under Persian rule, is the only one who knows how to walk (because of his inheritance of Wisdom) over against the living (his oppressors). Two items militate against this translation or interpretation. One, the historical setting would necessitate a date at least 500 years later than Solomon, and secondly, such an interpretation does not speak to the line of reasoning pursued in this entire section. The Septuagint suggests that "the living" is to be translated "life," and implies that he knows how to walk in this world to prepare for the life to come. Thus the Septuagint reads, "For what advantage has the wise man over the fool? since the poor man knows how to walk before life?" This idea appears to be foreign to not only the immediate context, but the thought of the entire book. *The Anchor Bible* eliminates

the problem by actually changing the direction of thought and making the idea of "knowing how to conduct himself during his life" refer to the wise man and thus pointing out that this is the only advantage the wise man has over the fool. This translation seems to be more from convenience than meeting the issue. Perhaps what Solomon is saying is that the poor has his troubles, too. He never has his desires fulfilled, and thus his appetite does not receive the numerous benefits of the wise man, rich in the things of this world, but like the rich man his desires are insatiable. No man has an advantage over another if each is controlled by greed and earthly goods. If this is indeed the correct interpretation then what Solomon is saying is that such an evil is truly common to all men. Both the rich and the poor have demonstrated a failure to enjoy life, and both have the same misery as the result of a lack of fulfillment. Their inability to "eat from" what they possess places them on equal status in that respect at least.

v. 9 "What the eyes see is better than what the soul desires," is not that which is spoken of in the same verse as "futility and striving after wind." Rather, it is good advice and is in harmony once again with previous conclusions found in 2:24; 3:12, 13, 22; 5:18 and later in 6:12. The adage, "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," speaks of this truth. It is better to take what one has and enjoy it rather than entertain a craving for what is possibly in the future and uncertain. To control one's appetites and make the most of what one has is the mark of a truly wise man. God will evidently permit such a one to find joy in living and "eat from" what he possesses.

The contrary attitude which manifests the dissatisfaction with life regardless of what one possesses is that which Solomon speaks of as futile. The oft-occurring "striving after wind" marks this type of activity as totally useless.

### FACT QUESTIONS 6:7-9

291. What key statement found in these verses helps to clarify the conclusions in this entire section?

292. What is demonstrated by the argument found in verse seven?
293. What characterizes the wise man of verse eight?
294. What characterizes the fool?
295. What advantage does the wise man have over the fool? Discuss.
296. Give two reasons why Leupold's translation of verse eight should not be considered.
297. Explain what the Septuagint does with the term "the living."
298. What does the poor man have in common with the rich, wise man?
299. What good advice does Solomon offer? (Cf. v. 9)
300. How can one "eat from" what he possesses?
301. What does "futility" refer to?

#### 4. Reasons why it is useless to strive for riches 6:10-12

##### TEXT 6:10-12

- 10 Whatever exists has already been named, and it is known what man is; for he cannot dispute with him who is stronger than he is.
- 11 For there are many words which increase futility. What then is the advantage to a man?
- 12 For who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime, 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?

##### THOUGHT QUESTIONS 6:10-12

163. Man was made from what substance? (Cf. Genesis 2:7)
164. In what way is man described in Isaiah 45:9?



165. Who is stronger than man?  
166. Can man dispute with God?  
167. What increases when man's words increase?  
168. Does man's ability to speak many words prove to be profitable to him?  
169. Does man have the ability to know what tomorrow holds?  
170. Man's short life is likened unto what?

## PARAPHRASE 6:10-12

Man cannot contend with God. God is stronger than man. It is well known that God created man from the earth, and man should never forget that. Man knows that whatever he is, he is created and came from the earth. The more man talks, the more evident this truth becomes! Man's much speech betrays his origin and his nature. How does man profit from that? His life is but for a few days, and is compared to a shadow—it lengthens and then quickly disappears. Who can tell a man what will be after him in this life marked with such a heavy stamp of meaninglessness and death?

## COMMENT 6:10-12

Solomon now returns to speak to a theme introduced in 1:9-11. This idea has been carried through his book. (Cf. 2:12; 3:15) The nature of man does not change. Man should know who he is and recognize that his ability to speak long and loud will not change his nature but only compound his futility. He concludes once more that one should simply make the most of the present and not fret over that which is beyond one's control.

v. 10 What is man? Whatever he is, he is certainly less than God. Perhaps it is a passing observation, but the Preacher admonishes his readers not to dispute with Him that is stronger than man. The idea that God is Creator is consonant with all

the teachings of the book. Direct reference to the fact is made when the Preacher begins to drive home his point like well-driven nails (Cf. 12:1, 11). The relationship that exists between "Adam" and the fact that Adam was taken from "the earth" is very close. God's new creation is called Adam because he is taken from the earth. One has aptly translated the idea into the English with the sentence: "His name is earthling because he was taken from the earth." Since this is true, man cannot dispute with God, for he is but the created, not the creator. It would also follow that man depends upon his Creator to empower him to eat of that which he possesses. The discussion here would be an additional argument for the Preacher's main thesis: i.e. The gift of God is for a man to enjoy his labor and stay occupied each day with the gladness of his heart. The superiority of God is demonstrated that man can see the futility of trying to find enjoyment without Him. God is definitely the One who is stronger than man and the One with whom man cannot contend.

v. 11 Although the NASV translates this idea as "many words" which increase futility, other translators have offered varying suggestions. One popular translation supplies "things" for "words," and thus suggests that wealth, pleasure, knowledge, all human pursuits along with every endeavor gives credence to the fact that man is subjected to futility. However, these are aspects that have previously been considered. The idea of "words" offers a different view of man. Now, one can see that the Preacher is saying that even though man is very glib and capable of varying and lengthy speeches, such exercises will only manifest his vanity. Perhaps this tendency on the part of man to demonstrate his futility through his speech was the thought in the Preacher's mind when he admonished, "Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your words be few" (5:2).

We are now confronted with the question: What profit has a man? This may refer to the general approach of the entire book, or it may speak specifically to the immediate context.

However, it is obvious that the Preacher is concerned about man's role on this earth and if there is any way in which he can come to the end of the day and honestly say, "See, this is my profit for today!" It is evident from his previous reasoning that the rich have nothing more than the poor. We are to accept his inquiry then as a sad but true commentary of life's endeavors. Regardless of what is accumulated, there is no profit to man who lives simply for pleasure itself.

v. 12 The first question of this verse has been taken by some to mean that he is not only questioning the meaning of life on the earth, but also the value of life to come. This is out of character with the book, and it is forcing the immediate context into an unwarranted position. He is speaking only to life as it is lived on this earth. Such ideas or terms as "futile," "under the sun," "few years," "shadow" and "his life time," verify this contention.

In answer to his question, the implication of verse ten is that God knows what is good for man. This is the basis for his reasoning in 5:18-20. Man is not in a position to determine what is good because he, like that which he desires, is subjected to vanity. His own conclusions, apart from God's help, will inevitably lead to the frustrating burden of feasting on the wind.

To spend his life like a shadow suggests that it is fleeting. This figure reinforces the idea of a "few years." Too much should not be made of the idea that when the sun goes down, the shadow vanishes. However, the concept of living one's life under the sun is interesting in view of the analogy with the shadow. There is a sense in which when the sun sets life is over for all. (Cf. 8:13; I Chronicles 29:15) Sufficient comment has already been made concerning the shortness of life and the concurrent emptiness that accompanies it.

The final question of this section is: "For who can tell a man what will be after him under the sun?" It does not refer to eternity but rather to the activities which shall occur upon the earth tomorrow, the day after that or in the following years. No man knows. Since God is in control of His world and is

the One who permits man to enjoy living, then it would follow that man should cease fretting about what might happen and live each day with simple trust and enjoyment. The wise, rich, but yet unhappy man has concerned himself with many problems that pertain to tomorrow: Who will come after him? To whom will he *really* leave all that he has collected and gathered? What if he has no son to carry on? Will he receive proper burial? What will people think of him when he has died? These and many other questions continually trouble his mind. He is rather required to submit to the power of God and enjoy with moderation the goods of life which God has permitted to accumulate and now potentially at least offer him the ability to enjoy.

## FACT QUESTIONS 6:10-12

302. Solomon now returns to what theme?
303. What is the meaning of the name Adam?
304. In what way does man depend on God?
305. Why do "many words" prove man's futility?
306. Why is man admonished to guard and select wisely the words he speaks? (Cf. 5:2)
307. What kind of life robs even a rich man of profit?
308. Give two reasons why Solomon is not writing of "eternal life" in verse twelve.
309. Why is man not in a position to determine what is good for himself?
310. What is meant by man spending his life like a shadow?
311. What period of time is referred to in the final verse by the phrase "after him under the sun"?

**II. A MAN OF WISDOM WHO WORKS IN HARMONY  
WITH GOD REAPS EARTHLY BENEFITS  
REGARDLESS OF ENVIRONMENTAL  
CIRCUMSTANCES. 7:1—12:8**

**A. ADVERSE CIRCUMSTANCES TEACH WORTHWHILE  
LESSONS BUT IF IMPROPERLY INTERPRETED  
COULD LEAD TO DESPAIR. 7:1-22**

1. This lesson taught by comparisons 7:1—7:14

a. A good name is better than precious ointment. 7:1

**TEXT 7:1**

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

**THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:1**

171. What must one possess to assure that his death is better  
than his birth?
172. Read Proverbs 22:1 and list the three valuable things  
which are not as desirable as a good name and the favor  
of others.

**PARAPHRASE 7:1**

To have a good name or reputation is of greater value than  
possessing fine perfumed oil. So, too, is the day of death  
better than the day of one's birth.

## COMMENT 7:1

This is the beginning of a rather long section of lessons taught through contrasts or comparisons. The technique is not new to Solomon. On the same subject he had previously written: "A good name is to be more desired than great riches, favor is better than silver and gold" (Proverbs 22:1). Undoubtedly the primary emphasis here is on one's character and integrity. To be honest and to have the respect of one's peers is the objective. Moral purity should receive the highest priority. The second part of the verse has been discarded by many as incidental to the lessons to be learned and has no particular contribution to make to the meaning here. It is argued that it is employed to simply show that one "thing" is better than another. However, there is purpose in the contrast between life and death that speaks to the lesson in point. The same "theme" of birth and death is carried through verse eight. The correlation is that one's reputation is often determined by serious consideration of the inevitable time of death which comes to every person. There is a real sense in which the honest facing up to the reality of death, whether your own or the death of another, has a sobering effect on decisions which may determine character and ultimately one's destiny.

To the Christian death is not the worst thing that can happen. On occasion it is welcomed as a sweet release from suffering or escape from a disease-ridden body which no longer should be joined with the spirit. To the Christian death is often viewed as a victory, a triumph. Especially is this true when it can be said, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord" (Revelation 14:13).

It appears that a good man with a good name dies and leaves behind a good reputation. Such an experience would elicit the observation that, in this case at least, the day of one's death is better than the day of his birth for he has lived his life successfully. He now has the assurance that he shall be remembered. (Cf. 2:16; 8:10; 9:15) It has been noted that to be forgotten was cause for despair.

## FACT QUESTIONS 7:1

312. What method is employed in this section to teach numerous lessons?
313. What primary lesson is taught in this verse?
314. In what way can the observation concerning death relate to the lesson of the good name?
315. List the reasons that death could be considered blessed to the Christian.
316. Why is the deathday better than the birthday for a good man?
317. Give evidence from Ecclesiastes that to be forgotten was cause for despair.

- b. Attendance at a funeral is better than attendance at a birthday party. 7:2

## TEXT 7:2

- 2 It is better to go to a house of mourning than to a house of feasting, because that is the end of every man, and the living takes it to heart.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:2

173. Why is it better to go to the house of mourning?
174. What is the end of every man?
175. If the house of mourning represents death, and the house of feasting is the opposite, what would the house of feasting refer to?
176. From your own observations, list reasons why you think it would be of greater value to attend a funeral than a birthday party.

## PARAPHRASE 7:2

Since all men must share in the experience of death, and since those who are living consider the serious nature of life when they visit the house of mourning, it is better to attend a funeral service than to go to the places of festive enjoyment.

## COMMENT 7:2

In the former verse the emphasis was on the importance of one's reputation and good name. Such an attainment would assure a good memory in the minds of those who outlive you on the earth. In this verse, the emphasis is placed on the living who recall the life lived by the one who is being mourned.

Once again the lesson is taught by comparison. Human nature is such that man naturally gravitates toward festive occasions where the senses are delighted and the heart is made to laugh. However, there are few lasting values in such experiences. It is better to seek out the house of mourning. It is in this house that one is confronted with the issues of life and death. These are the issues which are grave enough to influence destinies and bring about sober reflection on one's present activities. Because man moves naturally to festive occasions, he needs to be reminded and even admonished to seek out opportunities which will lead him to consider seriously his own short sojourn on the earth.

One should not argue too strenuously that the "house of feasting" is a birthday party. However, since birth is the opposite of death and most births are occasions for festivity, it could be reasoned that the contrast is made between the beginning of life and the house where life has been terminated. If such is the case, the lessons are more plentiful in number and more lasting in value. At any rate, honest men admit that death is inevitable and they are sobered by looking upon the face of a friend who in this life will neither smile nor sing again.



The sobering effect is of a permanent nature because the text literally states that the individual takes the idea of death and "gives" it to his heart (mind). He ponders the ramifications of the death event, and allows the fact that he too will one day come to the same end, help him redesign his thinking and subsequently his life. Note the similarity in the prayer recorded in Psalms 90:12: "So teach us to number our days, that we may present to Thee a heart of wisdom."

### FACT QUESTIONS 7:2

318. Who is to benefit from going to the house of mourning?
319. What must one do to receive benefit from such an experience?
320. Man, by nature, gravitates toward what kind of activity?
321. List and discuss the reasons that the "house of feasting" could refer to a birthday party.
322. According to Psalms 90:12, what is the result of seriously considering the few days one has to live on this earth?

c. Sorrow is better than laughter. 7:3

### TEXT 7:3

3 Sorrow is better than laughter, for when a face is sad a heart may be happy.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:3

177. In the contrast of the two houses in verse two, which house would hold sorrow? Which would hold laughter?
178. Explain this verse in the light of II Corinthians 7:10.
179. List some things that would cause a sad face but result in a happy heart.

## PARAPHRASE 7:3

To understand the circumstances of life which result in sorrowful experiences is better than seeking after laughter. The face may cloud with tears and sorrow, but the mind will benefit and be made happy.

## COMMENT 7:3

The principle taught in this verse is universally true. When one faces the reality of death and the suddenness of judgment before his Creator, he is drawn in his mind to consider his own ways. His countenance is made sad because he is seeing himself with the veneer and sham produced by self-deceit removed. His sinful ways are apparent. Repentance is implied because his sadness results in his heart being made happy. Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, "For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces repentance without regret, leading to salvation; but the sorrow of the world produces death" (II Corinthians 7:10).

Laughter is good for the soul. There are times when it is the manifestation of direct blessing received from the Lord. (Cf. Psalms 126:2) However, it is used here in contrast to sorrow with the latter being more profitable because it leads to repentance while joy is the result.

The term "sorrow" is also rendered "anger, indignation, shagrin," and suggests a more severe attitude one should express toward his own iniquity. (Cf. Psalms 6:8) Sorrow is probably the better word as the visitor is in the house of mourning and this causes him to reflect on his part in the light of the deep emotion of the moment.

## FACT QUESTIONS 7:3

323. Identify the principle taught in this verse.

324. Why is it evident that repentance is understood to have taken place?  
325. Why is sorrow more profitable than laughter?  
326. Why is sorrow more appropriate than anger in this context?

d. Wisdom is better than folly. 7:4

### TEXT 7:4

4 The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning, while the mind of the fool is in the house of pleasure.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:4

180. What decision does the wise man make?  
181. List the reasons from the first three verses as to why attendance in the house of mourning is a wiser choice than participating in the house of pleasure.

### PARAPHRASE 7:4

So the mind of the wise man dwells in the house of mourning while the house of mirth naturally attracts the heart of fools.

### COMMENT 7:4

The thesis of this section which reads, "It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting," has been thoroughly explained and defended. In this summary verse, a final argument is stated. It is noted that the "wise" man is the one who dwells upon the meaning of life as he faces the reality of death. If one fails to give death its rightful place

in the forming of life's decisions, and only pursues the activities of mirth and folly, he is considered a fool.

Death is never far removed from the mind of a Christian. There is an element of wisdom which is characteristic of the followers of Christ that is indeed foolishness to the world. (Cf. I Corinthians 1:18-23) We rejoice in the death of Christ for us and also our own death to sin which leads us to daily repentance. (Cf. Romans 6:1-7; Matthew 16:24-25) As one contemplates the cross and the death event of Jesus, the face is sorrowful but the heart is made to rejoice.

### FACT QUESTIONS 7:4

- 327. What is the final argument as stated in this verse?
- 328. When is a man considered a fool?
- 329. What two death events should the Christian keep in mind?

e. A rebuke from the wise is better than the song of fools.

7:5-7

### TEXT 7:5-7

- 5 It is better to listen to the rebuke of a wise man than for one to listen to the song of fools.
- 6 For as the crackling of thorn bushes under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool, and this too is futility.
- 7 For oppression makes a wise man mad, and a bribe corrupts the heart.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:5-7

- 182. What is of greater profit than listening to the singing of fools?
- 183. Discuss the lesson taught by the analogy of the "crackling of thorn bushes," and the "laughter of fools."

184. State the two reasons given in verse seven for listening to a wise man.

### PARAPHRASE 7:5-7

Grave admonitions which are directed toward us from a wise man are better than listening to the singing of fools. The laughter of fools accomplishes about as much as burning nettles under a kettle—it is but a meaningless illusion. For oppression will make a wise man foolish and a bribe will destroy his understanding.

### COMMENT 7:5-7

Solomon is still contending that one should maintain a good name and protect it. His argument has been that if we give sober consideration to the lessons gained from reflecting on death, rather than pursuing foolish pleasures, we will discover those truths which will enable us to protect our reputation. He continues to argue for the same cause. However, he now suggests that our attention should be directed toward the rebuke from wise men. If we listen and accept the admonition, this will cause us to develop into wise men, too.

v. 5 It is not encouragement that comes from the lips of the wise man, but stern rebuke. The idea is one of offering grave admonition that heals and strengthens while it wounds. Much of life is this way. Physical muscles must be broken down through hard work or exercise before they can be rebuilt with firmness and strength. Sometimes suffering is the direct result of sin. In such instances the sinner has found a friend when he discovers one who will rebuke him with the truth mingled with love and long-suffering. The rebuke of the wise is a blessing in disguise. Rebuke, with a view to repentance and renewal of spirit, has always been characteristic of God's prophetic word. Prophets, apostles and gospel preachers have

all lived under the same mandate to "speak, exhort and reprove" (Titus 2:15).

The listening to the singing of fools is the equivalent of luxurating with the world in pleasure and mirth. In such circumstances one is seldom confronted with a rebuke which leads to godly sorrow and healing of the soul. The reason is simple: *wise men* are not found singing songs that fools sing or frequenting places where fools seek pleasure and mirth.

v. 6 The lesson taught in the former verse is now illustrated by a simple but vivid analogy. The laughter of fools is short-lived, meaningless, loud, and without lasting value. In like manner, quick-burning, dried thorn bushes will crack and pop while appearing to give lasting heat beneath the kettle. However, their contribution to the cooking process is meaningless. In the original Hebrew, there appears to be a play on words which may be translated in our language as "nettles under the kettle." The point of the lesson is that the laughter of fools is a temporary contribution without redeeming value.

The oft-defined "vanity" is once more employed to underscore the uselessness of mirth and pleasure. That which once gave occasion for joy and laughter now lies in ashes. James summarized the lesson in the following words, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom" (James 4:8-9).

v. 7 One needs to safeguard his good name and maintain personal integrity. Especially is vigilance required when oppression is rampant and the universal practice of bribe-taking is corrupting the hearts of influential leaders. Rulers, who are tempted (Cf. Proverbs 16:8), need the rebuke of wise men just as those who are poor and suffer under oppression. The Jewish tradition surrounding Proverbs 31:1-9 is that in this section Solomon's mother is reprimanding him because he failed to act wisely. Her words conclude, "Open your mouth, judge righteously, and defend the rights of the afflicted and needy." When one is given to strong drink he cannot judge

wisely. In like manner, when one is influenced by a bribe he renders distorted judgments.

A corresponding observation concerning the destructive nature of taking a bribe is found in Proverbs 15:27. The heart is corrupted to the point where a man will abandon wisdom and sound judgment. The bribe-taker has fallen prey to compromise. He is now vulnerable to numerous areas of corruption. A reflection of verse five enables the reader to weigh the warning in the light of a positive declaration.

Numerous writers have expressed attitudes that verse seven is misplaced and unrelated to the preceding materials. However, the theme of this section, the protection of a good name through wise behavior, is threatened by oppression and bribe taking. The idea is that a wise man will safeguard himself against both hazards.

### FACT QUESTIONS 7:5-7

330. Identify the objective that is still being sought by Solomon.
331. Define the term "rebuke" as it is used in verse five.
332. Explain what is meant by the "singing of fools."
333. What similarities exist between the singing of fools and the crackling of thorn bushes?
334. In what sense is such singing vanity?
335. Name the two dangers facing a wise man which are found in verse seven.
336. Which of these two dangers would one consider the greater threat to a ruler?
337. Explain why verse seven is not out of place in this section.

f. Patience is better than anxiety. 7:8-9

### TEXT 7:8-9

8 The end of a matter is better than its beginning; patience

of spirit is better than haughtiness of spirit.

- 9 Do not be eager in your heart to be angry, for anger resides in the bosom of fools.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:8-9

185. To what previous statement in this chapter could the first part of verse eight have reference?
186. What one word is synonymous with "haughtiness of spirit"?
187. Explain what you think is meant by "*eager* . . . to be angry."
188. One who harbors anger in his heart is considered to be what?

### PARAPHRASE 7:8-9

Better is the end of something than its beginning, and better is a patient spirit than a proud spirit. Do not become impatient and angered in spirit for he who allows anger to reside in his heart is a fool.

### COMMENT 7:8-9

Why is the end of a thing better than its beginning? There are numerous answers which could be given as many experiences of life underscore the truth that "hind sight is better than foresight." One who enters rashly into a business deal or enterprise, bragging concerning his personal ambitions and goals, may discover that the wiser action would be to wait and see how events finally materialize. Jesus said concerning the individual who boasted of his intention to build, only to discover that he ran out of funds, that "all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying 'This man began to build and was not



able to finish' " (Luke 14:29-30). A similar statement comes to us from the Old Testament in the classic statement of Ahab: "Let not him who girds on his armor boast like him who takes it off" (I Kings 20:11). Thus, the wise man knows that it is better to resign all of one's future plans into the providential control of the Creator. This does not relieve one of the responsibility of planning for tomorrow, but it does safeguard against the proud spirit.

The purpose of a thing is best understood by looking back upon it. Wisdom is gained by patiently waiting even when one is tempted to press and force the situation to fit desired or predicted ends.

A quick temper in company with frustration is the earmark of a fool. Another mark of the fool is to welcome, harbor and entertain anger. The wise man will be careful not to become easily agitated or react physically without just provocation. Such irresponsible behavior will not produce a "good name."

### FACT QUESTIONS 7:8-9

338. Simple observations of life lead to what conclusion?
339. If one wishes to be thought of as a wise man, what is a better course of action than proud bragging over proposed projects?
340. Give two earmarks of a fool.

g. The now is better than the former days. 7:10

### TEXT 7:10

- 10 Do not say, "Why is it that the former days are better than these?" For it is not from wisdom that you ask about this.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:10

189. What would be considered the “former days”?

190. Why is it unwise for us to long for “the good old days”?

## PARAPHRASE 7:10

If you wish to be wise, do not be longing for the past and say, “The good old days were much better than these days!”

## COMMENT 7:10

There is undoubtedly more implied in this verse than merely a rebuke of being dissatisfied with the present and the fruitless longing for days gone by. If the conditions of the present time which produce suffering are a result of disobedience and sin, then the present is a time of just retribution. In such a case, it is not wise to question the circumstances of the present or long for the past. There is evidence that Solomon detected three signs of lack of wisdom: impatience, willingness to harbor anger, and a failure to inquire wisely concerning the circumstances of the present.

It is easy to imagine that former days were better than the present time regardless of the age in which one lives. With the passing of time there is the tendency to forget the evil experience of the day-to-day living that constitutes life in every age. Thus, the present *appears* to be more difficult than what one overhears concerning the joy of past experiences. However, the wise man interprets the present in the light of wisdom. This will enable him to interpret the past and make necessary adjustments to live wisely in the present.

## FACT QUESTIONS 7:10

341. The adverse conditions of the present time may be the result of what?
342. List the three signs of lack of wisdom noted by Solomon.
343. Discuss the attitude a wise man has toward his own present age.

h. Wisdom is better than haughty judgment. 7:11

## TEXT 7:11

- 11 Wisdom along with an inheritance is good and an advantage to those who see the sun.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:11

191. Who are the ones meant by "those who see the sun"?
192. Wisdom plus what is an advantage?

## PARAPHRASE 7:11

Wisdom like an inheritance is good and is profitable to those who are now living upon the earth.

## COMMENT 7:11

There are two ways to view this verse. One suggests that wisdom "plus" an inheritance is good. The other is that wisdom "like" an inheritance is good. The original language will permit either. The English translations are varied.

Wisdom is likened unto an inheritance. This suggests that it is a permanent possession. An inheritance was kept in the

family to be passed on from parents to children. It is wisdom, however, that is under discussion and not an inheritance. Wisdom is good like an inheritance, it is permanent like an inheritance, and it is superior to an inheritance. Other related passages in Ecclesiastes verify these conclusions. It is also true that wisdom enhances the value of an inheritance. However, when one is reduced to wisdom alone, he still has the greater treasure. Note Proverbs 3:13-14: "How blessed is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding. For its profit is better than the profit of silver and its gain than fine gold."

There is also a reciprocal nature that exists between wisdom and money: Wisdom lends value to wealth and wealth lends prestige to wisdom.

Wisdom is an advantage to those who see the sun. This conveys the idea that one can make more of life upon this earth than normally thought. The word "advantage" probably does not mean financial increase but rather that wisdom will add more to the enjoyment and purpose of living than would an inheritance. This conclusion is also supported by verse twelve.

### FACT QUESTIONS 7:11

344. Give the two ways the first part of this verse can be interpreted.
345. Why doesn't the original language settle the issue?
346. Give reasons why wisdom is superior to an inheritance.
347. Discuss what is meant by wisdom being an advantage to those who possess it.

- i. Wisdom is better than money. 7:12

### TEXT 7:12

12 For wisdom is protection just as money is protection. But

the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the lives of its possessors.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:12

193. What advantage does wisdom have over money?

194. Wisdom leads us to whom? (Cf. Proverbs 8:35)

### PARAPHRASE 7:12

To live beneath the shadow or shelter of wisdom is like living beneath the shadow or shelter of wealth, but there is the added blessing with wisdom and that is the blessing of knowing that wisdom gives life to its possessors.

### COMMENT 7:12

This verse adds another comparison to the growing list that exists between wisdom and other possessions which are discovered upon the earth. It is intended to help the reader understand that a wise man will value knowledge, which is synonymous with wisdom in this instance, above other things. To maintain a good name, one must place wisdom at the top of his priorities.

The additional comparison here is to illustrate the protective nature of wisdom. Yet, wisdom has greater value than offering protection to the one who possesses it. Solomon states that wisdom also preserves or keeps the one who possesses it. The analogy of the "shadow" is appropriate in that the heat of adversity ("oppression" v. 7) is evidently threatening. The shadow offers a shelter of protection from such heat. One can escape from certain threats in life by employing wisdom just as he can escape certain threats through the use of money. (Cf. v. 11) Examples of how both wisdom and money serve in

this capacity are found in Ecclesiastes 9:15 and Proverbs 13:8.

Some translations suggest more the idea that wisdom *gives* life rather than *preserves* life. The idea of giving life is consonant with other passages in the Bible which speak to the subject. One example is found in I Samuel 2:6, 8: "The Lord kills and makes alive; He brings down to Sheol and raises up. . . He raises the poor from the dust, He lifts the needy from the ash heap." It is also true that wisdom preserves life. (Cf. Proverbs 3:18) Either way, wisdom is the prize possession.

### FACT QUESTIONS 7:12

348. Is knowledge synonymous with wisdom as it is used in this verse?
349. Name the distinctive advantage that wisdom now offers.
350. Why is the analogy of the shadow appropriate?
351. What variations of translations appear in the last half of this verse? Discuss.

j. Trusting God for tomorrow is better than knowing about tomorrow. 7:13-14

### TEXT 7:13-14

- 13 Consider the work of God, for who is able to straighten what He has bent?
- 14 In the day of prosperity be happy, but in the day of adversity consider—God has made the one as well as the other so that man may not discover anything that will be after him.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:13-14

195. Note the similarities between 7:13 and 8:17. List them.
196. Can man discover the work of God? (Cf. 3:11)

197. What reason is offered that man should accept both the good days and the bad?
198. Give evidence from this passage that man cannot predict the future events as God works them out.

## PARAPHRASE 7:13-14

Look into and thoughtfully weigh the things which God has done, and yet you will never be able to straighten out what he has bent—that which has grown crooked because of sin. Rejoice when days are good and life goes well, but watch for the bad days for they will come too—God has made them both, placed them side by side so man will never know what lies ahead of him.

## COMMENT 7:13-14

v. 13 A wise man will consider the work of God. There are unlimited advantages in searching out God's involvement in His world. Some of these advantages have been clearly stated in the previous verses. Now others are called to the reader's attention. Certain traits of a fool, such as a haughty impatient spirit, can be averted if one seriously fixes his mind on God and his works.

The inability to alter the plans of God and the awareness that He is in complete control of His world results in humility on the part of men who consider this. Such action also causes one to discover serenity and calmness as anxieties are eliminated and trust is exercised. These are positive benefits from acknowledging that man cannot straighten what God has bent. The declaration here is positive confirmation that God has ultimate control of every-day events which are often so besetting to men. Man is not capable of arranging the events and circumstances of life in such a way as to satisfy his own ends. Otherwise, he would not remain under the burden of oppression.

A wise man will, therefore, acknowledge that what he cannot change or control he will accept. It is comparable to the declaration of Paul who wrote, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). Additional evidence of Paul's wisdom is found in Philippians 4:11-12 when he writes, "Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need."

How can God make anything crooked? The term "crooked" is used in reference to the wicked, as it is stated that God "... makes crooked the way of the wicked" (Psalms 146:9). Study once again the COMMENTS on 1:15. It is said that God makes things crooked only because His righteous judgments demand penalties be attached to the violations of His commands.

v. 14 "In the day of prosperity be happy." This is in harmony with the wise man's conclusions (Cf. 2:24, 3:12 and 3:22). Both the good days and evil days will serve the higher purposes of God. Therefore, one should learn to cope with the troublesome days as well as enjoy the good ones. He should realize that God remains the same regardless of the emotional "ups" and "downs" experienced by men. One indication of a person being mature is that he is not unduly influenced by his environment. Such a person maintains a spiritual constancy under all circumstances. Inner peace is a mark of wisdom. Discontent, longing for the former days, and giving anger a place in the heart are the marks of a fool. God does not allow us to see the future. Withholding such information from men should cause him to learn to look to God. Peter suggested that we cast our all upon Him and trust Him. (Cf. I Peter 5:7)

The remaining part of this verse corresponds with the former verse. There is the additional thought, however, that man cannot know if tomorrow will be a good day or an evil one. The conclusion is that man should learn to rejoice in the day



of prosperity and thoughtfully consider the true nature of God when evil days are experienced. No man can know what will be after him. "After him" does not refer to eternity; neither does it refer to some period of time upon the earth after one dies. The context demands the interpretation we have given: No man knows what *tomorrow* will hold for *him*.

### FACT QUESTIONS 7:13-14

352. Read the COMMENTS on these two verses and then write your own summary as to what you think Solomon is saying.
353. After reading the COMMENTS on 1:15, explain what is meant by the statement that God makes things crooked.
354. What will be the end result in one's life when he finally acknowledges that God has ultimate control of all things?
355. What should one do in the days of prosperity?
356. What should one do in the days of adversity?
357. Identify one indicator that a person is mature.
358. What is meant by "after him" in the last part of verse 14?

2. This lesson is taught even when the opposite appears to be true. 7:15-18

- a. The wicked are rewarded and the righteous suffer. 7:15

### TEXT 7:15

- 15 I have seen everything during my lifetime of futility; there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his wickedness.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:15

198. What two "crooked" ways are apparent?
199. What word qualifies "lifetime"?

## PARAPHRASE 7:15

I have seen everything during my short stay on this earth! I have seen death come swiftly to cut off the righteous man in the midst of his righteous activities. I have seen the wicked man live for a long time in spite of his wickedness.

## COMMENT 7:15

Can a man interpret the riddle of life which states that the innocent perish while the wicked prosper? He can if he is a wise man. Wisdom offers the advantage of looking beyond the apparent anomalies to the higher purposes of God.

Not only is life transitory and unfulfilling, it is also inconsistent. A wise man will acknowledge the inequities but he will not despair. He will remember that God controls the ultimate outcome.

There is a sense in which man receives an equitable return for his investment in life whether that investment is made in righteousness or in wickedness. (Cf. Proverbs 10:28, 11:21) However, there are exceptions to the rule that "Whatever a man sows he shall also reap." At the same time, the exceptions are but temporary—that is it only appears for a short time that the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper (Cf. 8:12-13). Solomon does not propose to his readers that they pursue wickedness because it pays or shun righteousness because suffering is often associated with it. He is still speaking to the theme of a good name. He points to the apparent reversal of the rules because this is a facet of life that wise men will eventually face. The next two verses in this chapter amplify his contention.

## FACT QUESTIONS 7:15

359. What riddle of life is stated?

360. Why will a wise man not despair over the success of the

wicked? . . .

361. Is Solomon suggesting that one pursue wickedness because it pays? Explain.

362. What goal is Solomon still trying to achieve?

b. Warnings against the wrong interpretations of life 7:16-17

TEXT 7:16-17

16 Do not be excessively righteous, and do not be overly wise. Why should you ruin yourself?

17 Do not be excessively wicked, and do not be a fool. Why should you die before your time?

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:16-17

200. What kind of righteousness is undesirable? (Cf. Matthew 5:20; Philippians 3:9; Luke 18:10-14)

201. What kind of wisdom is undesirable? (Cf. I Corinthians 3:19)

202. What will cause one to die before his time?

PARAPHRASE 7:16-17

Avoid self-righteousness and putting your trust in a false wisdom which is of this world. Both of these things will ruin you; so why destroy yourself? Why play the role of a fool through excessive wickedness? Such behavior will lead you to an early grave!

COMMENT 7:16-17

v. 16 There is a righteousness that is unhealthy and a wisdom which should be avoided. One would normally pursue both.

However, upon closer study of the Word of God, it is apparent that there is a kind of righteousness that causes spiritual and mental harm. There is also a wisdom which fosters pride and produces a false foundation upon which to build a life.

We call this kind of righteousness "self-righteousness." It questions God's dealings and judgments. (Cf. Romans 9:19ff.) It elevates man and leads him into arrogance. It is this strained, dangerous righteousness that Jesus publicly derided and condemned. (Cf. Matthew 23; Luke 18:10-14) Solomon is warning his readers against such temptations as this will lead them to grow bitter and resentful. Especially would this be a threat when the truly righteous person is persecuted and suffers while the wicked person prospers. Losing sight of God's higher purposes in history will lead to a crooked or perverted sense of ethical behavior. This is vividly illustrated in the words of Malachi 3:13-15: " 'Your words have been arrogant against Me,' says the Lord. 'Yet you say, "What have we spoken against Thee?" 'You have said, "It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His charge, and that we have walked in the mourning before the Lord of hosts? So now we call the arrogant blessed; not only are the doers of wickedness built up, but they also test God and escape." ' ' ' Such attitudes and behavior are indeed dangerous. If you persist in this direction, Solomon states, you will "ruin yourself."

He also warns against false wisdom. Here again the Bible is clear concerning the type of wisdom which destroys. This wisdom grows out of self-righteousness. Paul wrote concerning it: "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, 'he is the One who catches the wise in their craftiness'; and again, 'The Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, that they are useless ' ' ' (I Corinthians 3:19-20). The wise man will not ruin himself. He will cope with the pressures of the day as he properly interprets the events of life in the light of God's overall purpose. Once again, Paul summarized the proper attitude one should have when he said, "For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to

think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith" (Romans 12:3).

v. 17 God can neither condone nor encourage the slightest degree of wickedness. This statement in verse 17, like the preceding ones, must be explained in the context of the passage. Solomon is pointing out that righteousness is not immediately rewarded. Neither does God's judgment fall suddenly upon all who engage in wickedness. However, this does not give one God's approval to sin. Neither does the wise man interpret it as discouraging righteousness. One is indeed a fool if he thinks that he can entangle himself in sin and not pay the penalty for such involvement. As it is written, "The fear of the Lord prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be shortened" (Proverbs 10:27). Exceptions to this rule are just that—exceptions! No sin will go unpunished forever. This principle is foundational and is expressed throughout the Bible.

There can be no such thing as excessiveness in *true* righteousness. There are no limitations which God places upon us in respect to *true* wisdom. On the other hand, God cannot approve of any sin, nor does He want man to play the part of a fool. The explanation given here to the problems of these two verses is in harmony with the general purposes of Scripture. Furthermore, it fits the immediate context of this chapter. Solomon's contention is to find a wise man. He will be a man who protects himself from the deceitfulness of self-righteousness, the power of self-indulgence, the destruction of self-esteem and the pitfalls of foolishness. He will not knowingly ruin himself or die before his time.

#### FACT QUESTIONS 7:16-17

363. What kind of righteousness should be avoided?
364. Why would one be tempted to grow bitter and resentful?
365. What will happen to a person who persists in the wrong kind of righteousness?

366. False wisdom grows out of what?
367. Should long life for the wicked and short life for the righteous be considered exceptions to the general rules of life? Explain.
368. A wise man will protect himself from what four general areas which, if pursued, could kill him before his time?

c. Choose the best in life. 7:18

### TEXT 7:18

- 18 It is good that you grasp one thing and also not let go of the other, for the one who fears God comes forth with both of them.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:18

203. Identify the two things one should hold on to. (vs. 16, 17)
204. What condition must one meet in order to come forth with both of them?

### PARAPHRASE 7:18

It is good that you take hold of the true righteousness, and also that you grasp the idea that you should not lead a life of sin. Hold on to both of these for the one who departs from evil and seeks the good will escape the power of wickedness.

### COMMENT 7:18

Solomon is now *admonishing* his readers to follow the wisdom of acting upon the previously stated observations. He adds the incentive that if they will do this, they will always

be free from the evils which destroy us and kill us before our time. The condition that must be met which enables one to maintain his good name and attain unto wisdom is to practice the fear of God. This fear is a healthy reverence for God which results in departing from evil and following that which is good. Such pious activity will safeguard one against the dangers delineated in the two preceding verses.

The latter part of this verse presents a problem in translation and subsequently in interpretation. *The Anchor Bible* reads: "He who fears God will consider both sides." In a footnote on this verse, the translators openly state that it does not refer to "wisdom" and "folly" but to both sides of a question. However, there is more involved here than just the investigation of both sides of a question. Solomon is specific in pointing to the evils of self-righteousness, false wisdom, indulging in wickedness, and acting foolishly. The pursuit of any of these evils would destroy one's good name. The high good of attaining unto wisdom would thus be missed.

The *New American Standard Version* states that the wise man will "come forth with both of them." In this case the *them* would refer to purity of life and wisdom. The preposition "with" suggests that he desires to have them and figuratively holds them in his hands.

An opposite view is that the *them* refers to self-righteousness and folly, and that the wise man will escape from them. The following translations are based on this interpretation: "For he who fears God will come forth from every case" (Leupold); "... he that feareth God shall escape from all" (Hengstenberg).

Although the difficulty in translation exists, the main message is not diminished. Solomon is teaching that the wise man, who labors to maintain his good name, will do all within his power to "turn away from evil and do good" (I Peter 3:10). In his honest pursuit he will be delivered from the snare of the Devil and he will come forth with righteousness and wisdom in his hand.

## FACT QUESTIONS 7:18

369. What incentive to do good does Solomon now suggest?  
370. Define "fear" as it is used in this verse.  
371. Identify and explain the two main interpretations of the latter part of the verse.  
372. Explain what the main message of the verse is, and why neither interpretation violates the primary lesson of this section.

## 3. Wisdom leads to proper attitudes and conduct. 7:19-22

- a. Wisdom strengthens the wise. 7:19

## TEXT 7:19

- 19 Wisdom strengthens a wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:19

205. What theme is still under discussion?  
206. What is of greater value than ten rulers who rule a city?

## PARAPHRASE 7:19

Wisdom is strength to a wise man; more strength than ten rulers, although they are surrounded by their advisors, masters in their own right, and dwelling in a city.

## COMMENT 7:19

Wisdom gives strength. This is the first observation in a list that runs through verse twenty-two. When wisdom is accepted



as a companion, strength of such proportion is added to one that ten competent leaders cannot equal. Some argue that the verb will not allow "strengthen" but rather conveys the idea of a separate entity that can be called upon to fight for and defend the one who calls for such assistance. It has previously been noted that wisdom is better than money (v. 12), and here it is declared to be better than the accumulative power of ten rulers in a city. They may be wise in the ways of the world, but if they do not "fear" the Lord, they do not possess the true strength. As Psalms 127:1-2 states: "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who built it; unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman keeps awake in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to retire late, to eat the bread of painful labors; for He gives to His beloved even in his sleep."

The fact that "ten" rulers are mentioned is used by some to argue for a late date for the writing of Ecclesiastes on the basis that ten rulers often ruled Hellenistic towns and this is a reference to such instances. However, ten has a significant meaning in all Biblical periods. It represents completeness and may be suggesting nothing more than the fact that true wisdom is better than the accumulated wisdom of ten men which suggests in this context the complete, united effort of the strength of all non-wisdom sources. For the use of the number ten in Bible times, study the following:

- (1) The ten antediluvian patriarchs: Adam, Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech and Noah (Genesis 5);
- (2) The ten righteous men who would have saved Sodom (Genesis 18);
- (3) The ten plagues of Egypt (Exodus 8-12);
- (4) The ten commandments (Exodus 20);
- (5) The ten servants of Gideon (Judges 6);
- (6) The ten elders who accompanied Boaz (Ruth 4);
- (7) The ten virgins of the parable (Matthew 25);
- (8) The ten pieces of silver (Luke 15);
- (9) The ten servants entrusted with ten pounds (Luke 19);

- (10) The ten days tribulation predicted for the church of Smyrna (Revelation 2)<sup>1</sup>

The recognition that the ten rulers are *in a city* is also significant. Power, resources and authority would be assets of a city. In addition, there would be many from whom the rulers would be selected which suggests the choice of talented and competent men. The import is that of a superlative: *Wisdom* is a better companion and offers greater benefits than ten of the finest rulers chosen from the major population centers of the land. In light of the various ways the number ten is employed in the Bible, it would be a mistake to attribute significance to it beyond that which has been discussed here.

### FACT QUESTIONS 7:19

373. What is the first benefit of wisdom as noted here?  
374. Why is the number ten used in this verse?  
375. What is meant by the term *superlative*?  
376. Why say the ten rulers are in a city?

- b. Wisdom leads one to see his own sin. 7:20

### TEXT 7:20

- 20 Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins.

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<sup>1</sup> William Taylor Smith, "Significant Numbers," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1947), IV, p. 2162. This summary is taken in part from the article "The Number Ten."

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:20

207. What truth is stated here that is also taught in Romans 3:10?
208. In the light of this verse, why does man need wisdom as a corrective?
209. Write a definition of *righteous*.

## PARAPHRASE 7:20

There isn't a man on earth who doesn't need wisdom. Where is the righteous man who always does good and never sins? He cannot be found!

## COMMENT 7:20

This second benefit of wisdom—to teach us to be humble and to depend upon strength gained apart from human resources—is based on the conclusion of the former verse. Israel had the treasure of revelation and this alone should have kept her free from the wickedness which typified the heathen communities around her. Such wisdom should also eliminate the evils of self-righteousness which would be the major temptation of those who possessed the true revelation.

Since there is no man so righteous that he always does what is best, it logically follows that he needs all the assistance he can get. Wisdom is the very best source of such assistance.

Solomon had previously asked, "Who can say, 'I have cleansed my heart, I am pure from my sin' " (Proverbs 20:9)? A section of Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple spoke to this point when he said, "When they sin against Thee (for there is no man who does not sin) and Thou art angry with them and dost deliver them to an enemy, so that they take them away captive to the land of the enemy, far off or near, if they take thought in the land where they have been

taken captive, and repent and make supplication to Thee in the land of those who have taken them captive, saying, 'We have sinned and have committed iniquity, we have acted wickedly' " (I Kings 8:46-47). Repentance and confession are fruit of wisdom. In Solomon's prayer he foresees the people of God following this path of healing back to God. It is a wise man who recognizes that he has need of strength to withstand temptation, and also see the pathways to repentance, supplication, and forgiveness should his own strength fail him. No man, on his own, is able to hold on to the best pathways of life. He needs the strength which wisdom affords.

### FACT QUESTIONS 7:20

377. What is the second benefit of wisdom?
378. What characteristic identified those of the heathen community?
379. What special temptation is presented to those who have revelation from God?
380. What fruit of wisdom did Solomon speak of in his dedicatory prayer at the Temple?

c. Wisdom protects against false accusations and self-righteousness. 7:21-22

### TEXT 7:21-22

- 21 Also, do not take seriously all words which are spoken, lest you hear your servant cursing you.
- 22 For you also have realized that you likewise have many times cursed others.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:21-22

- 210. Wisdom will keep one from falling into what danger?
- 211. Identify the reason given why one should not busy himself with taking seriously all that he hears.
- 212. Why would a servant know about his master's faults and deficiencies?

## PARAPHRASE 7:21-22

Do not give your heart to ascribe too much value to what men say concerning you. If you do, you will soon hear your own servant cursing you. If you stop and consider your own past behavior, you will have to admit that you have many times reviled others.

## COMMENT 7:21-22

There is yet another benefit wisdom will bring to the one who turns to it for strength. In this instance, it is a two-fold blessing. First of all, it will keep one from prying into every bit of gossip or information circulating in the area; secondly, it will safeguard against a self-righteous attitude.

It is indeed the mark of a foolish man to pursue every tidbit of information that may be spoken concerning himself or others. So much of what is said is best unheard, and if heard soon forgotten. Wisdom will lead one to correct behavior and thus eliminate many sorrowful experiences because information gained was weighed and dismissed on the basis of lack of merit. How many heartaches in life would have been avoided if the whole matter would simply have been dropped. Solomon does not have reference here to information which will benefit the hearer. If in the sharing of truth, there will be benefit, then the one who possesses such knowledge has a moral obligation to speak. However, the idea here is that it is gossip or unprotected

words which wend their way into the communicative fabric of every culture and society.

The servant is mentioned for two reasons. Since he is a servant, he will most likely know the weaknesses of his master, or at least be near when his master loses control of his tongue. On the other hand, the master would be nearby and would overhear the conversation of the servant.

The idea of "cursing" in this context suggests more of a reviling than what one normally considers either "to curse" or "to swear." *Base* men curse and swear, but *all* men, whether of high or low estate, have difficulty controlling their tongues. The master is reminded that he has *often* "reviled others." He must admit that he, too, has spoken words in a moment of weakness or heated discussion which he would like to recall. He confesses that he would like such words to be forgotten.

### FACT QUESTIONS 7:21-22

381. What two-fold blessing does wisdom offer?
382. When should information be withheld?
383. When is one obligated to share information?
384. Give two reasons why the *servant* is mentioned here.
385. What prompts the "cursing" (reviling) which comes forth from the master of the house?

### B. IMPORTANT LESSONS DRAWN FROM THESE OBSERVATIONS 7:23-29

1. Practical lessons can be learned but the deeper things are unattainable. 7:23-24

### TEXT 7:23-24

- 23 I tested all this with wisdom, and I said, "I will be wise," but it was far from me.

24 What has been is remote and exceedingly mysterious. Who can discover it?

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:23-24

213. List the things that "all this" refers to if it has reference to the teaching found in verses 1-22.
214. Make a list of the things "all this" refers to if it has reference to the teaching found in verses 25-29.
215. What was the means by which Solomon tested everything?
216. Identify the conclusion at which Solomon now arrives.

### PARAPHRASE 7:23-24

I have proved many things, and in each case I proved it by wisdom. However, I have not discovered all there is to know about anything. I became wise, but complete wisdom was far from me. What I have failed to discover is still remote and exceedingly deep. Is there anyone who can find it?

### COMMENT 7:23-24

v. 23 What is the "all this" to which Solomon here refers? Whatever it is, he declares that he *tested* it with *wisdom*. One idea is that "all this" refers to everything written thus far in Ecclesiastes. This suggests that all of his previous experiments, observations and conclusions have been tested with wisdom. Others argue that "all this" is limited to the observations which pertain to a *good name*, and speak only to the material in the first twenty-two verses in chapter seven. On the other hand, there are those who believe that "all this" refers only to the final five verses of chapter seven, and not to any of the previous material. There is little doubt that Solomon claims that *all* of his activities were guided by wisdom. Examine the

following random expressions: "explore by wisdom" (1:13) "I set my mind to know wisdom" (1:17); "my mind was guiding me wisely" (2:3); "My wisdom also stood by me" (2:9); "I turned to consider wisdom" (2:12); "Wisdom is protection . . . wisdom preserves" (7:12); "wisdom strengthens" (7:19). Similar references to the place of wisdom are found in eleven direct instances in chapters eight through twelve. Note: 8:1, 16; 9:10, 13, 15, 16, 18; 10:1, 3, 10; 12:11.

What does this prove? First, it proves that one should not make too much of what "all this" refers to since *everything* in the book is tested by wisdom. Secondly, the emphasis is on the fact that *wisdom* is the tool used to test everything. Solomon's stated purpose was to possess wisdom fully. He wanted to understand all the facets of life—the perplexing contradictions as well as the transparent joyous experiences, the deep riddles along with the self-evident truths. There is now the obvious desire to probe deeper into the hitherto unexplored areas of life. His desire to know more concerning the deeper things of life is openly stated. He wishes to explore each nuance of every side of life, and yet his conclusion is almost a declaration of frustration: " 'I will be wise,' but it was far from me." The secret things of God are *always* a little distance from man's reach; at least until that time when God chooses to disclose the deep, deep mysteries. (Cf. Deuteronomy 29:29; Colossians 1:26-27). A parallel thought is found in Solomon's own words: "Man cannot find out the work that God does" (3:11). The Bible receives a new dimension of appreciation from such a *searcher* for it holds numerous answers to what would otherwise be perplexing riddles of life. More than that, the Bible gives us the most important answer to the most important question of life: "What will God do with my sins?" What "the Preacher" of Ecclesiastes searched diligently to discover, the Christian knows about and gives thanks, for God teaches us that ". . . the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin" (I John 1:7).

A beautiful parallel passage to the two verses under discussion here is found in Job 28:12-28. The reader would do



well to look it up and read through it thoughtfully. One is immediately impressed with three conclusions: (1) Man is limited in his knowledge and understanding; (2) Wisdom is of the greatest premium; and (3) God is the only source of true wisdom and man must turn to Him for understanding.

v. 24 Solomon set out to write about wisdom and in the midst of his adventure, he confesses his lack of it. He is wise but not fully wise. He can see the value of wisdom and extols it honestly and sincerely while at the same time humbly confessing that he is helpless before the infinite wisdom of God. He wants to know what is the actual *essence* of all things. Yet, he cannot discover it. He turns to a superlative which is variously translated but the impact is still felt. He states that it is "remote and exceedingly mysterious"; or that it is "far from me and deep, deep." He wishes to impress upon the reader that such knowledge as he is seeking is beyond the grasp or understanding of man. He cannot discover it!

There is a wisdom which is discoverable by man but it lies "under the sun." It is this wisdom that Solomon employs. However, there is a wisdom which God alone possesses and man cannot discover it. It is to Solomon's credit that he perceives his limitations and is wise enough to admit to them.

What is the nature of the information he seeks? From the context, it is obviously the every-day entanglements of life with its recurring inequities which build a web of unexplained riddles to bind and limit the understanding. He is practical rather than philosophical. He wants answers to *why* things happen as they do rather than *how* did they come to be. He knows God is the Creator (Cf. 8:15, 17; 11:5; 12:1, 7). He now wants to know the *why* behind the behavior of men. He is unable to explain it but he does draw a conclusion that temporarily satisfied him. He says, "Behold, I have found only this, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many devices" (7:29). Man's eyes are blinded by sin and the darkness is compounded because he lives in a sinful (dark) environment. Solomon's conclusion is another way of saying that man is

the author of his own blindness, while “God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all” (I John 1:5).

### FACT QUESTIONS 7:23-24

386. Identify three sections of Ecclesiastes that the “all this” of verse 23 could possibly refer.
387. Since there are numerous views as to what “all this” refers to, what two lessons should be drawn?
388. Was Solomon determined to be wise? Explain.
389. What kept Solomon from becoming completely wise?
390. Write out the three obvious lessons found in Job 28:12-28 which parallel the Ecclesiastes 7:23-24 passage.
391. What is the nature of the wisdom Solomon seeks? Explain.
392. What is it that blinds the eyes of men and keeps them from seeing clearly?
393. What compounds this darkness.

2. Through intensive study, one comes to see the potential within men and women to do evil. 7:25-28

### TEXT 7:25-28

- 25 I directed my mind to know, to investigate, and to seek wisdom and an explanation, and to know the evil of folly and the foolishness of madness.
- 26 And I discovered more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are chains. One who is pleasing to God will escape from her, but the sinner will be captured by her.
- 27 “Behold, I have discovered this,” says the Preacher, “adding one thing to another to find an explanation,
- 28 Which I am still seeking but have not found. I have found one man among a thousand, but I have not found a woman among all these.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:25-28

217. Who will escape from the evil woman?
218. Identify the three figurative tools used by the evil woman.
219. Solomon "directed" his mind to "seek" what?
220. How many men out of a thousand did he find that had such wisdom as he desired?
221. How many women did he discover who possessed wisdom to this degree?

## PARAPHRASE 7:25-28

I said in my heart that I will seek out two things: on the one hand, I will study, investigate and find an explanation and wisdom; on the other hand, I will come to know and identify wickedness, stupidity, folly and madness. What did I discover? I discovered something more bitter than death itself! I found through my experience with woman that her thoughts are snares and traps, and her hands are chains. One who seeks God and pleases Him may escape her. However, one who is a sinner will be caught in her snares and traps. "Look!" says the Preacher, "This is what I have discovered by adding one thought to another to find an explanation, which still calls forth my soul's energy and asks my strength. Yes, I am still searching but have not found a satisfactory answer. I have found that among a thousand men there is but one who can be numbered among the wise. However, I cannot say the same for women. I have not found one such women among all these."

## COMMENT 7:25-28

These verses are among the most difficult verses in Ecclesiastes to interpret. The primary cause of difficulty stems from whether one should exegete the passage literally or figuratively. If the woman is figurative (false wisdom), it is one thing, but

if she is a real woman then a different interpretation must be given. It is true, however, that regardless of the direction one takes, whether literal or figurative, there are similar passages in the Bible to support the principles involved.

*An overview of the passage.* Solomon is determined to discover wisdom in the fullest sense. This is not a new quest. (Cf. 1:13, 16-17; 7:23-24) However, he admits that he has not found the satisfactory answers. The one thing he has discovered is that not only is complete wisdom illusive, it is equally difficult to discover a wise person. His observation is that only one man in a thousand could be considered wise, but he failed to discover even one woman among this number. He further observes that there are some women who will catch and destroy you if it is in their power to do so. The one who pleases God and receives His favor will escape from the snare of such a woman. However, the one who acts foolishly will be caught by her.

*The literal view.* Solomon does not categorically label *all* women as evil. He identifies the evil woman as "the woman whose heart is snares and nets." The implication suggests that there are women whose hearts are not snares and nets. It is from the writing of Solomon that we have the beautiful description of the virtuous woman so delineated in terms of praise and honor. (Cf. Proverbs 31:10-31)

There can be little question concerning the power women are capable of exerting over men. In the context of Solomon's discussion, that power is evil. There are numerous non-Biblical proverbs which speak to a consensus on this subject. Some of these are: "It is better to follow a lion than a woman"; "Woe to the age whose leader is a woman"; "Who follows the counsel of his wife arrives at hell"; and "Women are snares of Satan." There is also the warning from Solomon: "Now therefore, my sons, listen to me, and pay attention to the words of my mouth. Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways, do not stray into her paths. For many are the victims she has cast down, and numerous are all her slain. Her house is on the way to Sheol, descending to the chambers of death" (Proverbs 7:24-27).

In Solomon's investigation to discover the "evil of folly" and the "foolishness of madness," he discovered how far both men and women are removed from their original design. There is little comfort for men, and less for women. He was unable to discover the degree of wisdom which he desired, but he discovered all too soon the depths of evil to which both men and women are capable of descending. As a male writer, he naturally turns to his counterpart in crime to impress the minds of his readers with the extent of his discovery of evil. He speaks of inescapable snares, nets and chains. However, he hastens to speak objectively and suggests that although God made men upright, they have bent low in the pursuit of devising new ways of committing sin.

His statement that he was unable to find one wise woman among a thousand should not be looked upon as saying there are no wise women. It is rather a relative comparison with men. He is saying that from his own observations, he has discovered that there are fewer wise women than men.

These verses should not be used to build a case for the superiority of men over women in the possession and use of wisdom. Many commentaries miss the point of Solomon's argument when they draw attention to the fact that only men were employed in writing the Bible, and in holding prominent positions of leadership in both the Jewish economy and the Christian church. The inference is that women were neither wise enough nor suited for such undertakings. It is true that woman was first in the fall (Cf. I Timothy 3:13-14), and that she is to be in subjection (Cf. Ephesians 5:22-24). But neither of these conclusions speak to the point at hand. It is simply that in Solomon's pursuit of wisdom and evil, he discovered *mankind* to be perverse and crooked. His conclusion is: wise, righteous people are scarce!

The literal interpretation of this passage satisfies the hermeneutical demands placed upon it.

*The figurative view.* The personification of false wisdom as "the woman" establishes a natural correspondence between sound doctrine which is "pleasing to God," and its opposite,

“folly and madness” which trap, ensnare, and destroy the sinner. It could be argued that “the woman” answers to philosophy and vain deceit. (Cf. Colossians 2:8; I Timothy 6:20) While it is true that both Israel and the church are personified as a woman (Cf. Ephesians 5:24-32; Revelation 21:2, 9; 22:17; Judges 8:27), it does not necessarily follow that such figurative language is used here. Solomon’s *literal wives* (300 of them and 700 concubines) were responsible for turning his heart away after other gods. They were real, physical women who ensnared and captured Solomon’s heart. So enslaved was he by their evil powers that he actually accepted the false wisdom of Ashtoreth and Milcom. He was led to false doctrine by his entanglement with real women. It is written of him, “And Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not follow the Lord fully, as David his father had done” (I Kings 11:6). There is little justification in the light of Solomon’s experiences and the context of Ecclesiastes for a figurative interpretation.

*Christological thoughts.* It is true that men and women are equally wise. It is also true that they are equally sinful. When one realizes that Solomon is marking *all* with the curse of sin and only a few with the blessing of wisdom, he has arrived at the intent of the passage. Some have not shared this interpretation of the passage and since they are reluctant to make a distinction between men and women in the area of wisdom, they ascribe the “one man among a thousand” to Jesus Christ. The *one man* they insist is a reference to Jesus who to Solomon was also the “rose of Sharon, the lily of the valleys” (Song of Songs 2:1). There are a number of arguments that militate against such a conclusion. Jesus does stand in a class by Himself. He *is* wisdom. However, to find one among a thousand implies that he would find another if he continued his search. There is only one Jesus (God). To ascribe this passage to Jesus would be breaking from the “under the sun” context of Solomon’s search. It is better to simply take him at his word: he did find one among a thousand. Finally, the context is not clarified or helped by such an interpretation.

Solomon *is* still reasoning "under the sun." He has clearly expressed his desire to be wise, and he has confessed to his inability to achieve such wisdom. He states his purpose to discover folly and madness and it is in this area that he excels. His final conclusions are consistent with the total context. He says (1) there are few wise people, (2) there are many who are caught in the trap of wickedness, and (3) those who devise new ways of sinning!

### FACT QUESTIONS 7:25-28

394. What makes the interpretation of these verses difficult?
395. Identify the two general areas Solomon is attempting to discover?
396. Is Solomon declaring that all women are evil? Discuss.
397. Was Solomon able to discover an "explanation" (vs. 27-28) of the wisdom he sought?
398. What did he find?
399. Explain what Solomon means by his statement: "I have not found a woman among all these."
400. If this passage is interpreted figuratively, the evil woman is a personification of what?
401. Were the women who turned Solomon's heart away from God real or figurative? Give proof of your answer.
402. In what was Solomon entangled when he turned away from God?
403. Give two reasons why a Christological interpretation of this passage is unwarranted.
404. After a careful study of these verses, write your own summary statement of the passage.

3. A final observation: Men seek evil devices. 7:29

TEXT 7:29

29 "Behold, I have found only this, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices."

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:29

- 222. How many things did Solomon discover?
- 223. What do you think is meant by the term upright?
- 224. If "many devices" are the occasion for keeping man from being upright, what would be the nature of the "many devices"?

PARAPHRASE 7:29

Be sure to look at this! Only this one thing have I discovered: When God created man, He created him perfect. However, since the creation, man has invented many ways to fall short of what God intended him to be.

COMMENT 7:29

The use of the interjection "behold" suggests that Solomon wants the attention of his readers on this subject. Why is there the gravity at this particular point? Two things become apparent: First, God is not to blame for man's inability to discover wisdom. God made man upright, and in that state man was in a position to know and understand the things which are now hidden from him. Man cannot achieve complete wisdom, but it is his own fault. Second, man busies himself with innovative, vain speculation and self-wise reasonings which compete in his own mind with the true wisdom of God. Solomon is underscoring his previous contention that both men and women are evil.



The "inventions" of this verse are speculations or thoughts which result in a spiritual and sometimes physical stance which is contrary to God's word. The one evil invention that Solomon cites in this entire passage is found in verse twenty-six. Here he speaks of the weakness of his own life. He speaks of the violation of the monogamous marriage situation in his own personal experience. The large number of both wives and concubines which he possessed defies the imagination. However, Solomon implies by the "*many devices*" that there are numerous ways to sin, many of which are unrelated to immoral sexual activity.

Man should both desire and be ready to receive the will of God for his life. He should not invent his own speculative philosophies. God approves of the wise man who allows God to speak to him. The promise has been given: "Behold, I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you" (Proverbs 1:23). The word translated "devices" is used only twice in the Old Testament. The other reference is II Chronicles 26:15 where the devices or "inventions" were "engines of war." These devices were clearly designed to shoot arrows and great stones at the enemy. They were also strategically located on the towers and on the corners to give maximum defense to the city. Such detail and cunning illustrates the ingenuity of the mind of man and demonstrates the variety of his inventiveness. The context under consideration, however, implies evil devices because they are set against the fact that God made man "upright." Man was made to walk with God, but he fell from his high place of honor because of sin. Without grace and truth (John 1:17) man continues to invent pathways of departure from the presence of God.

Solomon's conclusion is the inevitable point to which all thinking men are drawn: all have sinned. The Apostle Paul concurs. He writes, "we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written, there is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God, all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one" (Romans 3:10-12).

FACT QUESTIONS 7:29

405. Give two reasons why Solomon expresses "gravity" at this particular point.
406. What is Solomon "underscoring" in this verse?
407. Explain what is meant by "devices" or "inventions."
408. What *one* invention does Solomon cite?
409. The word translated "device" is used elsewhere only in II Chronicles 26:15. From this passage, what does the use of the word illustrate?
410. State Solomon's conclusion.

C. ADMONITIONS TO USE WISDOM IN THE WORK OF SOLVING THE PROBLEMS OF LIFE 8:1—9:18

1. Work in submission to the king. 8:1-8

TEXT 8:1-8

- 1 Who is like the wise man and who knows the interpretation of a matter? A man's wisdom illumines him and causes his stern face to beam.
- 2 I say, "Keep the command of the king because of the oath before God.
- 3 Do not be in a hurry to leave him. Do not join in an evil matter, for he will do whatever he pleases.
- 4 Since the word of the king is authoritative, who will say to him, "What are you doing?"
- 5 He who keeps a royal command experiences no trouble, for a wise heart knows the proper time and procedure.
- 6 For there is a proper time and procedure for every delight, when a man's trouble is heavy upon him.
- 7 If no one knows what will happen, who can tell him when it will happen?
- 8 No man has the authority to restrain the wind with the wind, or authority over the day of death; and there is no discharge

in the time of war, and evil will not deliver those who practice it.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS 8:1-8

225. Who is the man who knows the interpretation of a matter?
226. What two things will wisdom do (verse one)?
227. Are the "king" and "God" to be taken synonymously in verse three?
228. After reading through verse eight, can you find evidence that *requires* that the "king" be interpreted to mean God? Discuss.
229. Does God approve of entering into an agreement with Him through an oath? (Cf. Exodus 22:11; II Samuel 21:7; Ezekiel 17:18)
230. Does the "him" in verse three refer to God or to the king who rules the land? (Cf. 10:4)
231. What word in verse four indicates why the king can do whatever pleases him?
232. What will keep a wise man from getting into trouble with the local authority? (verse five)
233. What principle taught in verse six has previously been detailed in chapter three, verses one and seventeen?
234. According to verse seven, man does not know "what" will happen to him or "when" it will happen. Read 3:22; 6:12; 7:14 and 9:12. In each case, determine if it is the "when" or the "what" that Solomon refers to.
235. Identify the four things in verse eight that man cannot do.

### PARAPHRASE 8:1-8

Who can compare with the wise man? Who but a wise man understands what things mean, or knows the interpretation of a matter? It is because of wisdom that a man's face shines like a light, and the hardness of his countenance changes until

his face actually glows. It is wise counsel to keep the king's command. Have you not made an oath before God that you will keep his command? We know the king will do whatever pleases him. Therefore, you will be wise if you do not hurry from his presence simply because you are agitated with his command. Above all, do not stand for an evil cause. It is the king who has the authority in the land and his word is law. None dare say to him, "What are you doing?" A wise man knows when and how to act—he knows the proper time and procedure. He who keeps the law of the king will discover that he is free from every evil thing, and will therefore remain out of trouble. You have already been instructed in the truth that there is a proper time and place for every desire of man—yet, you must be aware of the heavy judgment and chastisement which often presses heavy upon man. A wise man considers all of these things because he does not know what will happen, and there is none to tell him when it will happen. Consider this: no man has the authority to hold back the wind with the wind; no man has the authority to hold back the spirit of man in the time of death; neither can man claim immunity in time of war, nor be discharged from the battle; no man who practices evil or becomes involved in wickedness can expect to be delivered by such evil in his time of distress.

### COMMENT 8:1-8

As noted in the outline, there are five distinct divisions in this section which relate to solving some of the problems of life. In each instance, *wisdom* is the guide which leads the reader to the correct solution. The first area of discussion calls attention to the authority in the land, suggesting that submission to the law will result in pleasant relationships between the king and his subjects. The heart of the discussion is summarized in the words, "He who keeps a royal command experiences no trouble."

v. 1 There is no man on earth who can compare with a wise

man. Such a man excels them all. It is evident that Solomon continues to extol wisdom. His emphasis is noted by his declaration that *only* a wise man can explain the difficult, and drive to the very foundation of things. There is more to the wise man's ability than that which equips him to be an interpreter of proverbs or an adequate manipulator of words. He can unfold the mysterious. He has the ability to draw back the veil and present a clear word picture of *why* things are.

This gift of understanding has a direct result on the wise man's heart which manifests itself immediately in his face. His knowledge has brought an inner awareness that he knows and understands both God's word and God's providential activities. His face literally shows it. He has a cheerful soul and his face shines. His face is but a reflection of his heart.

His face was formally "stern." This word is variously translated into "hardness," "harshness," "boldness," and "fierce countenance" (Deuteronomy 28:50). His wisdom transforms his face and causes it to beam. The marginal reading in the NASB reads: "causes his stern face to *change*." Examples of such changes of facial expressions are found in Exodus 34:29-30, Acts 6:15 and 7:14. Knowledge of the true God, and the awareness that one is keeping His commandments, results in both joy and happiness. Solomon's father had expressed it simply: "The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes" (Psalm 19:8). Sin causes the "hardness of face," while righteousness drives out sin and welcomes peace and contentment. Jesus aptly struck at the heart of the matter when He said, "Therefore every one who hears these words of Mine and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man" (Matthew 7:24).

v. 2 Two problems arise from this verse: (1) Who is the king? Is this a reference to God or to an earthly king? (2) What oath was stated before God by the people in Solomon's day? Authorities are divided on the first question but have generally agreed on the second. Let us consider the latter question first.

It is not so important that one determines the exact wording

of the oath as this is not the point of Solomon's argument. The point is that the oath was made "before God," and it stands as a reminder that (1) it was made before the highest authority, and (2) it pertains to submission to the rule of the king. One such oath is recorded in II Kings 11:17 where "Jehoida made a covenant between the Lord and the king and the people, that they should be the Lord's people, also between the king and the people." To be "the Lord's people" is tantamount to the submission to the rule or the authority of the Lord. It is further noted in this illustration that a distinction is made between the *Lord* and the *king*. Israel saw the king as God's representative who was appointed to carry out His will on earth. Thus, the oath was made to the highest authority and also bound the Israelites to the authority of their king. Instructions concerning such oaths are given in Exodus 22:11; I Kings 2:43; II Samuel 21:7 and Ezekiel 17:18.

To whom does the term "king" refer? Many commentaries view the king as God and suggest that the entire context must be interpreted as to our submission to "the heavenly King." However, the II Kings 11:17 passage makes a clear distinction between "the people," the earthly "king," and "the Lord." It appears that such a distinction would also capture the spirit of this passage. Everything spoken of in reference to the king could apply without difficulty to an earthly king. In forcing the meaning of the term king to refer to God, seems to be demanding more than either Solomon or the context intended to convey. New Testament parallels are found in Matthew 12:21; Romans 13:1-7 and I Peter 2:13-17.

v. 3 To break the oath is equal to entering into an association with evil. Therefore, the subjects of the kingdom are admonished not only to keep the command of the king, but to refrain from joining in an evil matter. The "fear of the Lord" has previously been defined (Cf. 5:7, p. 117) as departing from evil and doing that which is good. Solomon isn't introducing new material. He continues to pursue the characteristics of a wise man. In this instance, a wise man is one who recognizes the authority of the king and lives within the

restrictions of the law.

"Do not be in a hurry to leave him." The king is on the side of right; to depart from him would be to align oneself with evil. Cain is an example of one who because of his evil deed was forced to leave the companionship and security of the side of right. It is written of him, immediately after he had murdered his brother, that "Cain went out from the presence of the Lord" (Genesis 4:16). The relationship the kings of Israel enjoyed with God was unique in history. There was a much closer correlation between their laws and the law of God than has existed in any other period of time. However, the principle that authority is ordained of God is still true. On the whole, the admonition of this verse remains a valid one. Paul wrote: "Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves" (Romans 13:1-2).

"To do whatever he pleases" should be understood to mean that the king will inflict whatever punishment he wishes. It is the evil doer who draws the *wrath* of the king.

v. 4 The authority of the king has been established. On the basis of this conclusion, it must be admitted that none has the right to question the king's decision or to question the punishment which he places upon the wicked. The verse is not to be taken as blanket approval for *all* the activities of the king. It is to be understood in the light of two things: (1) Disobedient citizens who depart from the presence of the king and stand in an evil matter deserve punishment; (2) the punishment appointed is the prerogative of the king—none has the right to question him on such a matter.

v. 5 For authority to be meaningful, there must be laws and subsequent punishment exacted upon those who break the laws. Who is the wise man? A partial answer is arrived at in this verse. A wise man is one "who keeps a royal command." It is generally true that obedience to the law results

in peace. This principle is valid whether the law is God's law or man's law.

Another characteristic of the wise man is that he recognizes that judgment and punishment will fall upon those who break the law. He knows there is a "proper time and procedure." He practices patience and thus lives in peace. Sometimes such assurance is the *only* compensation for one who does right. Especially is this true when the authority is on the side of the oppressors (4:1), or when the law-abiding poor have their wages withheld and on occasion are put to death (James 5:4-6). Even in the face of such extreme punishment they are encouraged to retain their wisdom: "you too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand" (James 5:8). The lesson from Ecclesiastes, chapter three, had been that there is a time for everything under the sun. Now the Preacher is underlining his previous contention: "God will judge both the righteous man and the wicked man, for a time for every matter and every deed is there" (3:17). Even God patiently waits until the sin has ripened fully on the vine. Man would like for punishment to fall swiftly as well as justly but life is not always this way. The wise heart recognizes that such judgment will come with certainty and thus tunes all of his thoughts and activities to this channel. It is at the fountain of patience and deep conviction in the justice of God that he drinks.

v. 6 The preposition "for" indicates that this is an extension of the line of reasoning established in verse five. The phrase restates the closing thought of the preceding verse. "A proper time and procedure for every delight" has been sufficiently demonstrated in chapter three. However, the statement, "when a man's trouble is heavy upon him," needs explanation. Who is the man who is under the burden of trouble? Is he the good, wise man or the sinner who has departed from the side of the king? If it is the good man, then evil men have afflicted him and he must learn to patiently wait until the time and seasons of God's providence bring about God's justice. It is considered a *heavy* trouble because he is required to bear it until the



appropriate *time*. On the other hand, if it is indeed the sinner who is under consideration, then the heavy trouble is just and he acquiesces beneath it because he knows it is of his own doing. He knows that the judgment of God will eventually fall upon him. He has broken all the rules and departed from the king's cause; he finds himself standing in an evil matter. Now he must subscribe to punishment decreed by the king. This latter interpretation is most tenable as it fits best into the total context of the passage. Such an argument presses upon the mind of the one who would choose the road of wisdom that there are rewards indeed! Additional proof for this contention is found in the major premise of the passage: "He who keep the royal command experiences no trouble."

v. 7 The evil man's suffering is compounded because he knows neither when he will be punished nor what will be his punishment. He knows only that it is due him and will be forthcoming. Behind the law in the land stands the authority of God. Kings exact God's punishment and are thus a terror to those who do evil. However, kings may be bribed or influenced to compromise or act unjustly. In such instances the justice of God overrides the injustices of men. If not immediately, in due season (Cf. 8:11). This awareness weighs heavily upon the mind of the evil doer. He lives in constant fear as he does not know when or how his punishment will come. Solomon is careful not to insert the conditional "if" in his declaration. He is pressing for the inescapable: judgment *is* coming!

v. 8 The preceding interpretation appears to be logical in view of the closing fourfold argument Solomon now presents. He has contended that a wise man will live in harmony with the law of the land; in doing so he will neither bring the wrath of the king nor the wrath of God upon him. He now offers the closing arguments to sustain his contention:

(1) "No man has the authority to restrain the wind with the wind."

The term translated "wind" in this first statement is also commonly translated "spirit." It is improbable that one can

arrive at sufficient proof to ascertain one or the other. It is obvious that the NASB translated *ruach* as *wind*. There is a rather equal distribution of views in both translations and interpretations. The primary purpose of the verse is best served when the *lesson* of the verse is determined, not necessarily whether the term is translated wind or spirit. On this same subject Jesus said, "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going" (John 3:8). At least the truth taught in the two statements is the same: one cannot see or control the wind. But what is the intent of the observation? One conclusion is found in the fact that only God has control of the wind, man cannot hold back or control the wind even with the wind. The wind moves about according to an appointed order. Solomon described it as "Blowing toward the south, then turning toward the north, the wind continues swirling along; and on its circular courses the wind returns" (1:6). Again he stated that "we do not know the path of the wind" (11:5). The lesson seems to be that the evil man has no more control over his inevitable punishment which shall come upon him than he does over the wind. Both are in the hands of God. One is carried out through the laws of nature while the other is arranged on the basis of compensating for evil and is determined by the authority of the king. God is the author of both! This lesson—God is in control of the laws of ultimate justice just as He controls the wind and other laws of nature—is in harmony with the immediate and greater context of Ecclesiastes. It also justifies this emphasis that Solomon places on the uncontrollable nature of the wind.

If one feels compelled to interpret the term "spirit" as "breath of life," rather than "wind," as many authorities do (Cf. A. R. Fausset, E. W. Hengstenberg, J. P. Lange, H. C. Leupold, Et. Al.) then this phrase is a parallelism with the following part and simply restates the same thought. If this is the preferred interpretation, then the following discussion will explain the parallelism.

(2) "No man has the authority . . . over the day of death."

What has been referred to in this discussion as the "ultimate justice of God" is the judgment facing every man when his spirit is finally released from his body. The Preacher knows that when this happens, the spirit will return to God (12:7). At that time, the unequal judgments of this earth, the suffering of the innocent, the apparent escape of evil doers, will be brought to light. The crooked shall be made straight. The New Testament is also explicit on this matter: "inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once, and after this comes judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).

Many would restrain the spirit in the face of death if it were possible. Fortunes would be exchanged for a little more time. The epilogue of men's lives under such circumstances would see a rash of repentance and restitution. However, no man can decide to add a few days or years to his own life when death calls. It was true in Solomon's time and it is still true today. Once again the Preacher is bringing into focus the distinction between the wise man and the fool. The wise man has no more control over his time of death than the fool does, but the wise man is prepared. He keeps "the command of the king . . . and experiences no trouble."

It should be observed here for the Christian reader that Jesus teaches us to keep the command of *the King* and in so doing we shall find rest for our souls. (Cf. Jeremiah 6:16; Matthew 11:29).

(3) "There is no discharge in time of war."

Just as one is bound by the rigors of death and must submit to its call, there is no escape from the demands of service placed upon one during the time of war. The analogy is made to illustrate once more that "a wise heart knows the proper time and procedure" (8:5b). The following excerpt from *The Pulpit Commentary* illustrates the principle Solomon refers to:

Thus we read that when Oeabazus, the father of three sons, petitioned Darius to leave one at home, the tyrant replied that he would leave him all three, and had them put to death. Again, Pythius, a Lydian, asking Xerxes to

exempt his eldest son from accompanying the army of Greece, was reviled by the monarch in unmeasured terms, and was punished for his presumption by seeing his son slain before his eyes, the body divided into two pieces, and placed on either side of the road by which the army passed, that all might be warned of the fate awaiting any attempt to evade military service (Herod., IV, 84; vii, 38).<sup>1</sup>

Although there were exemptions prior to the battle (Cf. Deteronomy 20:5-8), none were made *during* the time of war. It is inappropriate to use this argument as evidence that Ecclesiastes had to be written late, during the Persian period, because Israel made some exceptions and there were none granted during the Persian rule. The point is not that every man had to be engaged in warfare, but once the battle is underway there is no escape or discharge. One is "locked in" as surely as he faces death and judgment. The lesson once again teaches that man should be on the side of "right" and refrain from joining in "an evil matter."

(4) "Evil will not deliver those who practice it."

The fourth and final reason stated in this verse has a parallel truth given in 8:13 where Solomon reminds his readers, "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."

What wickedness or evil cannot do, wisdom can. Wisdom *does* deliver those who practice it.

The tragedy of practicing evil is not only its failure to deliver one from the judgment of the King or the Lord, but their own wickedness will stand against them in the face of that judgment. The rich oppressors mentioned by James are examples of the severity of casting one's lot with the wicked. He writes, "Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. Your gold and your silver have rusted;

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<sup>1</sup> J. S. Excell, H. D. M. Spence (Editors), "Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon," *The Pulpit Commentary* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Company, 1893), p. 201.

and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the Last Days that you have stored up your treasure" (James 5:2-3)!

The wicked could raise the question: "Deliver from what?" The inference is strong regarding the necessity of escape. Once again the reader is reminded of the law of retribution that has been presented in this section as a major theme: One *will* reap what he sows. The severity of their evil demands severity of judgment. They shall not escape!

### FACT QUESTIONS 8:1-8

411. Identify the guide that leads the reader to solving the problems of life.
412. What will result in a pleasant relationship between the king and his subjects?
413. What specific ability on the part of the wise man causes his face to shine (verse one)?
414. What causes the "hardness" of face?
415. Identify the two problems of verse two.
416. Solomon is suggesting that the oath is a reminder of what two things?
417. Give evidence that the king could be an earthly king.
418. "Breaking the oath" is equal to what?
419. Explain what is meant by leaving the king.
420. What is the specific meaning given to the statement that the king will do whatever he pleases?
421. List the characteristics of the wise man found in verse five.
422. According to verse six, "trouble is heavy" upon a man. Is this man the wise man or the sinner? Discuss.
423. Who is it that does not experience trouble?
424. What compounds the evil man's trouble (verse seven)?
425. Give evidence that both Solomon and Jesus taught that the wind is not controlled by the power of men.
426. What lesson concerning the *wind* should the evil man learn? How will the same lesson comfort the wise man?

427. Explain what is meant by the "ultimate" justice of God.
428. Were exceptions from battle granted certain Israelites in time of war? Explain.
429. Could one be dismissed from battle after the war began?
430. What double jeopardy does the wicked man experience (verse eight)?

2. Work even when one discovers the oppression  
of the righteous. 8:9-13

TEXT 8:9-13

- 9 All this I have seen and applied my mind to every deed that has been done under the sun wherein a man has exercised authority over another man to his hurt.
- 10 So then, I have seen the wicked buried, those who used to go in and out from the holy place, and they are soon forgotten in the city where they did thus. This too is futility.
- 11 Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil.
- 12 Although a sinner does evil a hundred times and may lengthen his life, still I know it will be well for those who fear God, who fear Him openly.
- 13 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.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 8:9-13

236. Is the wise man or the wicked man the *primary* subject of this verse?
237. What evil action of the wicked man is recorded in verse nine?
238. Is there sometimes corruption of authoritative offices?

(Cf. 4:1; 5:8; 7:7)

239. What puts an end to the temporary oppression exercised by the wicked (verse ten)?
240. Give evidence from verse ten that the wicked made a pretense of worship.
241. Why do men indulge freely in sin (verse 11)?
242. What is meant by fearing God openly (verse 12)?
243. Why will it not be well for the evil man (verse 13)?

### PARAPHRASE 8:9-13

All this I have seen. I thought about everything man does under the sun and I realized that there is a time when one man has the opportunity to exercise authority, and in doing so injures himself or another. I watched the wicked come and go from the temple. However such practice did not save them from the doom due them—they too were eventually borne to their tombs. They were both praised and then forgotten in the city where they did such things. I number these activities among the unfulfilling, fleeting experiences under the sun. These evil activities, which fill the minds of men continually, happen because men are aware that the judgment upon wrongdoing is not quickly executed. As a result, men are fully set to do evil. Since a sinner may do evil a hundred times, and find his life to be prolonged, I am still aware that it is the one who reverently fears God—the one who abides in His presence—who will survive in the end. This is because the wise man practices reverence for God. But for him who will not reverently fear and honor God, it will not be well for him. Such wicked men will not prolong their days but their days will be fleeting as a shadow.

### COMMENT 8:9-13

This is the second division of this immediate section which offers guidance through wisdom for difficult or trying times.

More specifically, the admonition is to work and function as a wise person even when the wise or righteous are oppressed.

v. 9 Both translators and commentators manifest bias when translating or discussing this verse. Is the verse a summary, transitional or preparatory? Some maintain that it is a summary verse and include it as a terminating verse for the section including verses one through nine. Others say that “‘All this’ points forward to the problem that is about to be stated and about to be solved.”<sup>2</sup> A. L. Williams states that the expression “all this” is used to “introduce” not to “gather up.” The NASB views it as a summary with a new paragraph starting with verse ten. “One man ruling over another” seems to reflect more on the content of the preceding verses than it does to the following arguments. However, it may be taken as simply identifying a point in history—a *time* when one man has power over another to his hurt. The primary theme of this section deals with the characteristics of a wise man and this theme is still under consideration here. The most satisfactory view may be that the verse is *transitional* as is 7:14; 9:1; 9:11 and 9:13.

It should be noted again that Solomon is *still* restricted by “under the sun” observations.

The latter part of the verse also offers some difficulty. It could mean that the injured man is the one being oppressed or it could mean that the one who is doing the ruling is the one who suffers hurt. *The Amplified Bible* incorporates both views with the translation, “. . . one man has power over another to his own hurt or the other man’s.” Usually it is understood to mean that it is the poor, righteous person who suffers the persecution.

v. 10 Once more this verse presents additional difficulties in determining the original meaning. But whatever it means, it is labeled as “vanity” and “futility.” To make each of the activities in this verse refer to the wicked person makes for

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<sup>2</sup> Leupold, *Exposition of Ecclesiastes*, p. 192.



better sense. It is the *wicked* individual who journeys to the "holy place" (the Temple). They are observed by those who live in the city as worshiping God, but their worship is meaningless. (Cf. COMMENT 5:1-7) Such hypocritical worship was meaningless because it would neither hold back their time of death nor would it fortify them against the inevitable certainty of God's judgment. They were able, however, to influence their peers and received respectable burial. They received the burial due the righteous. This Solomon says is vanity and futility. The despicable in Israel were to be ". . . buried with a donkey's burial, dragged off and thrown out beyond the gates of Jerusalem" (Jeremiah 22:19). However, the wicked receive decent burial from their neighbors and friends.

Some of the living played along with their hypocritical game. They closed their eyes to the wicked deeds performed by those whom they had helped to bury. They praised their names in the streets. Some translations have "praised" instead of "forgotten." However, in a short period of time the dead were forgotten even by those of their own city. It is the wicked *rulers* who have died and receive burial. This makes the action more absurd and motivates the observation, "This too is futility." From the standpoint of the righteous, one of the most perplexing problems encountered is to observe the wicked go to their graves praised by the society whom they have maligned without any apparent retributive action to make the record straight. It is specifically to this problem of life that the Preacher addresses himself.

v. 1 The first observation in this verse suggests that sinners do *appear* to carry out their wickedness without just retribution. This is *not* the way wise men would prefer. *Punish the wicked and reward the righteous*. This would eliminate part of life's futility and bring immediate justification to the one who trusts God. However, the ultimate justice of God is one of the major themes of the Bible, and a wise man will accept the promise of the vindication of the righteous on faith. It was precisely this same problem which stimulated the words: "Surely in

vain I have kept my heart pure, and washed my hands in innocence; for I have been stricken all day long, and chastened every morning" (Psalm 73:13-14). The Psalmist felt the burden of the inconsistent justice of his world. He would have despaired in the face of it except for an experience which assured him that it *will not* be well for the wicked. His next observation manifests an assurance of God's justice and also how he came to that conclusion. He writes: ". . . when I pondered to understand this, it was troublesome in my sight, until I came into the sanctuary of God; *then* I perceived their end" (Psalm 73:16-17). The Psalmist drew near to God and was able to place the apparent injustices of life in proper perspective. The following two verses in Ecclesiastes demonstrates that the Preacher has come to the same conclusion!

The second thought in this verse is a result of the first. It is because the justice of God does not demand immediate retribution for evil activities that the hearts of men are literally filled to overflowing with evil. One has said that "the same sun that hardens the clay melts the wax." The long-suffering of God has a positive effect on some hearts while it is the occasion of evil activity for others. It is not the wise man who is under consideration here. The wicked are the ones considered in verse ten and the conclusion drawn in this verse has the wicked as the subject. The Preacher has a keen eye to interpret human nature. He observes that since men do not pay immediately for breaking God's moral laws, that they are deceived into believing that such evil behaviour need never be recompensed. The "heart" is mentioned because it is the seat of both emotional and rational processes. The "given *fully* to do evil" suggests that the wicked feel secure in their present state and give themselves with fearless, shameless, boldness to the practice of evil. The fact that God is slow to anger and filled with grace and mercy is clearly set forth in Exodus 34:6; Psalm 86:15; Romans 2:4 and II Peter 3:9. Many misinterpret God's mercy and conclude that pay day for them will never come. The Preacher only states that God's judgment is not "executed speedily," he does not imply that it will not be.

Christians are not such fools. They can rejoice because Christ has made them "wise unto salvation" (II Timothy 3:15). He has taught that although the wise man is a sinner, "Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried . . . He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed" (Isaiah 53:4-5). The wise Christian is thankful that "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, and not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9).

vs. 12-13 These two verses demonstrate the final vindication of God's ways. It is an open message to both the righteous and the wicked. The righteous are assured that a temporary extension of the life of the wicked is not tantamount to God's approval of their evil deeds. He is also given assurance that his own allegiance to purity of life and obedience to right will be rewarded. On the other hand, however, the sinner should take heed. There are forceful, declarative warnings. "It will not," "he will not," and "he does not" are statements which ring with certainty. They leave nothing to the imagination of the wicked. They close off all possible exits which could have served as a refuge from the wrath of God. There is no comfort in the Preacher's message for the one who has been deceived to believe that God will not execute justice.

The sinner "does evil a hundred times." He goes unchecked in his evil rampage. The idea that "his days are lengthened" is best understood to mean that his evil activities are prolonged. He has neither found the meaning of life nor are the *number* of his days prolonged because of his wickedness.

It is well for the one who *fears* God. He is the exact opposite of the sinner. The term fear has been sufficiently defined. As it appears here, it represents the abhorance of all that appeals to the sinner and it encompasses all that is worthy of the wise. The fact that sinners often live to old age should not be taken to mean that they have received God's approval. The fact that the righteous sometimes die young should not be